ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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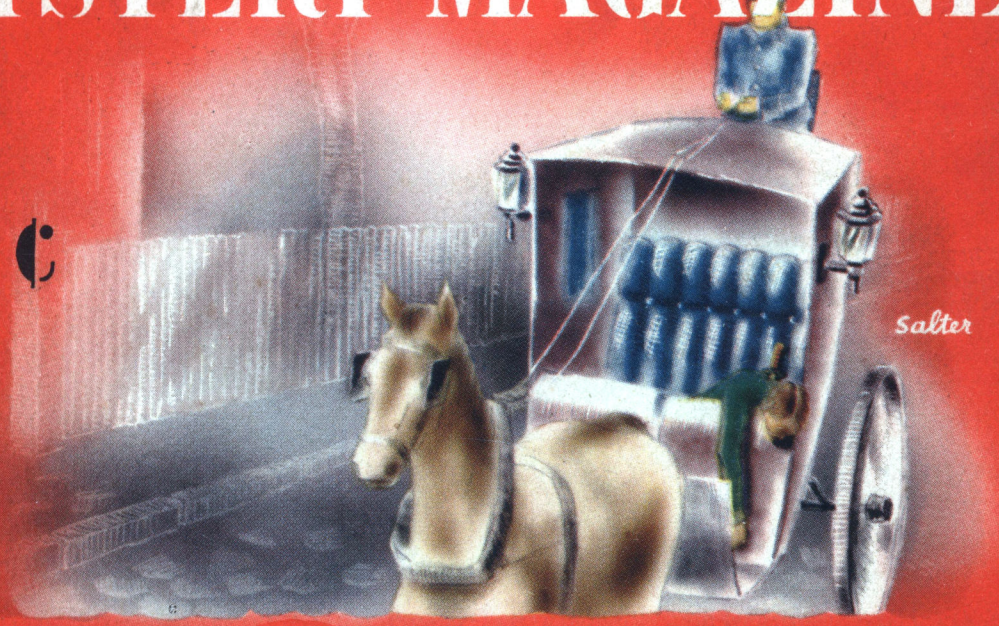

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK

EDITOR

ELLERY QUEEN

VOL. 4 NO. 2 *MARCH 1943*

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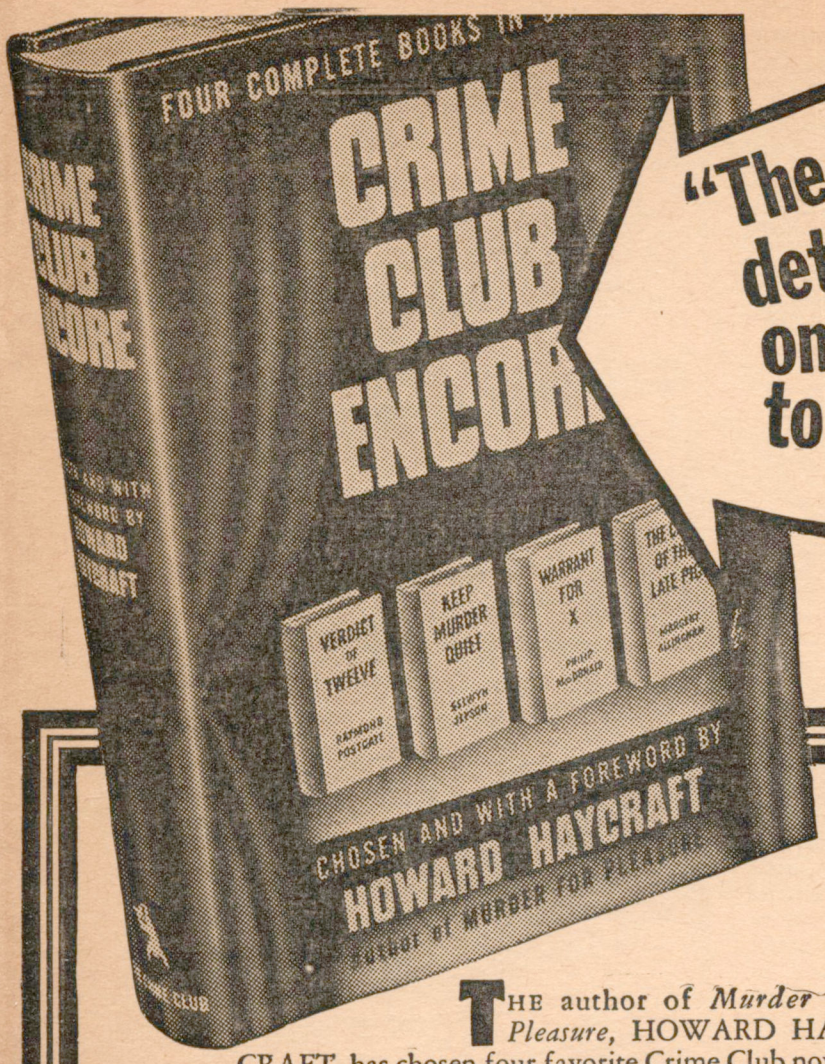

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ACCIDENT

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"And I tell you this — it's the same woman — not a doubt of it!"

Captain Haydock looked into the eager, vehement face of his friend and sighed. He wished Evans would not be so positive and so jubilant. In the course of a career spent at sea, the old sea captain had learned to leave things that did not concern him well alone. His friend Evans, late C.I.D. Inspector, had a different philosophy of life. "Acting on information received —" had been his motto in early days, and he had improved upon it to the extent of finding out his own information. Inspector Evans had been a very smart, wide-awake officer, and had justly earned the promotion which had been his. Even now, when he had retired from the force, and had settled down in the country cottage of his dreams, his professional instinct was still active.

"Don't often forget a face," he reiterated complacently. "Mrs. Anthony — yes, it's Mrs. Anthony right enough. When you said Mrs. Merrowdene — I knew her at once."

Captain Haydock stirred uneasily. The Merrowdenes were his nearest neighbours, barring Evans himself, and this identifying of Mrs. Merrowdene with a former heroine of a *cause célèbre* distressed him.

"It's a long time ago," he said rather weakly.

"Nine years," said Evans, accurate as ever. "Nine years and three months. You remember the case?"

"In a vague sort of way."

"Anthony turned out to be an arsenic eater," said Evans, "so they acquitted her."

"Well, why shouldn't they?"

"No reason in the world. Only verdict they could give on the evidence. Absolutely correct."

"Then, that's all right," said Haydock. "And I don't see what we're bothering about."

"Who's bothering?"

"I thought you were."

"Not at all."

"The thing's over and done with," summed up the Captain. "If Mrs. Merrowdene at one time of her life was unfortunate enough to be tried and acquitted of murder —"

"It's not usually considered unfortunate to be acquitted," put in Evans.

"You know what I mean," said Captain Haydock, irritably. "If the poor lady has been through that harrowing experience, it's no business of ours to rake it up, is it?"

Evans did not answer.

"Come now, Evans. The lady was innocent — you've just said so."

"I didn't say she was innocent. I said she was acquitted."

"It's the same thing."

"Not always."

Captain Haydock, who had commenced to tap his pipe out against the side of his chair, stopped, and sat up with a very alert expression:

"Hullo-ullo-ullo," he said. "The wind's in that quarter, is it? You think she wasn't innocent?"

"I wouldn't say that. I just — don't know. Anthony was in the habit of taking arsenic. His wife got it for him. One day, by mistake, he takes far too much. Was the mistake his or his wife's? Nobody could tell, and the jury very properly gave her the benefit of the doubt. That's all quite right and I'm not finding fault with it. All the same — I'd like to *know*."

Captain Haydock transferred his attention to his pipe once more.

"Well," he said comfortably. "It's none of our business."

"I'm not so sure. . . ."

"But, surely —"

"Listen to me a minute. This man, Merrowdene — in his laboratory this evening, fiddling round with tests — you remember —"

"Yes. He mentioned Marsh's test for arsenic. Said *you* would know all about it — it was in *your* line — and chuckled. He wouldn't have said that if he'd thought for one moment —"

Evans interrupted him.

"You mean he wouldn't have said that if he *knew*. They've been married

how long — six years, you told me? I bet you anything he has no idea his wife is the once notorious Mrs. Anthony."

"And he will certainly not know it from me," said Captain Haydock stiffly.

Evans paid no attention, but went on.

"You interrupted me just now. After Marsh's test, Merrowdene heated a substance in a test tube, the metallic residue he dissolved in water and then precipitated it by adding silver nitrate. That was a test for chlorates. A neat, unassuming little test. But I chanced to read these words in a book that stood open on the table. *H2SO4 decomposes chlorates with evolution of CL204. If heated, violent explosions occur, the mixture ought therefore to be kept cool and only very small quantities used.*"

Haydock stared at his friend.

"Well, what about it?"

"Just this. In my profession we've got tests, too — tests for murder. There's adding up the facts — weighing them, dissecting the residue when you've allowed for prejudice and the general inaccuracy of witnesses. But there's another test for murder — one that is fairly accurate, but rather — dangerous! *A murderer is seldom content with one crime.* Give him time and a lack of suspicion and he'll commit another. You catch a man — has he murdered his wife or hasn't he? — perhaps the case isn't very black against him. Look into his past — if you find that he's had several wives — and that they've all died, shall we say — rather curiously? — then you *know!* I'm not speaking legally, you understand. I'm speaking of moral certainty. Once you *know*, you can go ahead looking for evidence."

"Well?"

"I'm coming to the point. That's all right if there *is* a past to look into. But suppose you catch your murderer at his or her first crime? Then that test will be one from which you get no reaction. But the prisoner acquitted — starting life under another name. Will or will not the murderer repeat the crime?"

"That's a horrible idea."

"Do you still say it's none of our business?"

"Yes, I do. You've no reason to think that Mrs. Merrowdene is anything but a perfectly innocent woman."

The ex-Inspector was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly:

"I told you that we looked into her past and found nothing. That's not

quite true. There was a stepfather. As a girl of eighteen she had a fancy for some young man — and her stepfather exerted his authority to keep them apart. She and her stepfather went for a walk along a rather dangerous part of the cliff. There was an accident — the stepfather went too near the edge — it gave way and he went over and was killed."

"You don't think —"

"It was an accident. *Accident!* Anthony's overdose of arsenic was an accident. She'd never have been tried if it hadn't transpired that there was another man — he sheered off, by the way. Looked as though he weren't satisfied even if the jury were. I tell you, Haydock, where that woman is concerned I'm afraid of another — accident!"

The old Captain shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I don't know how you're going to guard against that."

"Neither do I," said Evans ruefully.

"I should leave well enough alone," said Captain Haydock. "No good ever came of butting into other people's affairs."

But that advice was not palatable to the ex-Inspector. He was a man of patience but determination. Taking leave of his friend, he sauntered down to the village, revolving in his mind the possibilities of some kind of successful action.

Turning into the post office to buy some stamps, he ran into the object of his solicitude, George Merrowdene. The ex-chemistry professor was a small, dreamy-looking man, gentle and kindly in manner, and usually completely absent-minded. He recognized the other and greeted him amicably, stooping to recover the letters that the impact had caused him to drop on the ground. Evans stooped also and, more rapid in his movements than the other, secured them first, handing them back to their owner with an apology.

He glanced down at them in doing so, and the address on the topmost suddenly awakened all his suspicions anew. It bore the name of a well-known insurance firm.

Instantly his mind was made up. The guileless George Merrowdene hardly realized how it came about that he and the ex-Inspector were strolling down the village together, and still less could he have said how it came about that the conversation should come round to the subject of life insurance.

Evans had no difficulty in attaining his object. Merrowdene of his own accord volunteered the information that he had just insured his life for his wife's benefit, and asked Evans's opinion of the company in question.

"I made some rather unwise investments," he explained. "As a result, my income has diminished. If anything were to happen to me, my wife would be left very badly off. This insurance will put things right."

"She didn't object to the idea?" inquired Evans casually. "Some ladies do, you know. Feel it's unlucky — that sort of thing."

"Oh! Margaret is very practical," said Merrowdene, smiling. "Not at all superstitious. In fact, I believe it was her idea originally. She didn't like my being so worried."

Evans had got the information he wanted. He left the other shortly afterwards, and his lips were set in a grim line. The late Mr. Anthony had insured his life in his wife's favour a few weeks before his death.

Accustomed to rely on his instincts, he was perfectly sure in his own mind. But how to act was another matter. He wanted, not to arrest a criminal redhanded, but to prevent a crime being committed and that was a very different and a very much more difficult thing.

All day he was very thoughtful. There was a Primrose League Fête that afternoon held in the grounds of the local squire, and he went to it, indulging in the penny dip, guessing the weight of a pig, and shying at cocoanuts all with the same look of abstracted concentration on his face. He even indulged in half a crown's worth of Zara the Crystal Gazer, smiling a little to himself as he did so, remembering his own activities against fortune-tellers in his official days.

He did not pay very much heed to her sing-song, droning voice till the end of a sentence held his attention.

"— and you will very shortly — very shortly indeed — be engaged on a matter of life or death — life or death to one person."

"Eh — what's that?" he asked abruptly.

"A decision — you have a decision to make. You must be very careful — very, very careful. . . . If you were to make a mistake — the smallest mistake —"

"Yes?"

The fortune-teller shivered. Inspector Evans knew it was all nonsense, but he was nevertheless impressed.

"I warn you — *you must not make a mistake.* If you do, I see the result clearly, a death. . . ."

Odd, damned odd! A death. Fancy her lighting upon that!

"If I make a mistake a death will result? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"In that case," said Evans, rising to his feet and handing over half a crown, "I mustn't make a mistake, eh?"

He spoke lightly enough, but as he went out of the tent, his jaw set determinedly. Easy to say — not so easy to be sure of doing. He mustn't make a slip. A life, a valuable human life depended on it.

And there was no one to help him. He looked across at the figure of his friend Haydock in the distance. No help there. "Leave things alone," was Haydock's motto. And that wouldn't do here.

Haydock was talking to a woman. She moved away from him and came towards Evans, and the Inspector recognized her. It was Mrs. Merrowdene. On an impulse he put himself deliberately in her path.

Mrs. Merrowdene was rather a fine-looking woman. She had a broad serene brow, very beautiful brown eyes, and a placid expression. She had the look of an Italian Madonna which she heightened by parting her hair in the middle and looping it over her ears. She had a deep, rather sleepy voice.

She smiled up at Evans; a contented, welcoming smile.

"I thought it was you, Mrs. Anthony — I mean Mrs. Merrowdene," he said glibly.

He made the slip deliberately, watching her without seeming to do so. He saw her eyes widen, heard the quick intake of her breath. But her eyes did not falter. She gazed at him steadily and proudly.

"I was looking for my husband," she said quietly. "Have you seen him anywhere about?"

"He was over in that direction when I last saw him."

They went side by side in the direction indicated, chatting quietly and pleasantly. The Inspector felt his admiration mounting. What a woman! What self-command. What wonderful poise. A remarkable woman — and a very dangerous one. He felt sure — a very dangerous one.

He still felt very uneasy, though he was satisfied with his initial step. He had let her know that he recognized her. That would put her on her guard. She would not dare attempt anything rash. There was the question of Merrowdene. If he could be warned. . . .

They found the little man absently contemplating a china doll which had fallen to his share in the penny dip. His wife suggested home and he agreed eagerly. Mrs. Merrowdene turned to the Inspector.

"Won't you come back with us and have a quiet cup of tea, Mr. Evans?"

Was there a faint note of challenge in her voice? He thought there was.

"Thank you, Mrs. Merrowdene. I should like to very much."

They walked there, talking together of pleasant ordinary things. The sun shone, a breeze blew gently, everything around them was pleasant and ordinary.

Their maid was out at the Fête, Mrs. Merrowdene explained, when they arrived at the charming old-world cottage. She went into her room to remove her hat, returning to set out tea and boil the kettle on a little silver lamp. From a shelf near the fireplace she took three small bowls and saucers.

"We have some very special Chinese tea," she explained. "And we always drink it in the Chinese manner — out of bowls, not cups."

She broke off, peered into a cup and exchanged it for another, with an exclamation of annoyance.

"George — it's too bad of you. You've been taking these bowls again."

"I'm sorry, dear," said the Professor apologetically. "They're such a convenient size. The ones I ordered haven't come."

"One of these days you'll poison us all," said his wife with a half laugh. "Mary finds them in the laboratory and brings them back here and never troubles to wash them out unless they've something very noticeable in them. Why, you were using one of them for Potassium Cyanide the other day. Really, George, it's frightfully dangerous."

Merrowdene looked a little irritated.

"Mary's no business to remove things from the laboratory. She's not to touch anything there."

"But we often leave our teacups there after tea. How is she to know? Be reasonable, dear."

The Professor went into his laboratory, murmuring to himself, and with a smile Mrs. Merrowdene poured boiling water on the tea and blew out the flame of the little silver lamp.

Evans was puzzled. Yet a glimmering of light penetrated to him. For some reason or other, Mrs. Merrowdene was showing her hand. Was this to be the "accident"? Was she speaking of all this so as deliberately to prepare her *alibi* beforehand. So that when, one day, the "accident" happened, he would be forced to give evidence in her favour. Stupid of her, if so, because before that —

Suddenly he drew in his breath. She had poured the tea into the three bowls. One she set before him, one before herself, the other she placed on a

little table by the fire near the chair her husband usually sat in, and it was as she placed this last one on the table that a little strange smile curved round her lips. It was the smile that did it.

He knew!

A remarkable woman — a dangerous woman. No waiting — no preparation. This afternoon — this very afternoon — with him here as witness. The boldness of it took his breath away.

It was clever — it was damnably clever. He would be able to prove nothing. She counted on his not suspecting — simply because it was "so soon". A woman of lightning rapidity of thought and action.

He drew a deep breath and leaned forward.

"Mrs. Merrowdene, I'm a man of queer whims. Will you be very kind and indulge me in one of them?"

She looked inquiring but unsuspicious.

He rose, took the bowl from in front of her and crossed to the little table where he substituted it for the other. This other he brought back and placed in front of her.

"I want to see you drink this."

Her eyes met his. They were steady, unfathomable. The colour slowly drained from her face.

She stretched out her hand, raised the cup. He held his breath.

Supposing all along he had made a mistake.

She raised it to her lips — at the last moment, with a shudder she leant forward and quickly poured it into a pot containing a fern. Then she sat back and gazed at him defiantly.

He drew a long sigh of relief, and sat down again.

"Well?" she said.

Her voice had altered. It was slightly mocking — defiant.

He answered her soberly and quietly.

"You are a very clever woman, Mrs. Merrowdene. I think you understand me. There must be no — repetition. You know what I mean?"

"I know what you mean."

Her voice was even, devoid of expression. He nodded his head, satisfied. She was a clever woman, and she didn't want to be hanged.

"To your long life and to that of your husband," he said significantly and raised his tea to his lips.

Then his face changed. It contorted horribly . . . he tried to rise — to

cry out. . . . His body stiffened — his face went purple. He fell back sprawling over the chair — his limbs convulsed.

Mrs. Merrowdene leaned forward, watching him. A little smile crossed her lips. She spoke to him — very softly and gently.

"You made a mistake, Mr. Evans. You thought I wanted to kill George. . . . How stupid of you — how very stupid."

She sat there a minute longer looking at the dead man, the third man who had threatened to cross her path and separate her from the man she loved. . . .

Her smile broadened. She looked more than ever like a Madonna. Then she raised her voice and called.

"George — George. . . . Oh! do come here. I'm afraid there's been the most dreadful accident. . . . Poor Mr. Evans. . . ."

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Globe-Trotter *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

As Fordney topped the hill to his summer cottage after a long morning of solitary, satisfying fishing, his young niece Jane Mundy flung her arms about him and cried, "He's coming, Uncle Joe! He's coming! Isn't it just too petrifyingly unutterable?"

"Who," asked the Professor, "is coming? The President? General MacArthur? Or merely the Marines?"

"Now don't be an old crustacean! Where's that memory course I gave you? It's Stillwell Chuswick. You know, the boy — the man — I met at Margie's!"

"I," said Fordney sighing ponderously, "remember."

* * *

The moon was over the lake. Fordney sat in silence counting his blessings. From the other end of the darkened porch came the cultured voice of Stillwell Chuswick.

"Oh, before the big show, I rumpused about in India; toyed around in Africa a bit — did a spot of big game hunting there, shot elephants, tigers, lions — that sort of thing. Worked my way up the Ivory Coast — had to kill two of the beggars in my safari. From there I floated around to Singapore. Last white man to leave, I believe. Bit of a dust-up that. Three Japs cornered me but I fancy I know a dot more of jujitsu than they. Their stance was definitely faulty. After dispatching them I stole a sampan and lurched down to . . ."

The Professor came out of his reverie. "I suppose the lad's merely romancing a bit, but I'll have to check into him tomorrow, before Jane becomes too petrifyingly enchanted," he chuckled. "I *know* he didn't do *all* of those stupefyingly wonderful things."

What single factual clue told the professor his guest was either an imposter or "romancing" a bit?

Solution

There are no tigers in Africa!

Here is one of the Old Master's lesser-known stories, brought back from undeserved obscurity. . . . You will witness a murder committed under your very eyes — a daring thing to have been conceived in 1902 when this story first appeared in the famous magazine of the day, "The Black Cat," and as O. Henry has written it, still a daring — almost a shocking — conception.

THE MARIONETTES

by O. HENRY

THE policeman was standing at the corner of Twenty-fourth Street and a prodigiously dark alley near where the elevated railroad crosses the street. The time was two o'clock in the morning; the outlook a stretch of cold, drizzling, unsociable blackness until the dawn.

A man, wearing a long overcoat, with his hat tilted down in front, and carrying something in one hand, walked softly but rapidly out of the black alley. The policeman accosted him civilly, but with the assured air that is linked with conscious authority. The hour, the alley's musty reputation, the pedestrian's haste, the burden he carried — these easily combined into the "suspicious circumstances" that required illumination at the officer's hands.

The "suspect" halted readily and tilted back his hat, exposing, in the flicker of the electric lights, an emotionless, smooth countenance with a rather long nose and steady dark eyes. Thrusting his gloved hand into a side pocket of his overcoat, he drew out a card and handed it to the policeman. Holding it to catch the uncertain light, the officer read the name "Charles Spencer James, M.D." The street and number of the address were of a neighborhood so solid and respectable as to subdue even curiosity. The policeman's downward glance at the article carried in the doctor's hand — a handsome medicine case of black leather, with small silver mountings — further endorsed the guarantee of the card.

"All right, doctor," said the officer, stepping aside, with an air of bulky affability. "Orders are to be extra careful. Good many burglars and hold-ups lately. Bad night to be out. Not so cold, but — clammy."

With a formal inclination of his head, and a word or two corroborative of

the officer's estimate of the weather, Doctor James continued his somewhat rapid progress. Three times that night had a patrolman accepted his professional card and the sight of his paragon of a medicine case as vouchers for his honesty of person and purpose. Had any one of those officers seen fit, on the morrow, to test the evidence of that card he would have found it borne out by the doctor's name on a handsome doorplate, his presence, calm and well dressed, in his well-equipped office — provided it were not too early, Doctor James being a late riser — and the testimony of the neighborhood to his good citizenship, his devotion to his family, and his success as a practitioner the two years he had lived among them.

Therefore, it would have much surprised any one of those zealous guardians of the peace could they have taken a peep into that immaculate medicine case. Upon opening it, the first article to be seen would have been an elegant set of the latest conceived tools used by the "box man," as the ingenious safe burglar now denominates himself. Specially designed and constructed were the implements — the short but powerful "jimmy," the collection of curiously fashioned keys, the blued drills and punches of the finest temper — capable of eating their way into chilled steel as a mouse eats into a cheese, and the clamps that fasten like a leech to the polished door of a safe and pull out the combination knob as a dentist extracts a tooth. In a little pouch in the inner side of the "medicine" case was a four-ounce vial of nitroglycerine, now half empty. Underneath the tools was a mass of crumpled banknotes and a few handfuls of gold coin, the money, altogether, amounting to eight hundred and thirty dollars.

To a very limited circle of friends Doctor James was known as "The Swell 'Greek.' " Half of the mysterious term was a tribute to his cool and gentlemanlike manners; the other half denoted, in the argot of the brotherhood, the leader, the planner, the one who, by the power and prestige of his address and position, secured the information upon which they based their plans and desperate enterprises.

Of this elect circle the other members were Skitsie Morgan and Gum Decker, expert "box men," and Leopold Pretzfelder, a jeweller downtown, who manipulated the "sparklers" and other ornaments collected by the working trio. All good and loyal men, as loose-tongued as Memnon and as fickle as the North Star.

That night's work had not been considered by the firm to have yielded more than a moderate repayal for their pains. An old-style two-story side-

bolt safe in the dingy office of a very wealthy old-style drygoods firm on a Saturday night should have excreted more than twenty-five hundred dollars. But that was all they found, and they had divided it, the three of them, into equal shares upon the spot, as was their custom. Ten or twelve thousand was what they expected. But one of the proprietors had proved to be just a trifle too old-style. Just after dark he had carried home in a shirt box most of the funds on hand.

Doctor James proceeded up Twenty-fourth Street, which was, to all appearance, depopulated. Even the theatrical folk, who affect this district as a place of residence, were long since abed. The drizzle had accumulated upon the street; puddles of it among the stones received the fire of the arc lights, and returned it, shattered into a myriad liquid spangles. A captious wind, shower-soaked and chilling, coughed from the laryngeal flues between the houses.

As the practitioner's foot struck even with the corner of a tall brick residence of more pretension than its fellows the front door popped open, and a bawling Negress clattered down the steps to the pavement. Some medley of words came from her mouth, addressed, like as not, to herself — the recourse of her race when alone and beset by evil. She looked to be one of that old vassal class of the South — voluble, familiar, loyal, irrepressible; her person pictured it — fat, neat, aproned, kerchiefed.

This sudden apparition, spewed from the silent house, reached the bottom of the steps as Doctor James came opposite. Her brain transferring its energies from sound to sight, she ceased her clamor and fixed her popeyes upon the case the doctor carried.

"Bress de Lawd!" was the benison the sight drew from her. "Is you a doctor, suh?"

"Yes, I am a physician," said Doctor James, pausing.

"Den fo' God's sake come and see Mister Chandler, suh. He done had a fit or sump'n. He layin' jist like he wuz dead. Miss Amy sont me to git a doctor. Lawd knows whar old Cindy'd a skeared one up from, if you, suh, hadn't come along. Ef old Mars' knowed one ten-hundredth part of dese doin's dey'd be shootin' gwine on, suh — pistol shootin' — leb'm feet marked off on de ground, and ev'ybody a-duellin'. And dat po' lamb, Miss Amy ——"

"Lead the way," said Doctor James, setting his foot upon the step, "if you want me as a doctor. As an auditor I'm not open to engagements."

The Negress preceded him into the house and up a flight of thickly carpeted stairs. Twice they came to dimly lighted branching hallways. At the second one the now panting conductress turned down a hall, stopping at a door and opening it.

"I done brought de doctor, Miss Amy."

Doctor James entered the room, and bowed slightly to a young lady standing by the side of a bed. He set his medicine case upon a chair, removed his overcoat, throwing it over the case and the back of the chair, and advanced with quiet self-possession to the bedside.

There lay a man, sprawling as he had fallen — a man dressed richly in the prevailing mode, with only his shoes removed; lying relaxed, and as still as the dead.

There emanated from Doctor James an aura of calm force and reserve strength that was as manna in the desert to the weak and desolate among his patrons. Always had women, especially, been attracted by something in his sick-room manner. It was not the indulgent suavity of the fashionable healer, but a manner of poise, of sureness, of ability to overcome fate, of deference and protection and devotion. There was an exploring magnetism in his steadfast, luminous brown eyes; a latent authority in the impassive, even priestly, tranquillity of his smooth countenance that outwardly fitted him for the part of confidant and consoler. Sometimes, at his first professional visit, women would tell him where they hid their diamonds at night from the burglars.

With the ease of much practice, Doctor James's unroving eyes estimated the order and quality of the room's furnishings. The appointments were rich and costly. The same glance had secured cognizance of the lady's appearance. She was small and scarcely past twenty. Her face possessed the title to a winsome prettiness, now obscured by (you would say) rather a fixed melancholy than the more violent imprint of a sudden sorrow. Upon her forehead, above one eyebrow, was a livid bruise, suffered, the physician's eye told him, within the past six hours.

Doctor James's fingers went to the man's wrist. His almost vocal eyes questioned the lady.

"I am Mrs. Chandler," she responded, speaking with the plaintive Southern slur and intonation. "My husband was taken suddenly ill about ten minutes before you came. He has had attacks of heart trouble before — some of them were very bad." His clothed state and the late hour seemed to

prompt her to further explanation. "He had been out late; to — a supper, I believe."

Doctor James now turned his attention to his patient. In whichever of his "professions" he happened to be engaged he was wont to honor the "case" or the "job" with his whole interest.

The sick man appeared to be about thirty. His countenance bore a look of boldness and dissipation, but was not without a symmetry of feature and the fine lines drawn by a taste and indulgence in humor that gave the redeeming touch. There was an odor of spilled wine about his clothes.

The physician laid back his outer garments, and then, with a penknife, slit the shirt-front from collar to waist. The obstacles cleared, he laid his ear to the heart and listened intently.

"Mitral regurgitation?" he said, softly, when he rose. The words ended with the rising inflection of uncertainty. Again he listened long; and this time he said, "Mitral insufficiency," with the accent of an assured diagnosis.

"Madam," he began, in the reassuring tones that had so often allayed anxiety, "there is a probability ——" As he slowly turned his head to face the lady, he saw her fall, white and swooning, into the arms of the old Negress.

"Po' lamb! po' lamb! Has dey done killed Aunt Cindy's own blessed child? May de Lawd 'stroy wid his wrath dem what stole her away; what break dat angel heart; what left ——"

"Lift her feet," said Doctor James, assisting to support the drooping form. "Where is her room? She must be put to bed."

"In here, suh." The woman nodded her kerchiefed head toward a door. "Dat's Miss Amy's room."

They carried her in there, and laid her on the bed. Her pulse was faint, but regular. She passed from the swoon, without recovering consciousness, into a profound slumber.

"She is quite exhausted," said the physician. "Sleep is a good remedy. When she wakes, give her a toddy — with an egg in it, if she can take it. How did she get that bruise upon her forehead?"

"She done got a lick there, suh. De po' lamb fell — No, suh" — the old woman's racial mutability swept her into a sudden flare of indignation — "old Cindy ain't gwineter lie for dat debble. He done it, suh. May de Lawd wither de hand what — dar now! Cindy promise her sweet lamb she ain't gwine tell. Miss Amy got hurt, suh, on de head."

Doctor James stepped to a stand where a handsome lamp burned, and turned the flame low.

"Stay here with your mistress," he ordered, "and keep quiet so she will sleep. If she wakes, give her the toddy. If she grows any weaker, let me know. There is something strange about it."

"Dar's mo' strange t'ings dan dat 'round here," began the Negress, but the physician hushed her in a seldom-employed peremptory, concentrated voice with which he had often allayed hysteria itself. He returned to the other room, closing the door softly behind him. The man on the bed had not moved, but his eyes were open. His lips seemed to form words. Doctor James bent his head to listen. "The money! the money!" was what they were whispering.

"Can you understand what I say?" asked the doctor, speaking low, but distinctly.

The head nodded slightly.

"I am a physician, sent for by your wife. You are Mr. Chandler, I am told. You are quite ill. You must not excite or distress yourself at all."

The patient's eyes seemed to beckon to him. The doctor stooped to catch the same faint words.

"The money — the twenty thousand dollars."

"Where is this money? — in the bank?"

The eyes expressed a negative. "Tell her" — the whisper was growing fainter — "the twenty thousand dollars — her money" — his eyes wandered about the room.

"You have placed this money somewhere?" — Doctor James's voice was toiling like a siren's to conjure the secret from the man's failing intelligence — "Is it in this room?"

He thought he saw a fluttering assent in the dimming eyes. The pulse under his fingers was as fine and small as a silk thread.

There arose in Doctor James's brain and heart the instincts of his other profession. Promptly, as he acted in everything, he decided to learn the whereabouts of this money, and at the calculated and certain cost of a life.

Drawing from his pocket a little pad of prescription blanks, he scribbled upon one of them a formula suited, according to the best practice, to the needs of the sufferer. Going to the door of the inner room, he softly called the old woman, gave her the prescription, and bade her take it to some drug store and fetch the medicine.

When she had gone, muttering to herself, the doctor stepped to the bedside of the lady. She still slept soundly; her pulse was a little stronger; her forehead was cool, save where the inflammation of the bruise extended, and a slight moisture covered it. Unless disturbed, she would yet sleep for hours. He found the key in the door, and locked it after him when he returned.

Doctor James looked at his watch. He could call half an hour his own, since before that time the old woman could scarcely return from her mission. Then he sought and found water in a pitcher and a glass tumbler. Opening his medicine case he took out the vial containing the nitroglycerine — "the oil," as his brethren of the brace-and-bit term it.

One drop of the faint yellow, thickish liquid he let fall in the tumbler.He took out his silver hypodermic syringe case, and screwed the needle into its place. Carefully measuring each modicum of water in the graduated glass barrel of the syringe, he diluted the one drop with half a tumbler of water.

Two hours earlier that night Doctor James had, with that syringe, injected the undiluted liquid into a hole drilled in the lock of a safe, and had destroyed, with one dull explosion, the machinery that controlled the movement of the bolts. He now purposed, with the same means, to shiver the prime machinery of a human being — to rend its heart — and each shock was for the sake of the money to follow.

The same means, but in a different guise. Whereas, that was the giant in its rude, primary dynamic strength, this was the courtier, whose no less deadly arms were concealed by velvet and lace. For the liquid in the tumbler and in the syringe that the physician carefully filled was now a solution of glonoin, the most powerful heart stimulant known to medical science. Two ounces had riven the solid door of the iron safe; with one fiftieth part of a minim he was now about to still forever the intricate mechanism of a human life.

But not immediately. It was not so intended. First there would be a quick increase of vitality; a powerful impetus given to every organ and faculty. The heart would respond bravely to the fatal spur; the blood in the veins return more rapidly to its source.

But, as Doctor James well knew, over-stimulation in this form of heart disease means death, as sure as by a rifle shot. When the clogged arteries should suffer congestion from the increased flow of blood pumped into them by the power of the burglar's "oil," they would rapidly become "no thoroughfare," and the fountain of life would cease to flow.

The physician bared the chest of the unconscious Chandler. Easily and skilfully he injected, subcutaneously, the contents of the syringe into the muscles of the region over the heart. True to his neat habits in both professions, he next carefully dried his needle and re-inserted the fine wire that threaded it when not in use.

In three minutes Chandler opened his eyes, and spoke, in a voice faint but audible, inquiring who attended upon him. Doctor James again explained his presence there.

"Where is my wife?" asked the patient.

"She is asleep — from exhaustion and worry," said the doctor. "I would not awaken her, unless —"

"It isn't — necessary." Chandler spoke with spaces between his words caused by his short breath that some demon was driving too fast. "She wouldn't — thank you to disturb her — on my — account."

Doctor James drew a chair to the bedside. Conversation must not be squandered.

"A few minutes ago," he began, in the grave, candid tones of his other profession, "you were trying to tell me something regarding some money. I do not seek your confidence, but it is my duty to advise you that anxiety and worry will work against your recovery. If you have any communication to make about this — to relieve your mind about this — twenty thousand dollars, I think was the amount you mentioned — you would better do so."

Chandler rolled his eyes in the direction of the speaker.

"Did I — say where this — money is?"

"No," answered the physician. "I only inferred, from your scarcely intelligible words, that you felt a solicitude concerning its safety. If it is in this room —"

Doctor James paused. Did he only seem to perceive a flicker of understanding, a gleam of suspicion upon the ironical features of his patient? Had he seemed too eager? Had he said too much? Chandler's next words restored his confidence.

"Where — should it be," he gasped, "but in — the safe — there?"

With his eyes he indicated a corner of the room, where now, for the first time, the doctor perceived a small iron safe, half-concealed by the trailing end of a window curtain.

Rising, he took the sick man's wrist. His pulse was beating in great throbs, with ominous intervals between.

"Lift your arm," said Doctor James.

"You know — I can't move, Doctor."

The physician stepped swiftly to the hall door, opened it, and listened. All was still. Without further circumvention he went to the safe, and examined it. Of a primitive make and simple design, it afforded little more security than protection against light-fingered servants. To his skill it was a mere toy, a thing of straw and pasteboard. The money was as good as in his hands. With his clamps he could draw the knob, punch the tumblers and open the door in two minutes. Perhaps, in another way, he might open it in one.

Kneeling upon the floor, he laid his ear to the combination plate, and slowly turned the knob. As he had surmised, it was locked at only a "day com." — upon one number. His keen ear caught the faint warning click as the tumbler was disturbed; he used the clue — the handle turned. He swung the door wide open. The interior of the safe was bare — not even a scrap of paper rested within the hollow iron cube.

Doctor James rose to his feet and walked back to the bed.

A thick dew had formed upon the dying man's brow, but there was a mocking, grim smile on his lips and in his eyes.

"I never — saw it before," he said, painfully, "medicine and — burglary wedded! Do you — make the — combination pay — dear Doctor?"

Than that situation afforded, there was never a more rigorous test of Doctor James's greatness. Trapped by the diabolic humor of his victim into a position both ridiculous and unsafe, he maintained his dignity as well as his presence of mind. Taking out his watch, he waited for the man to die.

"You were — just a shade — too — anxious — about that money. But it never was — in any danger — from you, dear Doctor. It's safe. Perfectly safe. It's all — in the hands — of the bookmakers. Twenty — thousand — Amy's money. I played it at the races — lost every — cent of it. I've been a pretty bad boy, Burglar — excuse me — Doctor, but I've been a square sport. I don't think — I ever met — such an — eighteen-carat rascal as you are, Doctor — excuse me — Burglar, in all my rounds. Is it contrary — to the ethics — of your — gang, Burglar, to give a victim — excuse me — patient, a drink of water?"

Doctor James brought him a drink. He could scarcely swallow it. The reaction from the powerful drug was coming in regular, intensifying waves. But his moribund fancy must have one more grating fling.

"Gambler — drunkard — spendthrift — I've been those, but — a doctor-burglar!"

The physician indulged himself to but one reply to the other's caustic taunts. Bending low to catch Chandler's fast crystallizing gaze, he pointed to the sleeping lady's door with a gesture so stern and significant that the prostrate man half-lifted his head, with his remaining strength, to see. He saw nothing; but he caught the cold words of the doctor — the last sounds he was to hear:

"I never yet — struck a woman."

It were vain to attempt to con such men. There is no curriculum that can reckon with them in its ken. They are offshoots from the types whereof men say, "He will do this," or "He will do that." We only know that they exist; and that we can observe them, and tell one another of their bare performances, as children watch and speak of the marionettes.

Yet it were a droll study in egoism to consider these two — one an assassin and a robber, standing above his victim; the other baser in his offences, if a lesser lawbreaker, lying, abhorred, in the house of the wife he had persecuted, spoiled, and smitten, one a tiger, the other a dog-wolf — to consider each of them sickening at the foulness of the other; and each flourishing out of the mire of his manifest guilt his own immaculate standard — of conduct, if not of honor.

The one retort of Doctor James must have struck home to the other's remaining shreds of shame and manhood, for it proved the *coup de grâce.* A deep blush suffused his face — an ignominious *rosa mortis;* the respiration ceased, and, with scarcely a tremor, Chandler expired.

Close following upon his last breath came the Negress, bringing the medicine. With a hand gently pressing upon the closed eyelids, Doctor James told her of the end. Not grief, but a hereditary *rapprochement* with death in the abstract, moved her to a dismal, watery snuffling, accompanied by her usual jeremiad.

"Dar now! It's in de Lawd's hands. He am de jedge ob de transgressor, and de suppo't of dem in distresss. He gwine hab suppo't us now. Cindy done paid out de last quarter fer dis bottle of physic, and it nebber come to no use."

"Do I understand," asked Doctor James, "that Mrs. Chandler has no money?"

"Money, suh? You know what make Miss Amy fall down and so weak?

Stahvation, suh. Nothin' to eat in dis house but some crumbly crackers in three days. Dat angel sell her finger rings and watch mont's ago. Dis fine house, suh, wid de red cyarpets and shiny bureaus, it's all hired; and de man talkin' scan'lous about de rent. Dat debble — 'scuse me, Lawd — he done in Yo' hands fer jedgment, now — he made way wid everything."

The physician's silence encouraged her to continue. The history that he gleaned from Cindy's disordered monologue was an old one, of illusion, wilfulness, disaster, cruelty and pride. Standing out from the blurred panorama of her gabble were little clear pictures — an ideal home in the far South; a quickly repented marriage; an unhappy season, full of wrongs and abuse, and, of late, an inheritance of money that promised deliverance; its seizure and waste by the dog-wolf during a two months' absence, and his return in the midst of a scandalous carouse. Unobtruded, but visible between every line, ran a pure white thread through the smudged warp of the story — the simple, all-enduring, sublime love of the old Negress, following her mistress unswervingly through everything to the end.

When at last she paused, the physician spoke, asking if the house contained whiskey or liquor of any sort. There was, the old woman informed him, half a bottle of brandy left in the sideboard by the dog-wolf.

"Prepare a toddy as I told you," said Doctor James. "Wake your mistress; have her drink it, and tell her what has happened."

Some ten minutes afterward, Mrs. Chandler entered, supported by old Cindy's arm. She appeared to be a little stronger since her sleep and the stimulant she had taken. Doctor James had covered, with a sheet, the form upon the bed.

The lady turned her mournful eyes once, with a half-frightened look, toward it, and pressed closer to her loyal protector. Her eyes were dry and bright. Sorrow seemed to have done its utmost with her. The fount of tears was dried; feeling itself paralyzed.

Doctor James was standing near the table, his overcoat donned, his hat and medicine case in his hand. His face was calm and impassive — practice had inured him to the sight of human suffering. His lambent brown eyes alone expressed a discreet professional sympathy.

He spoke kindly and briefly, stating that, as the hour was late, and assistance, no doubt, difficult to procure, he would himself send the proper persons to attend to the necessary finalities.

"One matter, in conclusion," said the doctor, pointing to the safe with

its still wide-open door. "Your husband, Mrs. Chandler, toward the end, felt that he could not live; and directed me to open that safe, giving me the number upon which the combination is set. In case you may need to use it, you will remember that the number is forty-one. Turn several times to the right; then to the left once; stop at forty-one. He would not permit me to waken you, though he knew the end was near.

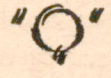
"In that safe he said he had placed a sum of money — not large — but enough to enable you to carry out his last request. That was that you should return to your old home, and, in after days, when time shall have made it easier, forgive his many sins against you."

He pointed to the table, where lay an orderly pile of banknotes, surmounted by two stacks of gold coins.

"The money is there — as he described it — eight hundred and thirty dollars. I beg to leave my card with you, in case I can be of any service later on."

So, he had thought of her — and kindly — at the last! So late! And yet the lie fanned into life one last spark of tenderness where she had thought all was turned to ashes and dust. She cried aloud "Rob! Rob!" She turned, and, upon the ready bosom of her true servitor, diluted her grief in relieving tears. It is well to think, also, that in the years to follow, the murderer's falsehood shone like a little star above the grave of love, comforting her, and gaining the forgiveness that is good in itself, whether asked for or no.

Hushed and soothed upon the dark bosom, like a child, by a crooning, babbling sympathy, at last she raised her head — but the doctor was gone.



The creator of Jake Justus and Helene Brand — and who doesn't love that delightfully wacky detectival duo? — wrote this hauntingly nostalgic tale especially for "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." We are proud to print it — an engrossing story of the modern school, about that hard-living, hard-drinking little criminal lawyer, John J. Malone, who investigates a murder committed in the strangest place imaginable — in the death house of a State Prison!

HIS HEART COULD BREAK

by CRAIG RICE

"As I passed by the ol' state's prison,
Ridin' on a stream-line' train —"

JOHN J. MALONE shuddered. He wished he could get the insidious melody out of his mind — or, remember the rest of the words. It had been annoying him since three o'clock that morning, when he'd heard it sung by the janitor of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

It seemed like a bad omen, and it made him uncomfortable. Or maybe it was the cheap gin he'd switched to between two and four a.m. that was making him uncomfortable. Whichever it was, he felt terrible.

"I bet your client's happy today," the guard said cordially, leading the way towards the death house.

"He ought to be," Malone growled. He reminded himself that he too ought to be happy. He wasn't. Maybe it was being in a prison that depressed him. John J. Malone, criminal lawyer, didn't like prisons. He devoted his life to keeping his clients out of them.

"Then the warden told me gently —"

That song again! How did the next line go?

"Well," the guard said, "they say you've never lost a client yet." It wouldn't do any harm, he thought, to get on the good side of a smart guy like John J. Malone.

"Not yet," Malone said. He'd had a close call with this one, though.

"You sure did a wonderful job, turning up the evidence to get a new trial," the guard rattled on. Maybe Malone could get him a better appointment, with his political drag. "Your client sure felt swell when he heard about it last night, he sure did."

"That's good," Malone said noncommittally. It hadn't been evidence that had turned the trick, though. Just a little matter of knowing some interesting facts about the judge's private life. The evidence would have to be manufactured before the trial, but that was the least of his worries. By that time, he might even find out the truth of what had happened. He hummed softly under his breath. Ah, there were the next lines!

"*Then the warden told me gently,*
He seemed too young, too young to die,
We cut the rope and let him down —'"

John J. Malone tried to remember the rhyme for "die". By, cry, lie, my and sigh. Then he let loose a few loud and indignant remarks about whoever had written that song, realized that he was entering the death house, and stopped, embarrassed. That particular cell block always inspired him with the same behavior he would have shown at a high class funeral. He took off his hat and walked softly.

And at that moment hell broke loose. Two prisoners in the block began yelling like banshees. The alarms began to sound loudly, causing the outside siren to chime in with its hideous wail. Guards were running through the corridor, and John J. Malone instinctively ran with them toward the center of disturbance, the fourth cell on the left.

Before the little lawyer got there, one of the guards had the door open. Another guard cut quickly through the bright new rope from which the prisoner was dangling, and eased the limp body down to the floor.

The racket outside was almost deafening now, but John J. Malone scarcely heard it. The guard turned the body over, and Malone recognized the very young and rather stupid face of Paul Palmer.

"He's hung himself," one of the guards said.

"With me for a lawyer?" Malone said angrily. "Hung himself, —" He started to say "hell", then remembered he was in the presence of death.

"Hey," the other guard said excitedly. "He's alive. His neck's broke, but he's breathing a little."

Malone shoved the guard aside and knelt down beside the dying man. Paul Palmer's blue eyes opened slowly, with an expression of terrible bewilderment. His lips parted.

"It wouldn't break," Paul Palmer whispered. He seemed to recognize Malone, and stared at him, with a look of frightful urgency. "*It wouldn't break,*" he whispered to Malone. Then he died.

"You're damned right I'm going to sit in on the investigation," Malone said angrily. He gave Warden Garrity's wastebasket a vicious kick. "The inefficient way you run your prison has done me out of a client." Out of a fat fee, too, he reminded himself miserably. He hadn't been paid yet, and now there would be a long tussle with the lawyer handling Paul Palmer's estate, who hadn't wanted him engaged for the defense in the first place. Malone felt in his pocket, found three crumpled bills and a small handful of change. He wished now that he hadn't got into that poker game last week.

The warden's dreary office was crowded. Malone looked around, recognized an assistant warden, the prison doctor — a handsome grey-haired man named Dickson — the guards from the death house, and the guard who had been ushering him in — Bowers was his name, Malone remembered, a tall, flat-faced, gangling man.

"Imagine him hanging himself," Bowers was saying incredulously. "Just after he found out he was gonna get a new trial."

Malone had been wondering the same thing. "Maybe he didn't get my wire," he suggested coldly.

"I gave it to him myself," Bowers stated positively. "Just last night. Never saw a man so happy in my life."

Doctor Dickson cleared his throat. Everyone turned to look at him.

"Poor Palmer was mentally unstable," the doctor said sadly. "You may recall I recommended, several days ago, that he be moved to the prison hospital. When I visited him last night he appeared hilariously — hysterically — happy. This morning, however, he was distinctly depressed."

"You mean the guy was nuts?" Warden Garrity asked hopefully.

"He was nothing of the sort," Malone said indignantly. Just let a hint get around that Paul Palmer had been of unsound mind, and he'd never collect that five thousand dollar fee from the estate. "He was saner than anyone in this room, with the possible exception of myself."

Dr. Dickson shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't suggest that he was insane. I only meant he was subject to moods."

Malone wheeled to face the doctor. "Say. Were you in the habit of visiting Palmer in his cell a couple of times a day?"

"I was," the doctor said, nodding. "He was suffering from a serious nervous condition. It was necessary to administer sedatives from time to time."

Malone snorted. "You mean he was suffering from the effect of being sober for the first time since he was sixteen."

"Put it any way you like," Dr. Dickson said pleasantly. "You remember, too, that I had a certain personal interest."

"That's right," Malone said slowly. "He was going to marry your niece."

"No one was happier than I to hear about the new trial," the doctor said. He caught Malone's eye and added, "No, I wasn't fond enough of him to smuggle in a rope. Especially when he'd just been granted a chance to clear himself."

"Look here," Warden Garrity said irritably. "I can't sit around listening to all this stuff. I've got to report the result of an investigation. Where the hell did he get that rope?"

There was a little silence, and then one of the guards said "Maybe from the guy who was let in to see him last night."

"What guy?" the warden snapped.

"Why —" The guard paused, confused. "He had an order from you, admitting him. His name was La Cerra."

Malone felt a sudden tingling along his spine. Georgie La Cerra was one of Max Hook's boys. What possible connection could there be between Paul Palmer, socialite, and the big gambling boss?

Warden Garrity had recognized the name too. "Oh yes," he said quickly. "That must have been it. But I doubt if we could prove it." He paused just an instant, and looked fixedly at Malone, as though daring him to speak. "The report will read that Paul Palmer obtained a rope, by means which have not yet been ascertained, and committed suicide while of unsound mind."

Malone opened his mouth and shut it again. He knew when he was licked. Temporarily licked, anyway. "For the love of mike," he said, "leave out the unsound mind."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," the warden said coldly.

Malone had kept his temper as long as he could. "All right," he said, "but I'll start an investigation that'll be a pip." He snorted. "Letting a gangster smuggle a rope in to a guy in the death house!" He glared at Dr. Dickson. "And you, foxy, with two escapes from the prison hospital in six months." He kicked the wastebasket again, this time sending it halfway across the room. "I'll show you from investigations! And I'm just the guy who can do it, too."

Dr. Dickson said quickly, "We'll substitute 'temporarily depressed' for the 'unsound mind.' "

But Malone was mad, now. He made one last, loud comment regarding the warden's personal life and probably immoral origin, and slammed the door so hard when he went out that the steel engraving of Chester A. Arthur over the warden's desk shattered to the floor.

"Mr. Malone," Bowers said in a low voice as they went down the hall, "I searched that cell, after they took the body out. Whoever smuggled in that rope smuggled in a letter, too. I found it hid in his mattress, and it wasn't there yesterday because the mattress was changed." He paused, and added "And the rope couldn't of been there last night either, because there was no place he could of hid it."

Malone glanced at the envelope the guard held out to him — pale grey expensive stationery, with "Paul Palmer" written across the front of it in delicate, curving handwriting.

"I haven't any money with me," the lawyer said.

Bowers shook his head. "I don't want no dough. But there's gonna be an assistant warden's job open in about three weeks."

"You'll get it," Malone said. He took the envelope and stuffed it in an inside pocket. Then he paused, frowned, and finally added, "And keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. Because there's going to be an awful stink when I prove Paul Palmer was murdered."

The pretty, black-haired girl in Malone's anteroom looked up as he opened the door. "Oh, Mr. Malone," she said quickly. "I read about it in the paper. I'm so sorry."

"Never mind, Maggie," the lawyer said. "No use crying over spilled clients." He went into his private office and shut the door.

Fate was treating him very shabbily, evidently from some obscure motive of personal spite. He'd been counting heavily on that five thousand buck fee.

He took a bottle of rye out of the filing cabinet marked "Personal", poured himself a drink, noted that there was only one more left in the bottle, and stretched out on the worn red leather davenport to think things over.

Paul Palmer had been an amiable, stupid young drunk of good family, whose inherited wealth had been held in trust for him by an uncle considered to be the stingiest man in Chicago. The money was to be turned over to him on his thirtieth birthday — some five years off — or on the death of the uncle, Carter Brown. Silly arrangement, Malone reflected, but rich men's lawyers were always doing silly things.

Uncle Carter had cramped the young man's style considerably, but he'd managed pretty well. Then he'd met Madelaine Starr.

Malone lit a cigar and stared dreamily through the smoke. The Starrs were definitely social, but without money. A good keen eye for graft, too. Madelaine's uncle was probably making a very good thing out of that political appointment as prison doctor.

Malone sighed, wished he weren't a lawyer, and thought about Madelaine Starr. An orphan, with a tiny income which she augmented by modelling in an exclusive dress shop — a fashionable and acceptable way of making a living. She had expensive tastes. (The little lawyer could spot expensive tastes in girls a mile away.)

She'd had to be damned poor to want to marry Palmer, Malone reflected, and damned beautiful to get him. Well, she was both.

But there had been another girl, one who had to be paid off. Lillian Claire by name, and a very lovely hunk of girl, too. Lovely, and smart enough to demand a sizable piece of money for letting the Starr-Palmer nuptials go through without a scandalous fuss.

Malone shook his head sadly. It had looked bad at the trial. Paul Palmer had taken his bride-to-be night-clubbing, delivering her back to her kitchenette apartment just before twelve. He'd been a shade high, then, and by the time he'd stopped off at three or four bars, he was several shades higher. Then he'd paid a visit to Lillian Claire, who claimed later at the trial that he'd attempted — unsuccessfully — to talk her out of the large piece of cash money, and had drunk up all the whiskey in the house. She'd put him in a cab and sent him home.

No one knew just when Paul Palmer had arrived at the big, gloomy apartment he shared with Carter Brown. The manservant had the night off. It was the manservant who discovered, next morning, that Uncle Carter had been shot neatly through the forehead with Paul Palmer's gun, and that Paul Palmer had climbed into his own bed, fully dressed, and was snoring drunk.

Everything had been against him, Malone reflected sadly. Not only had the jury been composed of hard-working, poverty-stricken men who liked nothing better than to convict a rich young wastrel of murder, but worse still, they'd all been too honest to be bribed. The trial had been his most notable failure. And now, this.

But Paul Palmer would never have hanged himself. Malone was sure of it.

He'd never lost hope. And now, especially, when a new trial had been granted, he'd have wanted to live.

It had been murder. But how had it been done?

Malone sat up, stretched, reached in his pocket for the pale grey envelope Bowers had given him, and read the note through again.

My dearest Paul:

I'm getting this note to you this way because I'm in terrible trouble and danger. I need you — no one else can help me. I know there's to be a new trial, but even another week may be too late. Isn't there *any* way?

Your own

M.

"M", Malone decided, would be Madelaine Starr. She'd use that kind of pale grey paper, too.

He looked at the note and frowned. If Madelaine Starr had smuggled that note to her lover, would she have smuggled in a rope by the same messenger? Or had someone else brought in the rope?

There were three people he wanted to see. Madelaine Starr was one. Lillian Claire was the second. And Max Hook was the third.

He went out into the anteroom, stopped halfway across it and said aloud, "But it's a physical impossibility. If someone smuggled that rope into Paul Palmer's cell and then Palmer hanged himself, it isn't murder. But it must have been murder." He stared at Maggie without seeing her. "Damn it, though, no one could have got into Paul Palmer's cell and hanged him."

Maggie looked at him sympathetically, familiar from long experience with her employer's processes of thought. "Keep on thinking and it'll come to you."

"Maggie, have you got any money?"

"I have ten dollars, but you can't borrow it. Besides, you haven't paid my last week's salary yet."

The little lawyer muttered something about ungrateful and heartless wenches, and flung himself out of the office.

Something had to be done about ready cash. He ran his mind over a list of prospective lenders. The only possibility was Max Hook. No, the last time he'd borrowed money from the Hook, he'd got into no end of trouble. Besides, he was going to ask another kind of favor from the gambling boss.

Malone went down Washington street, turned the corner, went into Joe

the Angel's City Hall Bar, and cornered its proprietor at the far end of the room.

"Cash a hundred dollar check for me, and hold it until a week from," — Malone made a rapid mental calculation — "Thursday?"

"Sure," Joe the Angel said. "Happy to do you a favor." He got out ten ten-dollar bills while Malone wrote the check. "Want I should take your bar bill out of this?"

Malone shook his head. "I'll pay next week. And add a double rye to it."

As he set down the empty glass, he heard the colored janitor's voice coming faintly from the back room.

"They hanged him for the thing you done,
You knew it was a sin,
You didn't know his heart could break —"

The voice stopped suddenly. For a moment Malone considered calling for the singer and asking to hear the whole thing, all the way through. No, there wasn't time for it now. Later, perhaps. He went out on the street, humming the tune.

What was it Paul Palmer had whispered in that last moment? "*It wouldn't break!*" Malone scowled. He had a curious feeling that there was some connection between those words and the words of that damned song. Or was it his Irish imagination, tripping him up again? "*You didn't know his heart could break.*" But it was Paul Palmer's neck that had been broken.

Malone hailed a taxi and told the driver to take him to the swank Lake Shore Drive apartment-hotel where Max Hook lived.

The gambling boss was big in two ways. He took in a cut from every crooked gambling device in Cook County, and most of the honest ones. And he was a mountain of flesh, over six feet tall and three times too fat for his height. His pink head was completely bald and he had the expression of a pleased cherub.

His living room was a masterpiece of the gilt-and-brocade school of interior decoration, marred only by a huge, battle-scarred roll-top desk in one corner. Max Hook swung around from the desk to smile cordially at the lawyer.

"How delightful to see you! What will you have to drink?"

"Rye," Malone said, "and it's nice to see you too. Only this isn't exactly a social call."

He knew better, though, than to get down to business before the drinks had arrived. (Max Hook stuck to pink champagne.) That wasn't the way Max Hook liked to do things. But when the rye was down, and the gambling boss had lighted a slender, tinted (and, Malone suspected, perfumed) cigarette in a rose quartz holder, he plunged right in.

"I suppose you read in the papers about what happened to my client, Palmer," he said.

"I never read the papers," Max Hook told him, "but one of my boys informed me. Tragic, wasn't it."

"Tragic is no name for it," Malone said bitterly. "He hadn't paid me a dime."

Max Hook's eyebrows lifted. "So?" Automatically he reached for the green metal box in the left-hand drawer. "How much do you need?"

"No, no," Malone said hastily, "that isn't it. I just want to know if one of your boys — Little Georgie La Cerra — smuggled the rope in to him. That's all."

Max Hook looked surprised, and a little hurt. "My dear Malone," he said at last, "why do you imagine he'd do such a thing?"

"For money," Malone said promptly, "if he did do it. I don't care, I just want to know."

"You can take my word for it," Max Hook said, "he did nothing of the kind. He did deliver a note from a certain young lady to Mr. Palmer, at my request — a bit of a nuisance, too, getting hold of that admittance order signed by the warden. I assure you, though, there was no rope. I give you my word, and you know I'm an honest man."

"Well, I was just asking," Malone said. One thing about the big gangster, he always told the truth. If he said Little Georgie La Cerra hadn't smuggled in that rope, then Little Georgie hadn't. Nor was there any chance that little Georgie had engaged in private enterprises on the side. As Max Hook often remarked, he liked to keep a careful watch on his boys. "One thing more, though," the lawyer said, "if you don't mind. Why did the young lady come to you to get her note delivered?"

Max Hook shrugged his enormous shoulders. "We have a certain — business connection. To be exact, she owes me a large sum of money. Like most extremely mercenary people she loves gambling, but she is not particularly lucky. When she told me that the only chance for that money to be paid was for the note to be delivered, naturally I obliged."

"Naturally," Malone agreed. "You didn't happen to know what was in the note, did you?"

Max Hook was shocked. "My dear Malone! You don't think I read other people's personal mail!"

No, Malone reflected, Max Hook probably didn't. And not having read the note, the big gambler probably wouldn't know what kind of "terrible trouble and danger" Madelaine Starr was in. He decided to ask, though, just to be on the safe side.

"Trouble?" Max Hook repeated after him. "No, outside of having her fiancé condemned to death, I don't know of any trouble she's in."

Malone shrugged his shoulders at the reproof, rose and walked to the door. Then he paused, suddenly. "Listen, Max. Do you know the words to a tune that goes like this?" He hummed a bit of it.

Max Hook frowned, then nodded. "Mmm — I know the tune. An entertainer at one of my places used to sing it." He thought hard, and finally came up with a few lines.

"*He was leaning against the prison bars,*
Dressed up in his new prison clothes —"

"Sorry," Max Hook said at last, "that's all I remember. I guess those two lines stuck in my head because they reminded me of the first time I was in jail."

Outside in the taxi, Malone sang the two lines over a couple of times. If he kept on, eventually he'd have the whole song. But Paul Palmer hadn't been leaning against the prison bars. He'd been hanging from the water pipe.

Damn, and double damn that song!

It was well past eight o'clock, and he'd had no dinner, but he didn't feel hungry. He had a grim suspicion that he wouldn't feel hungry until he'd settled this business. When the cab paused for the next red light, he flipped a coin to decide whether he'd call first on Madelaine Starr or Lillian Claire, and Madelaine won.

He stepped out of the cab in front of the small apartment building on Walton Place, paid the driver, and started across the sidewalk just as a tall, white-haired man emerged from the door. Malone recognized Orlo Featherstone, the lawyer handling Paul Palmer's estate, considered ducking out of sight, realized there wasn't time, and finally managed to look as pleased as he was surprised.

"I was just going to offer Miss Starr my condolences," he said.

"I'd leave her undisturbed, if I were you," Orlo Featherstone said coldly. He had only one conception of what a lawyer should be, and Malone wasn't anything like it. "I only called myself because I am, so to speak and in a sense, a second father to her."

If anyone else had said that, Malone thought, it would have called for an answer. From Orlo Featherstone, it sounded natural. He nodded sympathetically and said, "Then I won't bother her." He tossed away a ragged cigar and said "Tragic affair, wasn't it."

Orlo Featherstone unbent at least half a degree. "Distinctly so. Personally, I cannot imagine Paul Palmer doing such a thing. When I visited him yesterday, he seemed quite cheerful and full of hope."

"You — visited him yesterday?" Malone asked casually. He drew a cigar from his pocket and began unwrapping it with exquisite care.

"Yes," Featherstone said, "about the will. He had to sign it, you know. Fortunate for her," he indicated Madelaine Starr with a gesture toward the building, "that he did so. He left her everything, of course."

"Of course," Malone said. He lighted his cigar on the second try. "You don't think Paul Palmer could have been murdered, do you?"

"Murdered!" Orlo Featherstone repeated, as though it was an obscene word, "Absurd! No Palmer has ever been murdered."

Malone watched him climb into a shiny 1928 Rolls Royce, then started walking briskly toward State Street. The big limousine passed him just as he reached the corner, it turned north on State Street and stopped. Malone paused by the newsstand long enough to see Mr. Orlo Featherstone get out and cross the sidewalk to the corner drug store. After a moment's thought he followed and paused at the cigar counter, from where he could see clearly into the adjacent telephone booth.

Orlo Featherstone, in the booth, consulted a little notebook. Then he took down the receiver, dropped a nickel in the slot, and began dialling. Malone watched carefully. D-E-L—9-6-O—— It was Lillian Claire's number.

The little lawyer cursed all sound-proof phone booths, and headed for a bar on the opposite corner. He felt definitely unnerved.

After a double rye, and halfway through a second one, he came to the heartening conclusion that when he visited Lillian Claire, later in the evening, he'd be able to coax from her the reason why Orlo Featherstone, of

all people, had telephoned her, just after leaving the late Paul Palmer's fiancée. A third rye braced him for his call on the fiancée herself.

Riding up in the self-service elevator to her apartment, another heartening thought came to him. If Madelaine Starr was going to inherit all the Palmer dough — then it might not be such a trick to collect his five thousand bucks. He might even be able to collect it by a week from Thursday.

And he reminded himself, as she opened the door, this was going to be one time when he wouldn't be a sucker for a pretty face.

Madelaine Starr's apartment was tiny, but tasteful. Almost too tasteful, Malone thought. Everything in it was cheap, but perfectly correct and in exactly the right place, even to the Van Gogh print over the midget fireplace. Madelaine Starr was in exactly the right taste, too.

She was a tall girl, with a figure that still made Malone blink, in spite of the times he'd admired it in the courtroom. Her bronze-brown hair was smooth and well-brushed, her pale face was calm and composed. Serene, polished, suave. Malone had a private idea that if he made a pass at her, she wouldn't scream. She was wearing black rayon house-pajamas. He wondered if they were her idea of mourning.

Malone got the necessary condolences and trite remarks out of the way fast, and then said, "What kind of terrible trouble and danger are you in, Miss Starr?"

That startled her. She wasn't able to come up with anything more original than "What do you mean?"

"I mean what you wrote in your note to Paul Palmer," the lawyer said.

She looked at the floor and said, "I hoped it had been destroyed."

"It will be," Malone said gallantly, "if you say so."

"Oh," she said. "Do you have it with you?"

"No," Malone lied. "It's in my office safe. But I'll go back there and burn it." He didn't add when.

"It really didn't have anything to do with his death, you know," she said.

Malone said, "Of course not. You didn't send him the rope too, did you?"

She stared at him. "How awful of you."

"I'm sorry," Malone said contritely.

She relaxed. "I'm sorry too. I didn't mean to snap at you. I'm a little unnerved, naturally." She paused. "May I offer you a drink?"

"You may," Malone said, "and I'll take it."

He watched her while she mixed a lot of scotch and a little soda in two

glasses, wondering how soon after her fiancé's death he could safely ask her for a date. Maybe she wouldn't say Yes to a broken-down criminal lawyer, though. He took the drink, downed half of it, and said to himself indignantly, "Who's broken-down?"

"Oh, Mr. Malone," she breathed, "you don't believe my note had anything to do with it?"

"Of course not," Malone said. "That note would have made him want to live, and get out of jail." He considered bringing up the matter of his five thousand dollar fee, and then decided this was not the time. "Nice that you'll be able to pay back what you owe Max Hook. He's a bad man to owe money to."

She looked at him sharply and said nothing. Malone finished his drink, and walked to the door.

"One thing, though," he said, hand on the knob. "This — terrible trouble and danger you're in. You'd better tell me. Because I might be able to help, you know."

"Oh, no," she said. She was standing very close to him, and her perfume began to mingle dangerously with the rye and scotch in his brain. "I'm afraid not." He had a definite impression that she was thinking fast. "No one can help, now." She looked away, delicately. "You know — a girl — alone in the world —"

Malone felt his cheeks reddening. He opened the door and said, "Oh." Just plain Oh.

"Just a minute," she said quickly. "Why did you ask all these questions?"

"Because," Malone said, just as quickly, "I thought the answers might be useful — in case Paul Palmer was murdered."

That, he told himself, riding down the self-service elevator, would give her something to think about.

He hailed a cab and gave the address of the apartment building where Lillian Claire lived, on Goethe Street. In the lobby of the building he paused long enough to call a certain well-known politician at his home and make sure that he was there. It would be just as well not to run into that particular politician at Lillian Claire's apartment, since he was paying for it.

It was a nice apartment, too, Malone decided, as the slim mulatto maid ushered him in. Big, soft modernistic divans and chairs, panelled mirrors, and a built-in bar. Not half as nice, though, as Lillian Claire herself.

She was a cuddly little thing, small, and a bit on the plump side, with

curly blonde hair and a deceptively simple stare. She said, "Oh, Mr. Malone, I've always wanted a chance to get acquainted with you." Malone had a pleasant feeling that if he tickled her, just a little, she'd giggle.

She mixed him a drink, lighted his cigar, sat close to him on the biggest and most luxurious divan, and said, "Tell me, how on earth did Paul Palmer get that rope?"

"I don't know." Malone said. "Did you send it to him, baked in a cake?"

She looked at him reprovingly. "You don't think I wanted him to kill himself and let that awful woman inherit all that money?"

Malone said, "She isn't so awful. But this is tough on you, though. Now you'll never be able to sue him."

"I never intended to," she said. "I didn't want to be paid off. I just thought it might scare her away from him."

Malone put down his glass, she hopped up and refilled it. "Were you in love with him?" he said.

"Don't be silly." She curled up beside him again. "I liked him. He was much too nice to have someone like that marry him for his money."

Malone nodded slowly. The room was beginning to swim — not unpleasantly — before his eyes. Maybe he should have eaten dinner after all.

"Just the same," he said, "you didn't think that idea up all by yourself. Somebody put you up to asking for money."

She pulled away from him a little — not too much. "That's perfect nonsense," she said unconvincingly.

"All right," Malone said agreeably. "Tell me just one thing —"

"I'll tell you this one thing," she said. "Paul never murdered his uncle. I don't know who did, but it wasn't Paul. Because I took him home that night. He came to see me, yes. But I didn't put him in a cab and send him home. I took him home, and got him to his own room. Nobody saw me. It was late — almost daylight." She paused and lit a cigarette. "I peeked into his uncle's room to make sure I hadn't been seen, and his uncle was dead. I never told anybody because I didn't want to get mixed up in it worse than I was already."

Malone sat bolt upright. "Fine thing," he said, indignantly and a bit thickly. "You could have alibied him and you let him be convicted."

"Why bother?" she said serenely. "I knew he had you for a lawyer. Why would he need an alibi?"

Malone shoved her back against the cushions of the davenport and glared

at her. "A'right," he said. "But that wasn't the thing I was gonna ask. Why did old man Featherstone call you up tonight?"

Her shoulders stiffened under his hands. "He just asked me for a dinner date," she said.

"You're a liar," Malone said, not unpleasantly. He ran an experimental finger along her ribs. She did giggle. Then he kissed her.

All this time spent, Malone told himself reprovingly, and you haven't learned one thing worth the effort. Paul Palmer hadn't killed his uncle. But he'd been sure of that all along, and anyway it wouldn't do any good now. Madelaine Starr needed money, and now she was going to inherit a lot of it. Orlo Featherstone was on friendly terms with Lillian Claire.

The little lawyer leaned his elbows on the table and rested his head on his hands. At three o'clock in the morning, Joe the Angel's was a desolate and almost deserted place. He knew now, definitely, that he should have eaten dinner. Nothing, he decided, would cure the way he felt except a quick drink, a long sleep, or sudden death.

He would probably never learn who had killed Paul Palmer's uncle, or why. He would probably never learn what had happened to Paul Palmer. After all, the man had hanged himself. No one else could have got into that cell. It wasn't murder to give a man enough rope to hang himself with.

No, he would probably never learn what had happened to Paul Palmer, and he probably would never collect that five thousand dollar fee. But there was one thing that he could do. He'd learn the words of that song.

He called for a drink, the janitor, and the janitor's guitar. Then he sat back and listened.

"As I passed by the ol' State's prison,
Ridin' on a stream-lin' train — "

It was a long, rambling ballad, requiring two drinks for the janitor and two more for Malone. The lawyer listened, remembering a line here and there.

"When they hanged him in the mornin',
His last words were for you,
Then the sheriff took his shiny knife
An' cut that ol' rope through."

A sad story, Malone reflected, finishing the second drink. Personally,

he'd have preferred "My Wild Irish Rose" right now. But he yelled to Joe for another drink, and went on listening.

"They hanged him for the thing you done,
You knew it was a sin,
How well you knew his heart could break,
Lady, why did you turn him in —"

The little lawyer jumped to his feet. That was the line he'd been trying to remember! And what had Paul Palmer whispered? *"It wouldn't break."*

Malone knew, now.

He dived behind the bar, opened the cash drawer, and scooped out a handful of telephone slugs.

"You're drunk," Joe the Angel said indignantly.

"That may be," Malone said happily, "and it's a good idea too. But I know what I'm doing."

He got one of the slugs into the phone on the third try, dialled Orlo Featherstone's number, and waited till the elderly lawyer got out of bed and answered the phone.

It took ten minutes, and several more phone slugs to convince Featherstone that it was necessary to get Madelaine Starr out of bed and make the three-hour drive to the state's prison, right now. It took another ten minutes to wake up Lillian Claire and induce her to join the party. Then he placed a long-distance call to the sheriff of Statesville County and invited him to drop in at the prison and pick up a murderer.

Malone strode to the door. As he reached it, Joe the Angel hailed him.

"I forgot," he said, "I got sumpin' for you." Joe the Angel rummaged back of the cash register and brought out a long envelope. "That cute secretary of yours was looking for you all over town to give you this. Finally she left it with me. She knew you'd get here sooner or later."

Malone said "Thanks," took the envelope, glanced at it, and winced. "First National Bank." Registered mail. He knew he was overdrawn, but —

Oh, well, maybe there was still a chance to get that five thousand bucks.

The drive to Statesville wasn't so bad, in spite of the fact that Orlo Featherstone snored most of the way. Lillian snuggled up against Malone's left shoulder like a kitten, and with his right hand he held Madelaine Starr's hand under the auto robe. But the arrival, a bit before seven a.m., was depressing. The prison looked its worst in the early morning, under a light fog.

Besides, the little lawyer wasn't happy over what he had to do.

Warden Garrity's office was even more depressing. There was the warden, eyeing Malone coldly and belligerently, and Madelaine Starr and her uncle, Dr. Dickson, looking a bit annoyed. Orlo Featherstone was frankly skeptical. The sheriff of Statesville county was sleepy and bored, Lillian Claire was sleepy and suspicious. Even the guard, Bowers, looked bewildered.

And all these people, Malone realized, were waiting for him to pull a rabbit out of his whiskers.

He pulled it out fast. "Paul Palmer was murdered," he said flatly.

Warden Garrity looked faintly amused. "A bunch of pixies crawled in his cell and tied the rope around his neck?"

"No," Malone said, lighting a cigar. "This murderer made one try — murder by frame-up. He killed Paul Palmer's uncle for two reasons, one of them being to send Paul Palmer to the chair. It nearly worked. Then I got him a new trial. So another method had to be tried, fast, and that one did work."

"You're insane," Orlo Featherstone said. "Palmer hanged himself."

"I'm not insane," Malone said indignantly, "I'm drunk. There's a distinction. And Paul Palmer hanged himself because he thought he wouldn't die, and could escape from prison." He looked at Bowers and said "Watch all these people, someone may make a move."

Lillian Claire said, "I don't get it."

"You will," Malone promised. He kept a watchful eye on Bowers and began talking fast. "The whole thing was arranged by someone who was mercenary and owed money. Someone who knew Paul Palmer would be too drunk to know what had happened the night his uncle was killed, and who was close enough to him to have a key to the apartment. That person went in and killed the uncle with Paul Palmer's gun. And, as that person had planned, Paul Palmer was tried and convicted and would have been electrocuted, if he hadn't had a damn smart lawyer."

He flung his cigar into the cuspidor and went on, "Then Paul Palmer was granted a new trial. So the mercenary person who wanted Paul Palmer's death convinced him that he had to break out of prison, and another person showed him how the escape could be arranged — by pretending to hang himself, and being moved to the prison hospital — *watch her, Bowers!*"

Madelaine Starr had flung herself at Doctor Dickson. "Damn you," she screamed, her face white. "I knew you'd break down and talk. But you'll never talk again —"

There were three shots. One from the little gun Madelaine had carried in her pocket, and two from Bowers' service revolver.

Then the room was quite still.

Malone walked slowly across the room, looked down at the two bodies, and shook his head sadly. "Maybe it's just as well," he said. "They'd probably have hired another defense lawyer anyway."

"This is all very fine," the Statesville County sheriff said. "But I still don't see how you figured it. Have another beer?"

"Thanks," Malone said. "It was easy. A song tipped me off. Know this?" He hummed a few measures.

"Oh, sure," the sheriff said. "The name of it is, 'The Statesville Prison.'" He sang the first four verses.

"Well, I'll be double-damned," Malone said. The bartender put the two glasses of beer on the table. "Bring me a double gin for a chaser," the lawyer told him.

"Me too," the sheriff said. "What does the song have to do with it, Malone?"

Malone said, "It was the crank on the adding machine, pal. Know what I mean? You put down a lot of stuff to add up and nothing happens, and then somebody turns the crank and it all adds up to what you want to know. See how simple it is?"

"I don't," the sheriff said, "but go on."

"I had all the facts," Malone said, "I knew everything I needed to know, but I couldn't add it up. I needed one thing, that one thing." He spoke almost reverently, downing his gin. "Paul Palmer said '*It wouldn't break*' — just before he died. And he looked terribly surprised. For a long time, I didn't know what he meant. Then I heard that song again, and I did know." He sang a few lines. "*The sheriff took his shiny knife, and cut that ol' rope through.*" Then he finished his beer, and sang on "*They hanged him for the thing you done, you knew it was a sin. You didn't know his heart could break, Lady, why did you turn him in.*" He ended on a blue note.

"Very pretty," the sheriff said. "Only I heard it, '*You knew that his poor heart could break.*'"

"Same thing," Malone said, waving a hand. "Only, that song was what turned the crank on the adding machine. When I heard it again, I knew what Palmer meant by '*it wouldn't break.*'"

"His heart?" the sheriff said helpfully.

"No," Malone said, "the rope."

He waved at the bartender and said "Two more of the same." Then to the sheriff, "He expected the rope to break. He thought it would be artfully frayed so that he would drop to the floor unharmed. Then he could have been moved to the prison hospital — from which there had been two escapes in the past six months. He had to escape, you see, because his sweetheart had written him that she was in terrible trouble and danger — the same sweetheart whose evidence had helped convict him at the trial.

"Madelaine Starr wanted his money," Malone went on, "but she didn't want Paul. So her murder of his uncle served two purposes. It released Paul's money, and it framed him. Using poor old innocent Orlo Featherstone, she planted in Lillian Claire's head the idea of holding up Paul for money, so Paul would be faced with a need for ready cash. Everything worked fine, until I gummixed up the whole works by getting my client a new trial."

"Your client shouldn't of had such a smart lawyer," the sheriff said, over his beer glass.

Malone tossed aside the compliment with a shrug of his cigar. "Maybe he should of had a better one. Anyway, she and her uncle, Dr. Dickson, fixed it all up. She sent that note to Paul, so he'd think he had to break out of the clink. Then her uncle, Dickson, told Paul he'd arrange the escape, with the rope trick. To the world, it would have looked as though Paul Palmer had committed suicide in a fit of depression. Only he did have a good lawyer, and he lived long enough to say '*It wouldn't break.*' "

Malone looked into his empty glass and lapsed into a melancholy silence.

The phone rang — someone hijacked a truck over on the Springfield Road — and the sheriff was called away. Left by himself, Malone cried a little into his beer. Lillian Claire had gone back to Chicago with Orlo Featherstone, who really had called her up for a date, and no other reason.

Malone reminded himself he hadn't had any sleep, his head was splitting, and what was left of Joe the Angel's hundred dollars would just take him back to Chicago. And there was that letter from the bank, probably threatening a summons. He took it out of his pocket and sighed as he tore it open.

"Might as well face realities," Malone said to the bartender. "And bring me another double gin."

He drank the gin, tore open the envelope, and took out a certified check for five thousand dollars, with a note from the bank to the effect that Paul

Palmer had directed its payment. It was dated the day before his death.

Malone waltzed to the door, waltzed back to pay the bartender and kiss him good-bye.

"Do you feel all right?" the bartender asked anxiously.

"All right!" Malone said. "I'm a new man!"

What was more, he'd just remembered the rest of that song. He sang it, happily, as he went up the street toward the railroad station.

"As I passed by the ol' State's prison,
Ridin' on a stream-line' train
I waved my hand, and said out loud,
I'm never comin' back again,
I'm never comin' back a — gain!"

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Book Thieves *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

It was 1:30 A.M. when a disgruntled Fordney, responding to an urgent summons, settled himself in the library of Gregory Markham.

Silently he proceeded to "get the picture." With slight surprise he observed the vase of Oriental poppies on the gate-legged table in the center of the room to which a stout manilla rope was tied. The rope trailed across the room and through an open east window. He'd have to ask Markham about those poppies. His weren't doing well.

The silence was broken by Markham's bellow. "Tell him! Tell him! Don't sit there like a mummified ass."

Markham's handsome secretary, Paul Bishop, ignored the outburst, turned to the Professor and explained: "I was reading in my room . . . Mr. Markham was asleep at the other side of the house. I heard a noise in the library. It was repeated. I rushed here, saw the rope tied to the table and dashed to the open window — just in time to see a man let go the rope a few feet from the ground and dash for the shrubbery. I . . ."

"I saw him, too!" exclaimed Rolfe, the chauffeur. "I was coming up the drive when I saw him jump off the rope and beat it. I chased him, but he got away."

"With what?" demanded Fordney.

"With what!" shouted Markham. "Why, damn it all, Joe, with two — *two* Shakespearean first folios. They're worth $75,000 apiece! You've *got* to get them back for me!"

"Quite," said the Professor quietly, looking at Bishop and Rolfe. "Do you produce them *now*, or do you prefer a grilling at headquarters?"

What single clue told him both were lying, that the theft was an inside job?

Solution

The rope tied to the leg of the table which stood in the CENTER of the room told the Professor the setting was faked to suggest an inside job. Had a man gone down the rope (as Bishop and Rolfe said) the table would, of course, have been pulled across the room to the window — and very probably would have overturned. Markham's precious first folios were promptly returned by the two thieves.

We welcome the first appearance in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" of Bulldog Drummond — detective, adventurer, and nemesis — who knows how to lead even toy soldiers to victory. . . .

THIRTEEN LEAD SOLDIERS

by H. C. McNEILE

"You mustn't touch them, Uncle Hugh, because they're still wet. Mr. Stedman is going to paint some more when he comes back."

Hugh Drummond — uncle by courtesy — looked down at the small boy on the floor. Around him was strewn the litter inseparable from small boys, be it trains, airplanes or hairy bugs. In this case the central motif consisted of toy soldiers, with paints and brushes and pools of multi-colored water. In addition there were boxes of infantry, and cavalry, and guns all of a dull gray color, whilst on a tray, resplendent in scarlet, stood some freshly painted heroes.

"Mr. Stedman says it's far more fun to paint them oneself," explained the proud owner. "He says it doesn't matter if there is no full dress no more."

"I quite agree with Mr. Stedman, Billy," said Drummond. "Red looks much better than khaki, doesn't it. That's a good looking Highlander next door to the General on the horse."

"Yes. I've got some more of those. They're Cameron Highlanders."

"Not Camerons, old man. They might be Gordons."

"Mr. Stedman said Camerons," persisted the boy. "Didn't you?"

He looked up as a tall, dark man entered the room.

"Didn't I say what, Billy?"

"Say these were Cameron Highlanders. Uncle Hugh says they're Gordons."

"Only after they're painted, son," said Drummond. "Before they're painted they might be any Highland regiment."

"But Mr. Stedman painted him and he said he was a Cameron. Why can't he be a Cameron?"

"Because he's got the wrong colored kilt on, old man. I might stretch a point and say he was a Seaforth, but I can't allow Cameron, I'm afraid. You see that kilt gives the general impression of being dark green, or even black, whereas the Cameron kilt strikes one as red."

"The complete Scotchman, I see," said Stedman with a smile, and Drummond glanced at him. There was no friendliness behind the smile.

"Even to the extent of always saying, 'Guid nicht the noo'," he answered placidly.

"The color of a kilt seems a somewhat trifling matter to worry the child's head with."

Drummond raised his eyebrows and laughed.

"I don't suppose that it would materially affect Billy's future career if he was told that the Archbishop of Canterbury always preached in purple pajamas," he remarked. "At the same time if you are painting soldiers and thereby giving the child a little lesson in things military, it does no harm to get such trifles as facings and kilts correct."

He lit a cigarette and strolled over to the window.

"The rain has stopped: I think I shall take exercise. I suppose the great ones are still conferring?"

"They are," said Stedman shortly, and with an amused glance at him Drummond lounged out of the room. One of those tedious individuals, he reflected, who hate to be found wrong in anything. And yet able, presumably, or he wouldn't have his present job.

"Algy, you noxious blight," he remarked to Longworth, whom he found in the hall, "you may accompany me to the village. The evening paper should be in by now, and I want to see if I've backed my fifteenth consecutive loser. Tell me," he continued as they walked down the drive, "what do you think of the man Stedman?"

"I don't," said Algy, "if I can help it. Why?"

"I just wondered. We have been chatting on kilts and things, and I don't think he was amused. Incidentally, painting toy soldiers is a new one on me."

"Same here. But the kid seems to like it. And I suppose it was decent of the fellow to go all the way to Manchester to get unpainted ones. What's this about kilts?"

"Nothing of importance," answered Drummond, halting for a moment and looking back at the house. "What a magnificent old pile it is."

Outlined against the westering sun the towers and battlements of Oxshott Castle stood out dark and somber. Trees as old as the house flanked it on each side: in front lay a lake, placid as a sheet of glass. And as they looked, four men came through the front door and strolled across the drive.

It was easy to recognize them even at that distance. Slim and upright,

their seventy-year, silver-haired host, Lord Surrey, came first with the Frenchman, the Comte de Dinard: behind them, the smoke from their cigars almost motionless in the still air, were the Belgian, Monsieur Meteren, with Sir Charles Dorking. And as they disappeared round a corner of the house Drummond gave a short laugh.

"It's quaint, Algy, you know, when you think of it," he said. "At this moment the fate of Europe is quite possibly being settled: Stedman is painting toy soldiers for Billy, and you and I are going to see who won the two-thirty."

Algy looked at him anxiously.

"You'll be quoting Ella Wheeler Wilcox in a moment, my lad," he remarked. "What you want is beer in a large can. And what has stung you now?"

Drummond, his eyes narrowed, was staring down the drive towards the lodge.

"I'd know that walk anywhere," he said. "If that isn't our old friend Andrews of Scotland Yard, I will consume my headgear. Now what the deuce is he doing here?"

They strolled on, and a few moments later the three men met.

"Good evening, gentlemen," cried the jovial-faced Inspector cheerily. "I was hoping I might meet you."

Drummond glanced at him in surprise.

"Very kind of you, old lad," he remarked, "and the same to you and all that. But may I enquire how you knew we were here?"

"Because I suggested that you should be asked," answered Andrews calmly. "When discussing the house party with his Lordship it transpired that he knew both you and Mr. Longworth very well. So, as I say, I suggested that he should send you invitations for the week-end."

"Again very kind of you," said Drummond, looking even more surprised. "But why?"

"Because I may want your assistance," replied the Inspector. "What about a pint at the Barley Mow, and I'll tell you the lay of the ground."

"A brave thought, bravely spoken," said Drummond. "By the way, d'you know what won the two-thirty?"

"Moonlight. Sharpshooter second."

"Hell!" grunted Drummond. "Another fiver down the drain. I shall soon be known as the bookmaker's friend."

They entered the bar, and found it empty.

"What about that table over in the corner?" suggested Drummond. "I am frankly very curious, Andrews, to hear why you should have discussed the party with Lord Surrey."

"I suppose you're aware, Captain Drummond," said the Inspector, as they sat down, "that some very important discussions are on foot at the present moment between England, France and Belgium."

"I am," replied Drummond.

"That being the case, has it struck you as strange that a reporter isn't lurking behind every bush at Oxshott Castle?"

"It had not struck me up to date," admitted Drummond. "But now that you mention it, I get your meaning."

"The reason why they're not here," continued Andrews, "is that this conference has been kept a profound secret. The Press, of course, know that Meteren and the Comte de Dinard are in England. They know further that they are not over here to enjoy the English climate, but for the express purpose of meeting Sir Charles. And since the one thing the statesmen wished to avoid at the present stage of affairs was publicity, this week-end was arranged at Lord Surrey's suggestion. The whole plan was kept completely dark, and the very fact that there are no reporters here proves that we succeeded."

He paused and took a pull at his tankard, while the others waited.

"Yes, Captain Drummond," he repeated, "We succeeded — so far as the reporters are concerned — which, believe me, is no mean feat. But we have not succeeded entirely. Some unauthorized person knew of this conference four days ago."

"At any rate he seems to have kept the information to himself," remarked Drummond. "Incidentally, how did you find out that somebody knew?"

"I'm coming to that," continued Andrews. "Four days ago when I went to my office in the morning I was as certain as a man could be that everything was all right. The only people who knew about the week-end were Lord Surrey himself: the three statesmen and their confidential secretaries — Mr. Stedman and the other two — and, of course, myself. I had fixed all the staff work over cars and, as I say, I felt quite confident that all was well. You can judge then of my consternation when I received a letter by the second post that blew my optimism sky high. It was undated, bore no address, and naturally was not signed. And it ran as follows.

"'Guard the Comte de Dinard at Oxshott. Guns are useless.'"

He took another pull at his beer.

"Short and pithy — you'll agree," he went on, "and it gave me the devil of a jolt. To trace the writer was, of course, an utter impossibility even if there had been time. And there we were confronted with the fact that what we thought was a jealously-guarded secret was nothing of the sort. So I went off post haste to see Lord Surrey. Should we alter the arrangements: postpone the conference or what? Well, postponement was out of the question: Mr. Meteren has to be back in Brussels on Monday. To alter arrangements would have been difficult since the Comte had just flown back to Paris and was only returning that night. So we decided to carry on, and do as the anonymous writer had suggested — guard the Comte. And it was then that I took the liberty, when I found out that his Lordship knew you both, of asking him to invite you. Your methods, Captain Drummond, may at times be irregular, but there are few people I would sooner have beside me if there's any trouble about than yourself."

He made a little bow.

"Very nice of you to say so," said Drummond. "I should like to play."

"The trouble is," continued Andrews, "that I have no idea whatever as to what the game is likely to be."

"It's just possible," put in Algy, "that the letter is a hoax."

"Possibly, but not likely, Mr. Longworth. And even if it were, it doesn't alter the fact that somebody, inadvertently or otherwise, has spilled the beans. Because it's preposterous to think that any of the other seven people in the know could have sent me that note. No: I don't think that letter is a hoax. It is, I believe, a definite warning, sent by someone who has found out about this week-end, who knows that an attempt may be made on the Frenchman's life, and whose conscience has pricked him. You see, there's no secret about the fact that there is a large section of people in France, and in other countries too, who would rejoice if the Comte was out of the way."

"Has he been told about it?" asked Drummond.

"He has. And pooh-poohs the whole thing. Takes up the line that if people in his position paid any attention to threats of that sort they might as well chuck up the sponge straight away. Which is quite true. But the last thing I, or Lord Surrey want, is that the chucking up should occur here."

"Naturally," agreed Drummond. "You've got some men down, I suppose?"

"Four," said Andrews. "They're in the grounds now; they'll be in the house tonight."

" 'Guns are useless.' I wonder what that means. Poison?"

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Possibly. But unless he eats or drinks something different to everybody else the whole house party is in for it."

"Thanks," said Drummond with a grin. "What about the servants?"

"Been with his Lordship for years. Besides it is inconceivable that one of them should have sent the note, or given the show away. It would mean that Lord Surrey himself had been indiscreet, otherwise they could never have known."

"Still *somebody* has given it away," remarked Drummond. "And assuming what you've said to be correct it must be one of you eight."

"My own belief is that it's the Comte himself," said Andrews. "Quite unintentionally, of course. He's one of those men who is reckless to the point of foolhardiness where his own safety is concerned. For all that, he's got to submit to some safety measures tonight, whether he likes it or not."

"Are they hush-hush?" asked Drummond.

"Not from you," said the Inspector, "though I don't want you to pass them on at present. But he is not going to sleep in the room he occupies now. He will dress for dinner there, and then just before he goes to bed a strange defect will be discovered in a fuse. Or else Lord Surrey will tell him the truth point blank. He will sleep in another room, with one of my men outside his door, and I shall spend the night in his present one. Which may lead to us finding out something."

"You evidently take this as serious," said Drummond.

"I do. But in any case it's just as well to be on the safe side. And I think my arrangements, simple though they are, give the maximum of security with the minimum of inconvenience. If trouble comes from the outside it finds me; if it comes from the inside it has to pass one of my men."

"And what do you want us to do?"

"Keep your eyes open during the evening for anything that strikes you as being suspicious. I shall be on hand in one of the sitting rooms, if you want to get hold of me. And if the phrase 'Guns are useless' means anything in the nature of a rough house, you won't want any prompting," he added with a grin as he rose. "No, I won't have another, thanks. I must go and inspect my myrmidons. Probably see you later."

"So that's why we were honored, Algy," said Drummond as the door closed behind the Inspector. "I had hoped that my advice was going to be asked on high matters of state, but life is full of disappointments. However, if we've got to do the Sherlock Holmes stunt more beer is indicated. And then we'd better toddle back. But one wonders," he continued as another tankard was put before him, "why the letter writer was so cryptic. Having gone to the trouble of saying what he did, why the dickens didn't he say more? Didn't he know himself, or what stung him?"

"It's that that made me suspect a hoax," said Algy.

"You frightful liar," remarked Drummond dispassionately. "You never thought of the point till I mentioned it. Now mop up your ale, and wipe your chin, and then you must go back and change your dickey. And for heaven's sake don't tell old Dinard that French story of yours or all Andrews' precautions will be wasted. Though I admit," he added brutally, "that death could only be regarded as a merciful release from listening to it."

Any setting less suggestive of violence or murder than Oxshott Castle that night it would have been hard to imagine. They had dined in state in the large banqueting hall, a dinner which reflected credit on even Lord Surrey's far-famed chef — and the conversation at times had been amazingly indiscreet. It had taken the three diplomats a certain amount of time to understand the reason for Drummond's and Algy's presence, since by tacit consent no mention was made of the threatening note. The Comte especially appeared to think that Algy was mental — a skeleton in the family cupboard and Drummond his keeper — but the fact did not prevent him making one or two remarks that Fleet Street would have paid thousands for. And Meteren was not far behind in frankness.

It was a dinner to remember.

No women were present, and no other guests had been asked in. And as the meal progressed, Drummond found himself so absorbed in the glimpses — the human, scandalous glimpses — that lie at times behind the wheels of state that he almost forgot the real reason for his presence. And then, the drawn curtains — drawn ostensibly to keep out the mosquitoes — with the motionless bulges behind them on each side of the open window would bring him back to reality. For the bulges were two of Andrews' men, and two more were outside the door.

He was sitting between the Belgian minister and Mark Stedman, who seemed to have recovered from his temporary irritation of the afternoon.

"I had no idea, Captain Drummond," he said over the port, "that you were such a friend of Lord Surrey's."

"Hardly the way to put it," smiled Drummond. "His eldest son, who married my first cousin, and I were at Sandhurst together, and the old boy has asked me to shoot several times. Hence grandson Billy calls me uncle."

"Quite. I thought you were a sort of unofficial bravo brought in to help to protect our guest."

"You're perfectly right: I am. I should not be here but for that anonymous threat."

"What is your opinion of it?" asked Stedman.

"I haven't one," said Drummond frankly.

"I saw Inspector Andrews before dinner, and he seems equally at sea. However he is neglecting no precautions. Would it be indiscreet to ask what is your role?"

"Not at all," answered Drummond. "Since neither Andrews nor his merry men can actually join the party, my job is to keep my eyes skinned in the room itself for anything unusual that may happen."

"But what *could* happen?" said Stedman with an amused smile. "It sounds like the thriller of fiction: a secret death-dealing ray or something ridiculous of that sort."

"It does rather, I admit," agreed Drummond. "Certainly nothing could appear more removed from anything of that sort than the table at present."

"And yet," said Stedman thoughtfully, "it is an amazing thing how science has helped crime, though it sounds rather as if I was contradicting myself."

"It has helped the detection of crime just as much," Drummond argued.

"I wonder. I agree with you, of course, over crude commonplace crime, but in those cases the criminal is not availing himself of science, whereas the detective is. The crime I am alluding to belongs to a higher category, and of necessity must be murder."

"Why, of necessity?"

"Because in burglary or forgery, let us say, however much science is employed in the committing of the crime, the criminal can only obtain his reward by a process where science is of no avail. He must go to a fence: he must pass his dud fivers. And it is in the disposal of his goods, a thing over which the technique is much the same as it was last century, that he gets caught. That does not apply to murder."

"Perhaps not. But since the time of Cain and Abel there is one thing that has always applied to murder, and no science can alter that

"And supposing there is no motive."

"Then the murderer is a madman," said Drummond. "Or someone of the Jack the Ripper type."

"I will amend my remark. Supposing there is no motive that points to any particular individual."

"I don't quite get you," remarked Drummond.

Stedman hitched his chair a little nearer and lowered his voice.

"Let us take an academic case," he said, "our friend over whom the precautions are being taken tonight. Now the reasons why anyone desires his removal are nothing whatever to do with his private life. There is no question of love, or jealousy, or personal hatred pointing at a specific being, and saying, 'Thou art the man.' The reasons are purely public and apply to his political views, which are intensely unpopular amongst thousands of people. That is why I say that if the Comte was murdered tonight, though the motive would be obvious, it wouldn't help the police to find the murderer."

"That is true," agreed Drummond. "And provided the crime was committed with such skill, that the criminal made a clear getaway and left no obvious clues behind him, doubtless he would never be discovered."

"Which is what I was getting at in the first place," said Stedman. "Fifty years ago, with the precautions that have been taken tonight a getaway would have been impossible, because the methods of committing the crime were so crude. Short of a gang of men overpowering the police and shooting him, or someone poisoning his whiskey, there was no method of doing the deed. Today that is not the case. And that is where science has helped the criminal more than the detective."

"I wonder if the Yard would agree with you," remarked Drummond with a smile.

"Somewhat improbable," grinned Stedman. "Though it doesn't alter the fact that it's the truth. I am firmly convinced that given time, brains and a sufficiency of money it would be a comparatively simple matter to commit an undiscoverable murder."

"A good many people have thought the same thing and found they were wrong," said Drummond as they all rose from the table.

"And quite as many have found they were right," replied Stedman as they moved into the hall. "However let's hope there's no question of its

being put to the test tonight. I've promised to finish two more soldiers for Billy, and high art of that sort requires a steady hand."

Certainly there had been no question of it when the house party reassembled about midnight prior to going to bed. The three statesmen had disappeared with their host into secret conclave; Stedman, refusing to join the others at drink, had devoted himself to things military in a corner of the billiard room. And now, as everyone helped himself to his own particular night cap, he pointed with pardonable pride to the result of his labors.

Ranged in single file on a tray were the twelve gallant infantrymen and the field marshal on his prancing black horse. The command was small, Stedman admitted, for such an exalted officer, but any attempt to reduce him in rank had been firmly vetoed by Billy. And his actual position on parade was hardly according to the drill book. Instead of leading his army into action the cowardly old gentleman very nearly brought up the rear. Behind him strode a Greenjacket, a stouthearted warrior leading an Army mule, and the sanitary squad in the shape of an R.A.M.C. orderly. The remainder of the force led by the drum major stretched out in front, glistening in their scarlet tunics.

"Don't touch," warned Stedman. "They're still wet."

"I don't envy the Highlander," laughed his Lordship. "It seems to me that the off fore of the Field Marshal's charger is down his neck."

"Specially arranged by Billy, sir," said Stedman. "The Highlander is the Field Marshal's own private guard."

He put the tray on the window sill, and glanced at Drummond.

"We compromised on the Black Watch," he laughed. "So honor is satisfied. Hullo! What has stung the Comte?"

He was gesticulating freely by the fireplace, and Lord Surrey was soothing him down.

"But, my dear fellow," cried the Frenchman, "it is absurd. I appreciate greatly your care for my safety, and the precautions of the good Inspector. But to change my bedroom, because some madman has written a crazy note — it is surely ridiculous. You will be asking that I look under the bed next, like a hopeful old lady. However — if you insist I can only obey my so charming host. I will go, I think, now, if I may."

"What's all the excitement?" whispered Stedman to Drummond.

"One of Inspector Andrews' precautions," answered Drummond. "Even the servants don't know. The Comte's bedroom has been changed, and

Andrews himself is occupying the one he had originally. What on earth is the matter?" he added with a laugh. "You seem quite distressed about it."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Stedman. "Why should it distress me? Though I'm inclined to agree with the Comte as to its being most unnecessary."

"Perhaps. Still it's as well to be on the safe side."

He turned away: why had Stedman registered any reaction at all on hearing the news? It had only been momentary — gone in a flash: but to a shrewd observer like Drummond it had stuck out a yard. And how could it possibly affect Stedman personally if the Comte slept in his own bedroom or the coal hole, unless . . .

He sipped his drink thoughtfully, the conversation at dinner came back to him. Also Stedman's annoyance over the matter of the kilt. Could it be possible that they were two widely different manifestations of the same failing — conceit? The kilt — irritability because he had been proved wrong; the other, a sort of inverted pride in something planned, and which he could not resist bragging about even though his audience should be unaware of the fact.

" 'Old 'ard," muttered Drummond to himself. "You ain't even trotting: you're galloping. You're accusing this bloke Stedman of being the thorn in the flesh. And that's rot."

"Then why," came the reiterated question, "should he care the snap of a finger which is old Dinard's bedroom? And he did. Of that there's not a shadow of doubt."

He turned round to find Algy at his elbow.

"Coming to bed, old bird?" remarked that worthy. "I thought of taking up one of the pikes out of the hall in case a general action occurs during the night. The only thing against it is that a man impaled on the end of a pike would be a dreadful sight at three in the morning. He wouldn't go with my yellow pajamas at all well."

He looked at Drummond curiously.

"What's stung you, Hugh? You seem devilish thoughtful."

"I'm just wondering, Algy, if I'm being a complete half-wit, or if I'm not. By the way, Andrews did say, didn't he, that one of his minions was going to be on guard outside Dinard's door tonight?"

"He did and there he is. Further there is one on guard in the corridor. I've just been up to fill my cigarette case and I saw 'em."

"Good. Then let's go to bed. I've probably got the mental jitters."

It was half an hour later that the door of Algy's room opened. He had just smashed his tooth glass with his slipper, in an unsuccessful attempt to swat a mosquito, and was engaged in picking up the fragments, when Drummond came in.

"Unless I'm much mistaken, Algy," he remarked quietly, "strange things will be abroad tonight."

The other one stared.

"What sort of things?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," said Drummond. "So the curtain goes up on a completely unknown play."

"You annoying blighter," cried Algy. "Can't you be a bit more explicit?"

"I can't," answered Drummond simply. "I give you my word of honor I'm completely in the dark."

And he still was the following morning, when by ones and twos the guests drifted into breakfast. For nothing had happened in the night, except that, in common with most of the others, he had been bitten by a mosquito. Once in the distance he thought he had heard the sound of a motor being started and driven away; beyond that nothing had occurred. And with the coming of dawn he had slept.

Breakfast over he strolled out of doors followed by an openly derisive Algy. And outside the open window of the billiard room he paused and looked through at Billy arranging his army, now dry, in new formations, whilst fresh victims were being prepared for Stedman's art. Then, still in silence, he walked on with Algy beside him.

"What *did* you think was going to happen, old boy?" asked that worthy for the tenth time. "Or what made you think that anything was going to happen?"

"The Cameron Highlanders," said Drummond. "Anyone who is sufficiently interested in toy soldiers as to paint them, ought to know the color of their kilts. Hullo! what has Andrews got hold of?"

Coming towards them was the Inspector with one of his men, holding in his hand what seemed to be a long thin twig.

"Good morning, Captain Drummond," he cried cheerfully. "What do you make of this?"

On closer inspection it proved to be part of the top joint of a salmon rod, snapped off about three feet from the end. But the interesting thing was the small attachment. About an inch below the top of the rod was a small muslin

box, fastened securely to the rod. The box was about two inches square, and the framework was made of wood with the fabric stretched taut between. To one side was tied a piece of fine string which passed through the top ring of the rod in the fashion of an ordinary fishing line, and now hung trailing on the ground.

"As you can see," said Andrews, "when you pull that string you open the box. And unless you pull the string the box can't open because the lid is held in position by that bit of elastic inside."

"Where did you find it?" asked Drummond.

"Snapped off in the bush which is Jenkin's hiding place by day. Moreover it was not there yesterday, or he'd have seen it then."

"Which means it was broken off last night. Any footprints?"

"None. But with the ground like a board one wouldn't expect any help in that direction."

"What do *you* make of it, Andrews?" said Drummond.

"Since it obviously didn't get there by itself, there must have been someone prowling around last night carrying the rod of which this is the top. In the darkness it got tangled up in the bush and snapped off, and whatever was inside here escaped. It was something, Captain Drummond, that he intended to poke up from outside through a window in the Castle and allow to escape into the Comte de Dinard's room. 'Guns are useless,' don't forget. But when he broke his rod, and the thing escaped, the whole plan failed."

"Somehow or other I don't think I'd have left that in the bush even if it was broken," said Drummond thoughtfully. "That little muslin box is beautifully made and could be used again on another rod."

"But he *did* leave it there."

"Yes. But I wonder if it was on the way to the Castle. I wonder if by any chance he did just what you have suggested, then got alarmed or something and broke it on the way back, when the box was no longer of any use and he didn't mind losing it."

"Ingenious, my dear Captain Drummond, except for one point you overlooked. You forget that so far as any outsider could know, I was occupying the Comte's room. And you may take it from me that nobody flapped boxes last night outside *my* window."

"No: I hadn't overlooked it, old boy," said Drummond quietly. "Anyway the great point is that the Comte's health, judging by his verbosity at breakfast, is quite unimpaired."

The Inspector looked at him curiously.

"You're not satisfied, sir?" he said.

"I'm not," answered Drummond. "Though I daresay I shall prove utterly wrong."

"But what's stinging you?"

Drummond frowned.

"The fact that the kilt of the Camerons is reddish in hue."

The Inspector looked at Algy; Algy looked at the Inspector.

"He'll be better after he's had some beer, Andrews," he said. "Captain Drummond gets taken like this at times."

That afternoon the party broke up, and a few days later the whole episode was beginning to fade from Drummond's mind. He had made a mistake: his suspicions had been fantastic. In any even the Comte de Dinard was still going strong in Paris, which was all that really mattered. No harm had come to him at Oxshott Castle; the worthy Andrews deserved full marks. And, so far as he knew, no harm had come to anyone else. So it came as almost a shock to him when, returning to dress for dinner one evening, he found the Inspector waiting for him in his sitting room.

"Have you a few minutes to spare, Captain Drummond?" he said gravely.

"Certainly, Andrews. As long as you like. I see," he added, "that something has happened."

"Something so strange that I have come straight to you. I remember that you were not satisfied when you left the Castle, but at the time you would say nothing. Now, you must."

"Go on," said Drummond quietly.

"Have you ever heard of yellow fever?" asked Andrews.

"I have. A tropical disease," answered Drummond surprised.

"And a very dangerous one. It is fatal more often than not. Do you know how it is carried?"

"I can't say that I do," Drummond acknowledged.

"By mosquitoes," Andrews paused. "You may remember there were a good many mosquitoes at the Castle," he continued.

"There were," agreed Drummond.

"You may also remember that little muslin box?"

Drummond nodded.

"And our theory as to what it was for? To let out something — we knew not what — into the Comte's bedroom."

Once again Drummond nodded.

"We were right. And what is more you were right when you suggested that the rod had been broken *after* the owner had been to the Castle and not before."

"I was, was I?" said Drummond softly.

"That muslin box, Captain Drummond, contained mosquitoes carrying the germs of yellow fever. And the owner of the rod succeeded in reaching the Castle and liberating those mosquitoes. Only he set them free in the wrong room. This afternoon Mr. Stedman died of yellow fever in the Hospital for Tropical Diseases."

There was a long silence; then Drummond rose and began pacing up and down the room.

"You may further remember," continued Andrews, "that you told me you hadn't overlooked the point when I alluded to the nocturnal visitor coming to my window. That now requires elucidation. Have you any idea as to why he went to Mr. Stedman's? Or was it a fluke?"

"It wasn't a fluke," said Drummond gravely. "I sent him there."

"*You* sent him there?" The Inspector shot out of his chair as if he had been stung. "What on earth do you mean?"

"You needn't think that I took him by the hand and led him there," answered Drummond with a faint smile. "Until this moment I didn't even know he'd been there. In fact I've never seen him or spoken to him. For all that, I sent him there. Listen, Andrews, and I'll tell you."

"You remember the billiard room, don't you, with its broad window sill? Before we went to bed that night a tray of newly painted toy soldiers was placed on the sill. They had been painted by Stedman for the little boy, and we were all of us instructed not to touch them. They were arranged in single file — twelve infantrymen and one large man on a prancing horse. And one of the infantrymen was a Highlander in whom I was particularly interested, because of an argument on kilts that I had had with the artist. And my Highlander was placed so that he was just in front of the horseman.

"Then quite unexpectedly it was announced that the Comte de Dinard was going to change his room. He protested but complied and everybody went to bed — everybody, that is, except me. I wasn't feeling sleepy, and I sat down in an alcove in the room with a book. I was practically hidden, so that when Stedman returned he didn't see me. And he crossed to the window, remained there a second and then went out again.

"So, after a moment or two, I also went to the window, and there I noticed a very strange thing. My Highlander, in whom I was so interested, had changed places with the Field Marshal!"

"Good heavens!" whispered Andrews.

"You see it, don't you," said Drummond gravely. "Stedman neither knew nor cared anything about soldiers, but hearing that little Billy did, he thought of a darned original scheme for indicating the Comte's bedroom to someone on the outside. Soldiers that had to be painted and so couldn't be moved: a tray placed on the window sill so that any man looking in from outside could see it and see where the Field Marshal was. Thirteen bedrooms there were on our floor: thirteen soldiers there were on the tray. And when the Comte moved into the next room . . ."

Drummond shrugged his shoulders.

"I wonder why Stedman wanted to have him murdered," he went on thoughtfully.

For a space there was silence whilst Andrews stared at him.

"Stedman's bedroom was third from the other end," he said at length.

"I know. That's why the Field Marshal made yet another move. Just before I turned out the lights and went to bed, I placed two men in front of him. Have a drink."

Some time ago, the eminent Mr. Orson Welles, in answering a question submitted by your Editor to "Information Please," insisted that Arsène Lupin was not a detective. "The Lady With the Hatchet" is only one of many proofs that even Mr. Welles can be wrong. Of course, in the early days of his career, Arsène Lupin was the Prince of Thieves; but anyone who can become Chief of the Paris Detective-Service — as Lupin did under the name of M. Lenormand in the novel "813" — must be considered a detective with a vengeance.

THE LADY WITH THE HATCHET

by MAURICE LEBLANC

ONE of the most incomprehensible incidents that preceded the great war was certainly the one which was known as the episode of the lady with the hatchet. The solution of the mystery was unknown and would never have been known, had not circumstances in the cruellest fashion obliged Prince Rénine — or should I say, Arsène Lupin? — to take up the matter and had I not been able today to tell the true story from the details supplied by him.

Let me recite the facts. In a space of eighteen months, five women disappeared, five women of different stations in life, all between twenty and thirty years of age and living in Paris or the Paris district.

I will give their names: Madame Ladoue, the wife of a doctor; Mlle. Ardant, the daughter of a banker; Mlle. Covereau, a washer-woman of Courbevoie; Mlle. Honorine Vernisset, a dressmaker; and Madame Grollinger, an artist. These five women disappeared without the possibility of discovering a single particular to explain why they had left their homes, why they did not return to them, who had enticed them away, and where and how they were detained.

Each of these women, a week after her departure, was found somewhere or other in the western outskirts of Paris; and each time it was a dead body that was found, the dead body of a woman who had been killed by a blow on the head from a hatchet. And each time, not far from the woman, who was firmly bound, her face covered with blood and her body emaciated by lack of food, the marks of carriage-wheels proved that the corpse had been driven to the spot.

The five murders were so much alike that there was only a single investi-

gation, embracing all the five enquiries and, for that matter, leading to no result. A woman disappeared; a week later, to a day, her body was discovered; and that was all. The bonds that fastened her were similar in each case; so were the tracks left by the wheels; so were the blows of the hatchet, all of which were struck vertically at the top and right in the middle of the forehead.

The motive of the crime? The five women had been completely stripped of their jewels, purses and other objects of value. But the robberies might well have been attributed to marauders or any passers-by, since the bodies were lying in deserted spots. Were the authorities to believe in the execution of a plan of revenge or of a plan intended to do away with the series of persons mutually connected, persons, for instance, likely to benefit by a future inheritance? Here again the same obscurity prevailed. Theories were built up, only to be demolished forthwith by an examination of the facts. Trails were followed and at once abandoned.

And suddenly there was a sensation. A woman engaged in sweeping the roads picked up on the pavement a little notebook which she brought to the local policestation. The leaves of this notebook were all blank, excepting one, on which was written a list of the murdered women, with their names set down in order of date and accompanied by three figures: Ladoue, 132; Vernisset, 118; and so on.

Certainly no importance would have been attached to these entries, which anybody might have written, since everyone was acquainted with the sinister list. But, instead of five names, it included six! Yes, below the words "Grollinger, 128," there appeared "Williamson, 114." Did this indicate a sixth murder?

The obviously English origin of the name limited the field of the investigations, which did not in fact take long. It was ascertained that, a fortnight ago, a Miss Hermione Williamson, a governess in a family at Auteuil, had left her place to go back to England and that, since then, her sisters, though she had written to tell them that she was coming over, had heard no more of her.

A fresh enquiry was instituted. A postman found the body in the Meudon woods. Miss Williamson's skull was split down the middle.

I need not describe the public excitement at this stage nor the shudder of horror which passed through the crowd when it read this list, written without a doubt in the murderer's own hand. What could be more frightful

than such a record, kept up to date like a careful tradesman's ledger:

"On such a day, I killed so-and-so; on such a day so-and-so!"

And the sum total was six dead bodies.

Against all expectation, the experts in handwriting had no difficulty in agreeing and unanimously declared that the writing was "that of a woman, an educated woman, possessing artistic tastes, imagination and an extremely sensitive nature." The "lady with the hatchet," as the journalists christened her, was decidedly no ordinary person; and scores of newspaper articles made a special study of her case, exposing her mental condition and losing themselves in far-fetched explanations.

Nevertheless it was the writer of one of these articles, a young journalist whose chance discovery made him the center of public attention, who supplied the one element of truth and shed upon the darkness the only ray of light that was to penetrate it. In casting about for the meaning of the figures which followed the six names, he had come to ask himself whether those figures did not simply represent the number of the days separating one crime from the next. All that he had to do was to check the dates. He at once found that his theory was correct. Mlle. Vernisset had been carried off one hundred and thirty-two days after Madame Ladoue; Mlle. Covereau, one hundred and eighteen days after Honorine Vernisset; and so on.

There was therefore no room for doubt; and the police had no choice but to accept a solution which so precisely fitted the circumstances: the figures corresponded with the intervals. There was no mistake in the records of the lady with the hatchet.

But then one deduction became inevitable. Miss Williamson, the latest victim, had been carried off on the 26th of June last, and her name was followed by the figures 114: was it not to be presumed that a fresh crime would be committed a hundred and fourteen days later, that is to say, on the 18th of October? Was it not probable that the horrible business would be repeated in accordance with the murderer's secret intentions? Were they not bound to pursue to its logical conclusion the argument which ascribed to the figures — to all the figures, to the last as well as to the others — their value as eventual dates?

Now it was precisely this deduction which was drawn and was being weighed and discussed during the few days that preceded the 18th of October, when logic demanded the performance of yet another act of the abominable tragedy. And it was only natural that, on the morning of that day,

Prince Rénine and Hortense, when making an appointment by telephone for the evening, should allude to the newspaper articles which they had both been reading:

"Look out!" said Rénine, laughing. "If you meet the lady with the hatchet, take the other side of the road!"

"And, if the good lady carries me off, what am I to do?"

"Strew your path with little white pebbles and say, until the very moment when the hatchet flashes in the air, 'I have nothing to fear; *he* will save me.' *He* is myself . . . and I kiss your hands. Till this evening, my dear."

That afternoon, Rénine had an appointment with Rose Andrée and Dalbrèque to arrange for their departure for the States. Between four and seven o'clock, he bought the different editions of the evening papers. None of them reported any abduction.

At nine o'clock he went to the Gymnase, where he had taken a private box.

At half-past nine, as Hortense had not arrived, he rang her up, though without thought of anxiety. The maid replied that Madame Daniel had not come in yet.

Seized with a sudden fear, Rénine hurried to the furnished flat which Hortense was occupying for the time being, near the Parc Monceau, and questioned the maid, whom he had engaged for her and who was completely devoted to him. The woman said that her mistress had gone out at two o'clock, with a stamped letter in her hand, saying that she was going to the post and that she would come back to dress. This was the last that had been seen of her.

"To whom was the letter addressed?"

"To you, sir. I saw the writing on the envelope: Prince Serge Rénine."

He waited until midnight, but in vain. Hortense did not return; nor did she return next day.

"Not a word to anyone," said Rénine to the maid. "Say that your mistress is in the country and that you are going to join her."

For his own part, he had not a doubt: Hortense's disappearance was explained by the very fact of the date, the 18th of October. She was the seventh victim of the lady with the hatchet.

. . . . . .

"The abduction," said Rénine to himself, "precedes the blow of the hatchet by a week. I have, therefore, at the present moment, seven full days before me. Let us say six, to avoid any surprise. This is Saturday: Hortense must be set free by midday on Friday; and, to make sure of this, I must know her hiding place by nine o'clock on Thursday evening at latest."

Rénine wrote, "THURSDAY EVENING, NINE O'CLOCK," in big letters, on a card which he nailed above the mantelpiece in his study. Then at midday on Saturday, the day after the disappearance, he locked himself into the study, after telling his man not to disturb him except for meals and letters.

He spent four days there, almost without moving. He had immediately sent for a set of all the leading newspapers which had spoken in detail of the first six crimes. When he had read and reread them, he closed the shutters, drew the curtains and lay down on the sofa in the dark, with the door bolted, thinking.

By Tuesday evening he was no further advanced than on the Saturday. The darkness was as dense as ever. He had not discovered the smallest clue for his guidance, nor could he see the slightest reason to hope.

At times, notwithstanding his immense power of self-control and his unlimited confidence in the resources at his disposal, at times he would quake with anguish. Would he arrive in time? There was no reason why he should see more clearly during the last few days than during those which had already elapsed. And this meant that Hortense Daniel would inevitably be murdered.

The thought tortured him. He was attached to Hortense by a much stronger and deeper feeling than the appearance of the relations between them would have led an onlooker to believe. The curiosity at the beginning, the first desire, the impulse to protect Hortense, to distract her, to inspire her with a relish for existence: all this had simply turned to love. Neither of them was aware of it, because they barely saw each other save at critical times when they were occupied with the adventures of others and not with their own. But, at the first onslaught of danger, Rénine realized the place which Hortense had taken in his life and he was in despair at knowing her to be a prisoner and a martyr and at being unable to save her.

He spent a feverish, agitated night, turning the case over and over from every point of view. The Wednesday morning was also a terrible time for him. He was losing ground. Giving up his hermit-like seclusion, he threw

open the windows and paced to and fro through his rooms, ran out into the street and came in again, as though fleeing before the thought that obsessed him:

"Hortense is suffering. . . . Hortense is in the depths. . . . She sees the hatchet. . . . She is calling to me. . . . She is entreating me. . . . And I can do nothing. . . ."

It was at five o'clock in the afternoon that, on examining the list of the six names, he received that little inward shock which is a sort of signal of the truth that is being sought for. A light shot through his mind. It was not, to be sure, that brilliant light in which every detail is made plain, but it was enough to tell him in which direction to move.

His plan of campaign was formed at once. He sent Adolphe, his chauffeur, to the principal newspapers, with a few lines which were to appear in large type among the next morning's advertisements. Adolphe was also told to go to the laundry at Courbevoie, where Mlle. Covereau, the second of the six victims, had been employed.

On the Thursday, Rénine did not stir out of doors. In the afternoon, he received several letters in reply to his advertisement. Then two telegrams arrived. Lastly, at three o'clock, there came a pneumatic letter, bearing the Trocadéro postmark, which seemed to be what he was expecting.

He turned up a directory, noted an address — "M. de Lourtier-Vaneau, retired colonial governor, 47 *bis*, Avenue Kléber" — and ran down to his car:

"Adolphe, 47 *bis*, Avenue Kléber."

. . . . . .

He was shown into a large study furnished with magnificent bookcases containing old volumes in costly bindings. M. de Lourtier-Vaneau was a man still in the prime of life, wearing a slightly grizzled beard and, by his affable manners and genuine distinction, commanding confidence and liking.

"M. de Lourtier," said Rénine, "I have ventured to call on your excellency because I read in last year's newspapers that you used to know one of the victims of the lady with the hatchet, Honorine Vernisset."

"Why, of course we knew her!" cried M. de Lourtier. "My wife used to employ her as a dressmaker by the day. Poor girl!"

"M. de Lourtier, a lady of my acquaintance has disappeared as the other six victims disappeared."

"What!" exclaimed M. de Lourtier, with a start. "But I have followed

the newspapers carefully. There was nothing on the 18th of October."

"Yes, a woman of whom I am very fond, Madame Hortense Daniel, was abducted on the 17th of October."

"And this is the 22nd!"

"Yes; and the murder will be committed on the 24th."

"Horrible! Horrible! It must be prevented at all costs. . . ."

"And I shall perhaps succeed in preventing it, with your excellency's assistance."

"But have you been to the police?"

"No. We are faced by mysteries which are, so to speak, absolute and compact, which offer no gap through which the keenest eyes can see and which it is useless to hope to clear up by ordinary methods, such as inspection of the scenes of the crimes, police enquiries, searching for fingerprints and so on. As none of those proceedings served any good purpose in the previous cases, it would be waste of time to resort to them in a seventh, similar case. An enemy who displays such skill and subtlety would not leave behind her any of those clumsy traces which are the first things that a professional detective seizes upon."

"Then what have you done?"

"Before taking any action, I have reflected. I gave four days to thinking the matter over."

M. de Lourtier-Vaneau examined his visitor closely and, with a touch of irony, asked:

"And the result of your meditations . . . ?"

"To begin with," said Rénine, refusing to be put out of countenance, "I have submitted all these cases to a comprehensive survey, which hitherto no one else had done. This enabled me to discover their general meaning, to put aside all the tangle of embarrassing theories and, since no one was able to agree as to the motives of all this filthy business, to attribute it to the only class of persons capable of it."

"That is to say?"

"Lunatics, your excellency."

M. de Lourtier-Vaneau started:

"Lunatics? What an idea!"

"M. de Lourtier, the woman known as the lady with the hatchet is a madwoman."

"But she would be locked up!"

"We don't know that she's not. We don't know that she is not one of those half-mad people, apparently harmless, who are watched so slightly that they have full scope to indulge their little manias, their wild-beast instincts. Nothing could be more treacherous than these creatures. Nothing could be more crafty, more patient, more persistent, more dangerous and at the same time more absurd and more logical, more slovenly and more methodical. All these epithets, M. de Lourtier, may be applied to the doings of the lady with the hatchet. The obsession of an idea and the continual repetition of an act are characteristics of the maniac. I do not yet know the idea by which the lady with the hatchet is obsessed but I do know the act that results from it; and it is always the same. The victim is bound with precisely similar ropes. She is killed after the same number of days. She is struck by an identical blow, with the same instrument, in the same place, the middle of the forehead, producing an absolutely vertical wound. An ordinary murderer displays some variety. His trembling hand swerves aside and strikes awry. The lady with the hatchet does not tremble. It is as though she had taken measurements; and the edge of her weapon does not swerve by a hair's breadth. Need I give you any further proofs or examine all the other details with you? Surely not. You now possess the key to the riddle; and you know as I do that only a lunatic can behave in this way, stupidly, savagely, mechanically, like a striking clock or the blade of the guillotine. . . ."

M. de Lourtier-Vaneau nodded his head:

"Yes, that is so. One can see the whole affair from that angle . . . and I am beginning to believe that this is how one ought to see it. But, if we admit that this madwoman has the sort of mathematical logic which governed the murders of the six victims, I see no connection between the victims themselves. She struck at random. Why this victim rather than that?"

"Ah," said Rénine. "Your excellency is asking me a question which I asked myself from the first moment, the question which sums up the whole problem and which cost me so much trouble to solve! Why Hortense Daniel rather than another? Among two millions of women who might have been selected, why Hortense? Why little Vernisset? Why Miss Williamson? If the affair is such as I conceived it, as a whole, that is to say, based upon the blind and fantastic logic of a madwoman, a choice was inevitably exercised. Now in what did that choice consist? What was the quality, or the defect, or the sign needed to induce the lady with the hatchet to strike? In a word, if she chose — and she must have chosen — what directed her choice?"

"Have you found the answer?"

Rénine paused and replied:

"Yes, your excellency, I have. And I could have found it at the very outset, since all that I had to do was to make a careful examination of the list of victims. But these flashes of truth are never kindled save in a brain overstimulated by effort and reflection. I stared at the list twenty times over, before that little detail took a definite shape."

"I don't follow you," said M. de Lourtier-Vaneau.

"M. de Lourtier, it may be noted that, if a number of persons are brought together in any transaction, or crime, or public scandal or what not, they are almost invariably described in the same way. On this occasion, the newspapers never mentioned anything more than their surnames in speaking of Madame Ladoue, Mlle. Ardant or Mlle. Covereau. On the other hand, Mlle. Vernisset and Miss Williamson were always described by their Christian names as well: Honorine and Hermione. If the same thing had been done in the case of all the six victims, there would have been no mystery."

"Why not?"

"Because we should at once have realized the relation existing between the six unfortunate women, as I myself suddenly realized it on comparing those two Christian names with that of Hortense Daniel. You understand now, don't you? You see the three Christian names before your eyes. . . ."

M. de Lourtier-Vaneau seemed to be perturbed. Turning a little pale, he said:

"What do you mean? What do you mean?"

"I mean," continued Rénine, in a clear voice, sounding each syllable separately, "I mean that you see before your eyes three Christian names which all three begin with the same initial and which all three, by a remarkable coincidence, consist of the same number of letters, as you may prove. If you enquire at the Courbevoie laundry, where Mlle. Covereau used to work, you will find that her name was Hilairie. Here again we have the same initial and the same number of letters. There is no need to seek any farther. We are sure, are we not, that the Christian names of all the victims offer the same peculiarities? And this gives us, with absolute certainty, the key to the problem which was set us. It explains the madwoman's choice. We now know the connection between the unfortunate victims. There can be no mistake about it. It's that and nothing else. And how this method of choosing confirms my theory! What proof of madness! Why kill

these women rather than any others? Because their names begin with an H and consist of eight letters! You understand me, M. de Lourtier, do you not? The number of letters is eight. The initial letter is the eighth letter of the alphabet; and the word *huit*, eight, begins with an H. Always the letter H. *And the implement used to commit the crime was a hatchet.* Is your excellency prepared to tell me that the lady with the hatchet is not a madwoman?"

Rénine interrupted himself and went up to M. de Lourtier-Vaneau:

"What's the matter, your excellency? Are you unwell?"

"No, no," said M. de Lourtier, with the perspiration streaming down his forehead. "No . . . but all this story is so upsetting! Only think, I knew one of the victims! And then . . ."

Rénine took a water-bottle and tumbler from a small table, filled the glass and handed it to M. de Lourtier, who sipped a few mouthfuls from it and then, pulling himself together, continued, in a voice which he strove to make firmer than it had been:

"Very well. We'll admit your supposition. Even so, it is necessary that it should lead to tangible results. What have you done?"

"This morning I published in all the newspapers an advertisement worded as follows: 'Excellent cook seeks situation. Write before 5 P.M. to Herminie, Boulevard Haussmann, etc.' You continue to follow me, don't you, M. de Lourtier? Christian names beginning with an H and consisting of eight letters are extremely rare and are all rather out of date: Herminie, Hilairie, Hermione. Well, these Christian names, for reasons which I do not understand, are essential to the madwoman. She cannot do without them. To find women bearing one of these Christian names and for this purpose only she summons up all her remaining powers of reason, discernment, reflection and intelligence. She hunts about. She asks questions. She lies in wait. She reads newspapers which she hardly understands, but in which certain details, certain capital letters catch her eye. And consequently I did not doubt for a second that this name of Herminie, printed in large type, would attract her attention and that she would be caught today in the trap of my advertisement."

"Did she write?" asked M. de Lourtier-Vaneau, anxiously.

"Several ladies," Rénine continued, "wrote the letters which are usual in such cases, to offer a home to the so-called Herminie. But I received an express letter which struck me as interesting."

"From whom?"

"Read it, M. de Lourtier."

M. de Lourtier-Vaneau snatched the sheet from Rénine's hands and cast a glance at the signature. His first movement was one of surprise, as though he had expected something different. Then he gave a long, loud laugh of something like joy and relief.

"Why do you laugh, M. de Lourtier? You seem pleased."

"Pleased, no. But this letter is signed by my wife."

"And you were afraid of finding something else?"

"Oh no! But since it's my wife . . ."

He did not finish his sentence and said to Rénine:

"Come this way."

He led him through a passage to a little drawing-room where a fair-haired lady, with a happy and tender expression on her comely face, was sitting in the midst of three children and helping them with their lessons.

She rose. M. de Lourtier briefly presented his visitor and asked his wife:

"Suzanne, is this express message from you?"

"To Mlle. Herminie, Boulevard Haussmann? Yes," she said, "I sent it. As you know, our parlour-maid's leaving and I'm looking out for a new one."

Rénine interrupted her:

"Excuse me, madame. Just one question: where did you get the woman's address?"

She flushed. Her husband insisted:

"Tell us, Suzanne. Who gave you the address?"

"I was rung up."

"By whom?"

She hesitated and then said:

"Your old nurse."

"Félicienne?"

"Yes."

M. de Lourtier cut short the conversation and, without permitting Rénine to ask any more questions, took him back to the study:

"You see, monsieur that pneumatic letter came from a quite natural source. Félicienne, my old nurse, who lives not far from Paris on an allowance which I make her, read your advertisement and told Madame de Lourtier of it. For, after all," he added laughing, "I don't suppose that you suspect my wife of being the lady with the hatchet."

"No."

"Then the incident is closed . . . at least on my side. I have done what I could, I have listened to your arguments and I am very sorry that I can be of no more use to you. . . ."

He drank another glass of water and sat down. His face was distorted.

Rénine looked at him for a few seconds, as a man will look at a failing adversary who has only to receive the knock-out blow, and, sitting down beside him, suddenly gripped his arm:

"Your excellency, if you do not speak, Hortense Daniel will be the seventh victim."

"I have nothing to say, monsieur! What do you think I know?"

"The truth! My explanations have made it plain to you. Your distress, your terror are positive proofs."

"But, after all, monsieur, if I knew, why should I be silent?"

"For fear of scandal. There is in your life, so a profound intuition assures me, something that you are constrained to hide. The truth about this monstrous tragedy, which suddenly flashed upon you, this truth, if it were known, would spell dishonour to you, disgrace . . . and you are shrinking from your duty."

M. de Lourtier did not reply. Rénine leaned over him and, looking him in the eyes, whispered:

"There will be no scandal. I shall be the only person in the world to know what has happened. And I am as much interested as yourself in not attracting attention, because I love Hortense Daniel and do not wish her name to be mixed up in your horrible story."

They remained face to face during a long interval. Rénine's expression was harsh and unyielding. M. de Lourtier felt that nothing would bend him if the necessary words remained unspoken; but he could not bring himself to utter them:

"You are mistaken," he said. "You think you have seen things that don't exist."

Rénine received a sudden and terrifying conviction that, if this man took refuge in a stolid silence, there was no hope for Hortense Daniel; and he was so much infuriated by the thought that the key to the riddle lay there, within reach of his hand, that he clutched M. de Lourtier by the throat and forced him backwards:

"I'll have no more lies! A woman's life is at stake! Speak . . . and speak at once! If not . . . !"

M. de Lourtier had no strength left in him. All resistance was impossible. It was not that Rénine's attack alarmed him, or that he was yielding to this act of violence, but he felt crushed by that indomitable will, which seemed to admit no obstacle, and he stammered:

"You are right. It is my duty to tell everything, whatever comes of it."

"Nothing will come of it, I pledge my word, on condition that you save Hortense Daniel. A moment's hesitation may undo us all. Speak. No details, but the actual facts."

"Madame de Lourtier is not my wife. The only woman who has the right to bear my name is one whom I married when I was a young colonial official. She was a rather eccentric woman, of feeble mentality and incredibly subject to impulses that amounted to monomania. We had two children, twins, whom she worshipped and in whose company she would no doubt have recovered her mental balance and moral health, when, by a stupid accident — a passing carriage — they were killed before her eyes. The poor thing went mad . . . with the silent, secretive madness which you imagined. Some time afterwards, when I was appointed to an Algerian station, I brought her to France and put her in the charge of a worthy creature who had nursed me and brought me up. Two years later, I made the acquaintance of the woman who was to become the joy of my life. You saw her just now. She is the mother of my children and she passes as my wife. Are we to sacrifice her? Is our whole existence to be shipwrecked in horror and must our name be coupled with this tragedy of madness and blood?"

Rénine thought for a moment and asked:

"What is the other one's name?"

"Hermance."

"Hermance! Still that initial . . . still those eight letters!"

"That was what made me realize everything just now," said M. de Lourtier. "When you compared the different names, I at once reflected that my unhappy wife was called Hermance and that she was mad . . . and all the proofs leapt to my mind."

"But, though we understand the selection of the victims, how are we to explain the murders? What are the symptoms of her madness? Does she suffer at all?"

"She does not suffer very much at present. But she has suffered in the past, the most terrible suffering that you can imagine: since the moment when her two children were run over before her eyes, night and day she

had the horrible spectacle of their death before her eyes, without a moment's interruption, for she never slept for a single second. Think of the torture of it! To see her children dying through all the hours of the long day and all the hours of the interminable night!"

"Nevertheless," Rénine objected, "it is not to drive away that picture that she commits murder?"

"Yes, possibly," said M. de Lourtier, thoughtfully, "to drive it away by sleep."

"I don't understand."

"You don't understand, because we are talking of a madwoman . . . and because all that happens in that disordered brain is necessarily incoherent and abnormal?"

"Obviously. But, all the same, is your supposition based on facts that justify it?"

"Yes, on facts which I had, in a way, overlooked but which today assume their true significance. The first of these facts dates a few years back, to a morning when my old nurse for the first time found Hermance fast asleep. Now she was holding her hands clutched around a puppy which she had strangled. And the same thing was repeated on three other occasions."

"And she slept?"

"Yes, each time she slept a sleep which lasted for several nights."

"And what conclusion did you draw?"

"I concluded that the relaxation of the nerves provoked by taking life exhausted her and predisposed her for sleep."

Rénine shuddered:

"That's it! There's not a doubt of it! The taking of life, the effort of killing makes her sleep. And she began with women what had served her so well with animals. All her madness has become concentrated on that one point: she kills them to rob them of their sleep! She wanted sleep; and she steals the sleep of others! That's it, isn't it? For the past two years, she has been sleeping?"

"For the past two years, she has been sleeping," stammered M. de Lourtier.

Rénine gripped him by the shoulder:

"And it never occurred to you that her madness might go farther, that she would stop at nothing to win the blessing of sleep! Let us make haste, monsieur! All this is horrible!"

They were both making for the door, when M. de Lourtier hesitated. The telephone-bell was ringing.

"It's from there," he said.

"From there?"

"Yes, my old nurse gives me the news at the same time every day."

He unhooked the receivers and handed one to Rénine, who whispered in his ear the questions which he was to put.

"Is that you, Félicienne? How is she?"

"Not so bad, sir."

"Is she sleeping well?"

"Not very well, lately. Last night, indeed, she never closed her eyes. So she's very gloomy just now."

"What is she doing at the moment?"

"She is in her room."

"Go to her, Félicienne, and don't leave her."

"I can't. She's locked herself in."

"You must, Félicienne. Break open the door. I'm coming straight on. . . . Hullo! Hullo! . . . Oh, damnation, they've cut us off!"

Without a word, the two men left the flat and ran down to the avenue. Rénine hustled M. de Lourtier into the car:

"What address?"

"Ville d'Avray."

"Of course! In the very center of her operations . . . like a spider in the middle of her web! Oh, the shame of it!"

He was profoundly agitated. He saw the whole adventure in its monstrous reality.

"Yes, she kills them to steal their sleep, as she used to kill the animals. It is the same obsession, but complicated by a whole array of utterly incomprehensible practices and superstitions. She evidently fancies that the similarity of the Christian names to her own is indispensable and that she will not sleep unless her victim is an Hortense or an Honorine. It's a madwoman's argument; its logic escapes us and we know nothing of its origin; but we can't get away from it. She has to hunt and has to find. And she finds and carries off her prey beforehand and watches over it for the appointed number of days, until the moment when, crazily, through the hole which she digs with a hatchet in the middle of the skull, she absorbs the sleep which stupefies her and grants her oblivion for a given period. And

here again we see absurdity and madness. Why does she fix that period at so many days? Why should one victim ensure her a hundred and twenty days of sleep and another a hundred and twenty-five? What insanity! The calculation is mysterious and of course mad; but the fact remains that, at the end of a hundred or a hundred and twenty-five days, as the case may be, a fresh victim is sacrificed; and there have been six already and the seventh is awaiting her turn. Ah, monsieur, what a terrible responsibility for you! Such a monster as that! She should never have been allowed out of sight!"

M. de Lourtier-Vaneau made no protest. His air of dejection, his pallor, his trembling hands, all proved his remorse and his despair:

"She deceived me," he murmured. "She was outwardly so quiet, so docile! And, after all, she's in a lunatic asylum."

"Then how can she . . . ?"

"The asylum," explained M. de Lourtier, "is made up of a number of separate buildings scattered over extensive grounds. The sort of cottage in which Hermance lives stands quite apart. There is first a room occupied by Félicienne, then Hermance's bedroom and two separate rooms, one of which has its windows overlooking the open country. I suppose it is there that she locks up her victims."

"But the carriage that conveys the dead bodies?"

"The stables of the asylum are quite close to the cottage. There's a horse and carriage there for station work. Hermance no doubt gets up at night, harnesses the horse and slips the body through the window."

"And the nurse who watches her?"

"Félicienne is very old and rather deaf."

"But by day she sees her mistress moving to and fro, doing this and that. Must we not admit a certain complicity?"

"Never! Félicienne herself has been deceived by Hermance's hypocrisy."

"All the same, it was she who telephoned to Madame de Lourtier first, about that advertisement. . . ."

"Very naturally. Hermance, who talks now and then, who argues, who buries herself in the newspapers, which she does not understand, as you were saying just now, but reads through them attentively, must have seen the advertisement and, having heard that we were looking for a servant, must have asked Félicienne to ring me up."

"Yes . . . yes . . . that is what I felt," said Rénine, slowly. "She marks down her victims. . . . With Hortense dead, she would have known,

once she had used up her allowance of sleep, where to find an eighth victim. . . . But how did she entice the unfortunate women?"

The car was rushing along, but not fast enough to please Rénine, who rated the chauffeur:

"Push her along, Adolphe, can't you? . . . We're losing time, my man."

Suddenly the fear of arriving too late began to torture him. The logic of the insane is subject to sudden changes of mood, to any perilous idea that may enter the mind. The madwoman might easily mistake the date and hasten the catastrophe, like a clock out of order which strikes an hour too soon.

On the other hand, as her sleep was once more disturbed, might she not be tempted to take action without waiting for the appointed moment? Was this not the reason why she had locked herself into her room? Heavens, what agonies her prisoner must be suffering! What shudders of terror at the executioner's least movement!

"Faster, Adolphe, or I'll take the wheel myself! Faster, hang it."

At last they reached Ville d'Avray. There was a steep, sloping road on the right and walls interrupted by a long railing.

"Drive round the grounds, Adolphe. We mustn't give warning of our presence, must we, M. de Lourtier? Where is the cottage?"

"Just opposite," said M. de Lourtier-Vaneau.

They got out a little farther on. Rénine began to run along a bank at the side of an ill-kept sunken road. It was almost dark. M. de Lourtier said:

"Here, this building standing a little way back. . . . Look at that window on the ground floor. It belongs to one of the separate rooms . . . and that is obviously how she slips out."

"But the window seems to be barred."

"Yes; and that is why no one suspected anything. But she must have found some way to get through."

The ground floor was built over deep cellars. Rénine quickly clambered up, finding a foothold on a projecting ledge of stone.

Sure enough, one of the bars was missing.

He pressed his face to the windowpane and looked in.

The room was dark inside. Nevertheless he was able to distinguish at the back a woman seated beside another woman, who was lying on a mattress. The woman seated was holding her forehead in her hands and gazing at the woman who was lying down.

"It's she," whispered M. de Lourtier, who had also climbed the wall. "The other one is bound."

Rénine took from his pocket a glazier's diamond and cut out one of the panes without making enough noise to arouse the madwoman's attention. He next slid his hand to the window-fastening and turned it softly, while with his left hand he levelled a revolver.

"You're not going to fire, surely!" M. de Lourtier-Vaneau entreated.

"If I must, I shall."

Rénine pushed open the window gently. But there was an obstacle of which he was not aware, a chair which toppled over and fell.

He leapt into the room and threw away his revolver in order to seize the madwoman. But she did not wait for him. She rushed to the door, opened it and fled, with a hoarse cry.

M. de Lourtier made as though to run after her.

"What's the use?" said Rénine, kneeling down. "Let's save the victim first."

He was instantly reassured: Hortense was alive.

The first thing that he did was to cut the cords and remove the gag that was stifling her. Attracted by the noise, the old nurse had hastened in with a lamp, which Rénine took from her, casting its light on Hortense.

He was astounded: though livid and exhausted, with emaciated features and eyes blazing with fever, Hortense was trying to smile. She whispered:

"I was expecting you. . . . I did not despair for a moment. . . . I was sure of you. . . ."

She fainted.

An hour later, after much useless searching around the cottage, they found the madwoman locked into a large cupboard in the loft. She had hanged herself.

. . . . . .

Hortense refused to stay another night. Besides, it was better that the cottage should be empty when the old nurse announced the madwoman's suicide. Rénine gave Félicienne minute directions as to what she should do and say; and then, assisted by the chauffeur and M. de Lourtier, carried Hortense to the car and brought her home.

She was soon convalescent. Two days later, Rénine carefully questioned her and asked her how she had come to know the madwoman.

"It was very simple," she said. "My husband, who is not quite sane, as I have told you, is being looked after at Ville d'Avray; and I sometimes go to see him, without telling anybody, I admit. That was how I came to speak to that poor madwoman and how, the other day, she made signs that she wanted me to visit her. We were alone. I went into the cottage. She threw herself upon me and overpowered me before I had time to cry for help. I thought it was a jest; and so it was, wasn't it: a madwoman's jest? She was quite gentle with me. . . . All the same, she let me starve. But I was so sure of you!"

"And weren't you frightened?"

"Of starving? No. Besides, she gave me some food, now and then, when the fancy took her. . . . And then I was sure of you!"

"Yes, but there was something else: that other peril. . .

"What other peril?" she asked, ingenuously.

Rénine gave a start. He suddenly understood — it seemed strange at first, though it was quite natural — that Hortense had not for a moment suspected and did not yet suspect the terrible danger which she had run. Her mind had not connected with her own adventure the murders committed by the lady with the hatchet.

He thought that it would always be time enough to tell her the truth. For that matter, a few days later her husband, who had been locked up for years, died in the asylum at Ville d'Avray, and Hortense, who had been recommended by her doctor a short period of rest and solitude, went to stay with a relation living near the village of Bassicourt, in the center of France.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE FIRE-BUG

by ELLERY QUEEN

The Characters

ELLERY QUEEN . . . . . *the detective*
NIKKI PORTER . . . . . *his secretary*
INSPECTOR QUEEN . . . . . *his father, of Police Headquarters*
SERGEANT VELIE . . . . . *of Inspector Queen's staff*
SWEENEY . . . . . *a fire insurance agent*
FERGUSON . . . . . *who owns a cigar-and-stationery store*
JACOB TINKER . . . . . *who owns a pawn-shop*
SIMON TINKER . . . . . *Tinker's half-witted brother*
FERRIL . . . . . *who owns an interior-decorating shop*
MME. DELAGE . . . . . *who owns a milliner's shop*
CHIEF HILLIARD . . . . . *of the Fire Department*
and FIREMEN — POLICE — STREET SPECTATORS, *etc.*

Scene

New York City: The Queen Apartment — Various Retail Shops in a Middle-Class Neighborhood — and Inspector Queen's Office at Police Headquarters

SCENE I: *The Queen Apartment*

(*The Inspector, Ellery, and Nikki Porter are at breakfast, Sergeant Velie is impatiently waiting for the Inspector to finish*)

VELIE: Here's your hat an' coat, Inspector Queen. Man, you must love coffee! Don't you know dooty calls?

INSPECTOR: (*Chuckling*) Don't rush me, Velie. I'm an old man.

ELLERY: Old man! Why there isn't a youngster on the police force could keep up with you, dad Isn't that so, Sergeant?

VELIE: When he wants to. Right now he don't want to.

NIKKI: More coffee, Ellery?

ELLERY: No thanks, Nikki. Oh, by the way! No work on my novel this morning. I'm expecting a visitor.

NIKKI: (*Quickly*) Male or female?

ELLERY: Male, my child. Male named Sweeney. New York agent for the Vulcan Fire Insurance

Company of Cleveland.

VELIE: The whozis? Say, Inspector, d'ye hear that?

NIKKI: *Now* what did the great Mr. Queen say?

INSPECTOR: Well, Ellery doesn't know it, but Headquarters is helping the Vulcan people investigate the epidemic of fires that's been keeping this neighborhood up nights.

NIKKI: And their agent is coming to see him today — the long arm of coincidence! May as well clear these dishes away. (*Fading*) Hired as a secretary — finagled into being a housekeeper! (*The men laugh*)

VELIE: Those fires been raisin' hallelujah around here. Bad business, Mr. Queen.

ELLERY: How many fires have there been, dad?

INSPECTOR: Three in the last two weeks. First one was that cigar-and-stationery store around the corner on Amsterdam Avenue.

NIKKI: (*Returning*) You know, Ellery — the store run by that grumpy old Scotchman, Ferguson.

VELIE: Second fire was an interior decorator's shop down the block a ways — Ferril's.

INSPECTOR: And the third fire — only two nights ago — gutted a brand-new milliner's shop two blocks north.

NIKKI: I know! Madame Delage's. She really had the stunningest hats, Ellery. *Such* a shame.

ELLERY: Isn't it possible the three fires were accidents?

VELIE: Not accordin' to the Arson boys at Headquarters.

INSPECTOR: Chemicals started the blaze in all three cases, son — and all in the middle of the night, so that by the time the fires were discovered and alarms turned in, there was a total loss of interior property.

VELIE: Inspector, we gotta be goin'. We're late! L-A-T-E!

INSPECTOR: Coming, Velie, coming. Ellery, compare notes with me after you've talked to this Vulcan insurance man — what's 'is name? — Sweeney. (*Velie growls at him*) Right, right, Velie! (*The Inspector and Velie leave the apartment*)

NIKKI: This is one of the few cases you've had involving mysterious fires, isn't it, Ellery?

ELLERY: Yes, Nikki. Where's that man Sweeney? I'm itching to have a go at this one!

NIKKI: Could the three fires be the work of a — what do you call those people who set fire to things just for the heck of it?

ELLERY: Incendiary — pyromaniac — commonly called "fire-bug," Nikki. An especially nasty and

dangerous type of psychopathic criminal. (*Doorbell rings off*) There's Sweeney now.

NIKKI: (*Fading*) Coming . . . ! (*She opens the door off*)

SWEENEY: (*He is a nervous, middle-aged man*) I have an appointment with Mr. Queen. Name's Sweeney.

NIKKI: (*Off*) Come in, Mr. Sweeney. (*She closes the door*) This way, please.

ELLERY: Come in, Mr. Sweeney! My secretary, Miss Porter. (*Sweeney mumbles*) Sit down.

SWEENEY: Thanks. Mr. Queen, I . . . you've got a rep for . . . well, helpin' people out when they're in a jam —

NIKKI: (*Surprised*) But I thought it was about the fires —

ELLERY: (*Quickly*) Notes, Nikki. (*Nikki subsides*) (*gently*) Yes, Mr. Sweeney?

SWEENEY: (*Desperately*) Mr. Queen, would you help an ex-convict go straight?

NIKKI: Of course he would! He's *always* helping people.

ELLERY: (*Kindly*) You've done time, Mr. Sweeney?

SWEENEY: (*Unevenly*) Quite a stretch. Years ago I . . . got into a bad mess. I'd just started workin' for the Vulcan Fire Insurance company, and they had me pinched.

ELLERY: On what charge?

SWEENEY: Collusion with a policy-holder to defraud the company. Yes, I was guilty — this account of mine was a slick article, he tempted me . . . anyway, we tried to collect on a fake fire. They had me with the goods, and I went to jail. (*Quickly*) The company was swell to me, though. When I was paroled, they took me right back and gave me another chance.

NIKKI: That's the way it should be.

SWEENEY: I've worked honest ever since. But just when I thought it was all forgotten — *this* has to happen.

ELLERY: You're under suspicion again, Mr. Sweeney?

SWEENEY: But this time I'm innocent — I swear I am, Mr. Queen! Three of the accounts I wrote up for fire insurance have had fires in the past two weeks — mighty funny-lookin' fires —

NIKKI: The fires in this neighborhood? Stationery-store, interior decorator, and hat shop?

SWEENEY: (*Surprised*) Yes. You know about this case?

ELLERY: Yes, we know about it. What's the attitude of your company — precisely?

SWEENEY: They're suspicious. Can you blame 'em, Mr. Queen? Not in the face of my record. But I tell you I don't know a darned thing about those fires. I've got a wife and two growin' kids now. I

wouldn't want my youngsters to find out their old man's an ex-con.

NIKKI: Oh, Ellery! Can't you do something for Mr. Sweeney?

ELLERY: We can try, Nikki.

SWEENEY: Mr. Queen, if my company fires me again, under suspicion, I'm through. I'll be tagged a crook for the rest of my life. No other company'd give me a job. Help me, Mr. Queen. I *want* to go straight!

ELLERY: I'll start investigating at once. Be back here at my apartment tonight at nine, Mr. Sweeney, and perhaps I'll have some news for you!

SCENE 2: *Ferguson's Cigar-and-Stationery Store*

(*Ellery and Nikki pause on the sidewalk before Ferguson's shop*)

NIKKI: Here's Ferguson's cigar-and-stationery store, Ellery. But the show window's all boarded up.

ELLERY: Let's see . . . No, there's our Scotty sitting inside with his head in his hands. (*They go in*).

NIKKI: Doesn't he look sad, Ellery?

FERGUSON: (*He is a broad-brogued Scotsman*) And if ye're lookin' fer a cigar, or a magazine, look elsewhere. Ferguson's outa business! . . . Oh. 'Tis that bonnie Miss Porter. And Misterrr Queen. (*They greet him*) Come to commiserate with a ruint mon, eh, lassie? Ferguson ruint by a conflagration!

NIKKI: You poor thing. *Look* at this place. Everything burned to a cinder!

ELLERY: But didn't you carry fire insurance, Mr. Ferguson?

FERGUSON: 'Tis His Satanic Majesty himself's been after me since I coom to this coontry, Mr. Queen! Fer ten long years I carry fire insurance to the hilt —

NIKKI: Then stop worrying, Mr. Ferguson. The insurance company will pay you for your losses.

FERGUSON: Aye, an' will they, lass? Nae, not Ferguson! I decided to economize a wee bit. No sooner does Ferguson cancel part of his insurance, then a fire breaks oot an' ruins the entire stock!

ELLERY: How much will you collect on your policy?

FERGUSON: Not enough to pay my creditors for bills past doo! (*Sighs*) Aye, Ferguson's outa business.

ELLERY: Any idea how the fire started, Mr. Ferguson?

FERGUSON: 'Twas at night, sir, in m'back room there. I kept a wee dark-room there — amatoor photographer I am — and o' coorse there's chemicals. But whether the fire started in the chemicals by itself, sir, or some dirrrty criminal put a match to 'em . . .

ELLERY: Who's your landlord, Mr.

Ferguson? From whom do you rent this store?

FERGUSON: Aye, an' there's a harrrd mon, Mr. Queen — a verra harrrd mon. Jacob Tinker.

NIKKI: Jacob Tinker? Ellery, that's the squeaky little old man who owns the pawnshop down the street.

FERGUSON: (*Glumly*) The verra same. A graspin' miser! I tell ye I'd like — (*The shop door opens and a queer figure shambles in*)

NIKKI: A customer . . . and nothing to sell! It *is* a shame.

ELLERY: (*Low*) Queer-looking customer. Look at the bulk of the man, Nikki! Burly brute.

NIKKI: (*Low*) But he has such a childish smile Ellery — and such foolish, staring eyes!

FERGUSON: (*Gentle impatience*) Well, well! Don't be gawpin' there, Simon! Go away. Shoo! Off wi' ye!

SIMON: (*He has a deep, but childlike voice. He is a "simple"*) I just found a penny, Mr. Ferguson. See how nice and shiny it is. Will you sell me a cigaret? Please, Mr. Ferguson.

FERGUSON: (*Sighing*) Simon, I canna sell ye cigarets na' more. (*As if to a child*) See? My shop. Gone!

SIMON: (*Wondering*) Did the fairies take it? (*Claps hands like a child*) I know! The fire! (*He laughs with glee*) It was a nice fire — it burned so bright — like the boys make on the empty lot (*Fading*) but so big — so hot — so *red* . . . (*He exits suddenly, with gleeful laughter*)

NIKKI: *Who* in the world was that, Mr. Ferguson?

FERGUSON: 'Tis Simon Tinker, lass — the pawnbroker's brother.

ELLERY: Body of a grown man and the mind of a child.

FERGUSON: Aye, he's a half-wit, Simple Simon is. Lives with old Jacob in the back room of the pawnshop. (*Muttering*) A hot fire, he says. Aye, 'twas that, 'twas that!

ELLERY: (*Low*) Let's be off, Nikki — Ferguson's miserable enough as it is. And we've learned all we can.

FERGUSON: (*Muttering as they leave*) 'Tis an enemy I've got — who it is I canna think — but may he burrrn in his own fire in the deepest pits of . . . (*The door drowns him out*)

SCENE 3: *Ferril's Interior-Decorating Shop*

(*Ellery and Nikki enter Ferril's shop*)

ELLERY: Mr. Ferril?

FERRIL: (*Approaching*) Yes?

ELLERY: My name's Queen. This is Miss Porter, Mr. Ferril.

FERRIL: (*Despairing*) If you're intewethted in decowating an apartment, Mithter Queen, I'm afwaid

I can't help you. All my dwapeth and curtainth and wall-paperth were burned to a cwithp!

NIKKI: (*Grimly*) Seems to have been a pretty complete job, your fire, Mr. Ferril. Gosh!

FERRIL: Thimply dweadful!

ELLERY: We're investigating the epidemic of fires in this neighborhood, Mr. Ferril.

FERRIL: Oh! You're detectivth?

ELLERY: Well —

MME. DELAGE: (*She is a full-blown French woman — a vivid personality*) Do I hear you say de-tec-ative? It is time someone do some thing! Chou-Chou an' I — we both wring our hands!

FERRIL: (*Hastily*) Thith ith Madame Delage. Miss Porter, Mr. Queen. (*Greetings*)

NIKKI: Aren't you the milliner who was burned out, too, Madame Delage?

ELLERY: Companions in misery, eh, Madame?

MME. DELAGE: *Oui.* Chou-Chou an' I — we are ol' friends. (*Giggle*) *Pardonnez-moi!* Chou-Chou . . . that is my pet name for Mr. Ferril. We know each ozzer from Paree, when Chou-Chou is an artist on the Left Bank an' I . . . (*Sighs*) I was Camille.

FERRIL: (*Unhappily*) Madame Delage wethently came fwom Pawith to open a millinery ethtablithment, tho I thub-leathed my old thtore to her and wented thith bigger one for my dwape-and-wallpaper buthineth.

MME. DELAGE: An' I, Monsieur Queen — I sub-lease Chou-Chou's small shop, I turn it at great expense into a millinery shop — new fixtures, new decorations, *magnifique!* An' I am not open a week when the fire, she burn every thing! I go out of my mind!

NIKKI: It was a lovely shop, Madame. I was thinking of coming in for a hat. Then I passed and saw what the fire had done —

MME. DELAGE: (*Despairing*) You see? It is fate!

ELLERY: But you must have carried fire insurance, Madame.

MME. DELAGE: But so little! I was a fool. What I will collect from the Vulcan Fire Insurance Company — it is not sufficient to furnish the poorest new shop!

ELLERY: Were *you* sufficiently covered by insurance, Mr. Ferril?

MME. DELAGE: Chou-Chou? He is even worse off! He is — how you say? — broken!

FERRIL: Naturally when I ekthpanded, Mithter Queen, I bought a new thtock — wallpaper, fabricth — gorgeouth line! But I wath tho buthy and tho ekthited, I forgot to incweathe my polithy to cover the new invethtment.

I'm over my thilly ear-th in debt — the old polithy won't half pull me out!

ELLERY: Who's your landlord, Mr. Ferril? I mean, both of the small shop you sub-leased to Madame Delage, and of this one you recently moved to?

FERRIL: The thame man — old Jacob Tinker. The Scwooge!

ELLERY: Ah. Well, we'll be getting along. (*He opens the street door*) If you two should recall anything helpful to our investigation —

FERRIL: We'll get wight in touch with you, Mithter Queen. (*Angry*) Thimon! Thimon Tinker! Get away fwom here!

NIKKI: (*Low*) Here's the half-wit again, Ellery.

FERRIL: He maketh me *tho* nervouth.

SIMON: (*Approaching eagerly*) Mr. Ferril, see what I found! A nice cigaret! Give me a match to light my cigaret, Mr. Ferril? Please!

MME. DELAGE: *Non, non* — go away, Simon! We have no matches!

SIMON: (*Wistfully*) Nobody ever has matches. (*Eagerly*) *You* look nice. Will *you* give me a match?

NIKKI: (*Whispering*) Ellery, he's talking to *you!*

FERRIL: (*Whisper*) Thay you haven't any, Mithter Queen! Thimon'th like a baby — can't be twuthted!

ELLERY: (*Gently*) Sorry, Simon. No matches today.

SIMON: (*Agonized*) No matches for Simon! I'll find a good fairy — *she'll* give me a match! Won't somebody give me a match? Please. Simon wants a match . . . Simon wants a match to see the pretty fire. (*He laughs and laughs.*)

SCENE 4: *The Queen Apartment*

INSPECTOR: But why are you so interested in this pawnbroker Jake Tinker and his half-wit brother Simon, Ellery?

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) Because I'm wondering if Jacob Tinker gained anything by those three fires, Dad.

NIKKI: And where was the half-wit brother on the nights of the three fires?

VELIE: Aw, we didn't pass *that* one up, Miss Porter!

INSPECTOR: Old Jake Tinker gave his brother Simon an alibi. Said Simon didn't leave their backroom quarters at the pawnshop on any of the three nights. (*Doorbell rings.*)

NIKKI: I'll go. Must be Mr. Sweeney.

INSPECTOR: Could be Jake's lying in his false teeth, but right now the alibi holds. It's a funny case.

VELIE: Yeah — I bet Ferguson, Ferril, an' this French dame are bustin' their sides laughin'!

NIKKI: (*Returning with Sweeney*) Mr. Queen's waiting, Mr. Sweeney.

SWEENEY: Evenin', Mr. Queen! Am I late? You said to be back here at nine —

ELLERY: Right on time, Mr. Sweeney. My father Inspector Queen, Sergeant Velie. (*Ad libs*) Of course you must know that Jacob Tinker, the local pawnbroker, owns the buildings where all three fires occurred?

SWEENEY: Sure, Mr. Queen. He used to be one of my accounts.

NIKKI: (*Eagerly*) Does Tinker gain by the fires, Mr. Sweeney?

SWEENEY: Gains! He loses more than anyone else.

ELLERY: (*Sharply*) How's that?

SWEENEY: A month ago, when Tinker's insurance had to be renewed, he squawked for a reduction in rate. My company said no. Tinker got sore, started dickering with another company, then Ferguson's fire happened, and the old nickel-nurser was caught without protection.

NIKKI: Serves people like that right!

INSPECTOR: I knew about that, Ellery. The other company called off negotiations until the cause of the fire could be determined.

VELIE: So Tink-Tink-Tinker's had three big fire-losses in a row — an' he ain't collectin' a cent!

ELLERY: Then *you've* nothing to worry about, Mr. Sweeney.

SWEENEY: (*Eagerly*) I haven't?

ELLERY: Of course not! How can the Vulcan company accuse you of collusion to defraud? In all three fires the shopkeepers lost *more* than the insurance coverage! And Tinker's building losses don't cost the company anything. (*Faint fire engines clang from some nearby street.*)

SWEENEY: (*Relief*) I hope the home office sees it that way. But who's behind these fires, darn it?

NIKKI: And for goodness sake — why? (*The fire engines are louder.*)

ELLERY: Since no one gains anything — shopkeepers or owner of the buildings or insurance company or yourself, Mr. Sweeney, — it must be the work of a fire-bug — a crank committing arson for the thrill. (*Engines still louder.*)

VELIE: Say! Ain't those fire-engines?

NIKKI: Fire-engines! Let's see!

INSPECTOR: Open the window, Velie! (*Velie obeys, and the engines scream from somewhere nearby.*)

ELLERY: They're racing past on Amsterdam Avenue!

SWEENEY: There's the glow against the sky! See it?

VELIE: Wow, what a fire!

NIKKI: Ellery! Isn't that just about the spot where Jacob Tinker's pawnshop is located?

ELLERY: Tinker's pawnshop? Come on!

SCENE 5: *A Street Outside Tinker's Pawnshop*

(*Fire-engines, crowd noises, hiss of hoses, shouted orders of police and firemen, and a fierce background of crackling flames.*)

ELLERY: (*Above hubbub*) Let us through, please!

NIKKI: Ouch, my foot! It's like the mob-scene from Macy's!

VELIE: Gangway, folks! Come on, Sweeney!

ELLERY: Dad! Get us through the fire-lines.

INSPECTOR: Follow me. One side, Officer!

OFFICER: (*Fading on*) Hey, you! You can't git through here! Oh, 'scuse me, Inspector Queen. Didn't rec-o'nize you. Stand back, folks! Go on, now . . . !

INSPECTOR: Chief! Chief Hilliard!

FIRE CHIEF: (*Fading on*) Evening, Inspector. Out to see the fun, hey? (*Grimly.*) Some fun. . . . Hey Bill! More pressure! You men! Get a move on there.

INSPECTOR: Jake Tinker's pawnshop, all right. Can you save the building, Chief?

CHIEF: We'll be lucky if we save the ones on either side. Fire inside Tinker's store is terrific.

ELLERY: Chemical combustion, like the previous fires?

CHIEF: Yep. Sent a fireman inside, but the heat's so intense that even wearing special equipment the man had to come out again. Says the fire's so hot the aluminum cooking pots on a shelf over the stove in the back room are melting. (*Shouts.*) Bring up Number Three!

NIKKI: *Look* at that fire! My face is hot even from here.

VELIE: Jake Tinker an' his brother safe?

CHIEF: Haven't seen Tinker. The half-wit got out by himself.

NIKKI: There he is — crowing like a child!

ELLERY: Sergeant, call the poor fellow over here. (*Velie slips off.*) I wonder where his brother Jacob is.

SWEENEY: Tinker's gone to the home office of my insurance company — that's in Cleveland — to try and talk them into reinstating his lapsed policy. Funny, isn't it?

VELIE: (*Returning*) Here's Simple Simon, Mr. Queen.

SIMON: (*Excited*) Ooh! It's a big, big fire! Isn't it?

ELLERY: (*Gently*) Where have you been all day, Simon?

SIMON: Playing in the street with the little boys . . . Sssss! Watch the water! Watch the fire! Watch the smoke!

INSPECTOR: You weren't in your brother's pawnshop or back room all day, Simon?

SIMON: Huh? Oh, sure. In and out. I

love fires! The fairies make them! For me! The fairies like me. (*He lumbers off gleefully.*) More fire! More water! More smoke! Ssssss. . . . !

NIKKI: Isn't that Mr. Ferguson in the crowd there, Ellery? And there's Mr. Ferril and Madame Delage!

ELLERY: Fatal affinity of misery and company, Nikki . . . Dad! ("*Yes, son!*") When the fire's out and the engines leave, post your own men around the building. Don't let anyone examine the débris. By morning the fire should be out, and it will be safe for me to poke around the ruins. I want to be *the first one.*

INSPECTOR: All right, but what do you expect to find?

ELLERY: (*Grimly*) If I knew that, Dad, I'd know everything.

SCENE 6: *The Same, Next Morning* (*The Queen Party drives up to the scene of the fire*)

ELLERY: Come on, Dad, Nikki. Let's have a look at the remains.

NIKKI: It's just a black, hollow shell. Awful! (*They get out.*)

INSPECTOR: There's Velie — he's relieved the night men. Morning Velie! (*Velie yawns, Ferguson is with him.*)

ELLERY: Good morning, Sergeant. Ah, Mr. Ferguson. Out early to view the remains?

VELIE: Mr. Ferguson just come around to give ol' man Tinker the needles.

FERGUSON: But that harrrd-hearted mon, he's na' here yet. Well, sir, Ferguson waits, I'll tell ye thot! I'm not a vindictive mon, but that Tinker — serves him right, the penny-pinchin' scrounger!

INSPECTOR: (*Chuckling*) Scotty's got his monkey up. Well, let's go in. (*They all enter the gutted building.*)

ELLERY: No one's been allowed inside all night, Sergeant?

VELIE: Nope. Watch yer step, Miss Porter. This floor ain't what you'd call the Rock o' Gibraltar.

NIKKI: This *was* a fire. Practically nothing left.

ELLERY: Grab sticks, everybody. Let's see if we can't turn up something interesting.

INSPECTOR: Here's a couple. Scatter. Sticks!

FERGUSON: (*Off*) And what we supposed to be lookin' for, Mr. Queen?

ELLERY: Mr. Ferguson, blessed if I know! (*They keep poking.*)

VELIE: (*Off*) What could anyone find in this burned trash?

NIKKI: Even the big safe over there's in pretty bad shape. (*Cries of Tinker off. He enters, stumbling.*) Who on earth is *that*?

INSPECTOR: It's Jake Tinker. Listen

to him rave!

TINKER: (*He is an old man with a nasal cracked voice*) My store! My propitty! Burned to the ground! Who did it? They're tryin' to ruin me! *Look* at it — just *look*! (*Groans.*)

FERGUSON: (*Shouting — off*) Serves ye right, ye old shark!

ELLERY: Hush, Mr. Ferguson. You just found out you'd had a fire, Mr. Tinker?

TINKER: I just got back from Cleveland — the insurance company won't renew my policy . . . My store, my building, burned . . . Wait! I'm crazy! I forgot! Did you find it? Where is it? It was over here, over the stove . . .

INSPECTOR: Did we find what, Jake? (*Things hurled aside.*)

TINKER: My cracker tin! The tin I kept on the shelf over the stove in the back room here! It's got all my money in it! Hid under the crackers! (*He hurls himself at the débris.*)

ELLERY: (*Low*) He certainly lives up to his reputation as a miser, doesn't he, Nikki? Money in a cracker box!

NIKKI: (*Low*) Look at him scrabbling in that pile of charred junk! He's worse than his brother Simon.

TINKER: (*Babbling*) I don't trust banks — so I keep my money here. Can you blame me? Who can trust anyone these days? My tin — where is it? It must be here some place!

ELLERY: Let us help you, Mr. Tinker. How much money did you have in the tin box?

TINKER: Twenty one-thousand-dollar bills!

VELIE: (*Whistles*) Twenty grand!

NIKKI: Covered with moldy crackers. *He's* been reading Poe!

VELIE: (*Off*) Don't see that cracker-tin nowheres.

TINKER: (*Yell of triumph*) I found it!

INSPECTOR: Yep, it's a cracker box, all right. All twisted and blackened. Can you open it? (*Clatter of tin lid — Tinker cries out.*)

ELLERY: What's the matter, Mr. Tinker?

TINKER: (*Sobbing*) My twenty thousand dollars — my lovely dollars — ashes. Just ashes. All burned up!

ELLERY: Let's have that tinful of ashes, Mr. Tinker. (*Low*) Dad — Headquarters. I want these ashes tested in the police laboratory!

SCENE 7: *Inspector Queen's Office, Police Headquarters*

NIKKI: (*Yawning*) I wish Sergeant Velie'd come upstairs with that laboratory report. I'm all worn out.

ELLERY: It's a peculiar case. Four fires, all deliberately set, and every person involved is ruined!

INSPECTOR: What's peculiar about it, Ellery? These things happen every day. It's the work of a nut, a fire-bug.

NIKKI: It's just a question of *finding* the bug!

ELLERY: It's certainly not Ferguson or Ferril or Madame Delage or Jacob Tinker, if it's a fire-bug. A fire-bug might ruin others for the sheer joy of committing arson — but not himself. And Sweeney wouldn't run the risk of losing four customers and perhaps his job!

INSPECTOR: My guess is it's this half-wit Simon.

NIKKI: You've seen how the poor man acts, Ellery. He loves fire. And he's half-witted. He *might* be the fire-bug!

ELLERY: Oh, come. These fires have been cleverly executed — they involved the combustion of chemicals. Would a dreamy simpleton like Simon be capable of such planning and cleverness? No, it's not Simon. (*Fretfully.*) A case without a single active suspect!

NIKKI: Here's Sergeant Velie! Well, Sergeant?

INSPECTOR: Was old Jake telling the truth about the money?

VELIE: (*Entering*) Yep. Lab report says most of the ashes in the burned tin *are* ashes of paper!

ELLERY: The same kind of paper used in printing paper money?

VELIE: Yeah. An' what's more, the amount of ashes, they say, is just about what it oughta be if twen'y one-thousand-buck bills'd been burned up in the tin.

NIKKI: (*Sighing*) Jacob Tinker's got such a bad reputation — I'd feel better if we'd found he was lying.

INSPECTOR: (*Fretfully*) Yes, it would have given us something to start on — a lead, anything.

VELIE: Looks like we gotta start all over again —

ELLERY: Wait! That's it! *That's it . . .* (*Ad libs.*) Yes, I see it all now — the whole diabolical thing! (*Chuckles.*) Very clever. *Very* clever! (*Grimly.*) *Dad, I know who the fire-bug is!*

ELLERY QUEEN, *as you have just seen, now knows the identity of the fire-bug. Do you?*

Millions who have listened to "The Adventures of ELLERY QUEEN" *on the air have joined what seems to be a spontaneous "armchair detectives' society," the sole bylaw of which is that the armchair detectives shall try to figure out both the identity of the criminal, and the clues and logical reasoning which pin the guilt on him, before* ELLERY QUEEN *himself goes through the reasoning for them.*

You can garner additional pleasure from the reading of these radio playlets by stopping here and playing the game.

And now, if you think you've figured out the correct answer . . . go ahead and read ELLERY QUEEN'S *own solution to* The Adventure of the Fire-Bug.

The Solution

SCENE 8: *Same, Immediately After*

(*They are besieging Ellery with questions.*)

ELLERY: (*Laughing*) All right, I'll explain. In the fourth fire the heat was so intense, the Fire Chief told us, that *aluminum pots* on the shelf above the stove in Tinker's back-room actually *melted.* But what else was on that shelf over the stove? The cracker tin in which old Jacob hid his twenty thousand dollars!

VELIE: That's a fact. Old Jake told us that himself!

ELLERY: Everybody knows tin melts more easily than aluminum. In fact, aluminum needs almost *three times more heat!* Then why didn't the *tin* of the cracker-tin on the shelf melt? The tin was merely twisted and blackened, as Dad remarked. If the tin *didn't* melt, while the more fire-resistant aluminum *did* —

NIKKI: Then it means the tin wasn't on the shelf at all!

INSPECTOR: Wasn't in that inferno of a back-room at all!

ELLERY: Precisely. Therefore someone spirited old Jacob's cracker-tin full of money away *before the fire started* — and brought it back the next morning and buried it in the débris of the room, after fire-treating it by hand to make it look twisted and blackened!

VELIE: Not realizin' he was pullin' a boner — that if the tin'd really gone through that fire, it woulda melted!

ELLERY: Yes, Sergeant. Now who took the tin away? Could only be the person who later set fire to the premises. Why was it taken away in the first place? Obviously, for its contents — twenty thousand dollars in one-thousand-dollar bills. Then we shouldn't be looking for a fire-bug at all — *our* man is really a thief! And the ashes we found were *not* the ashes of Tinker's treasure!

NIKKI: But why didn't the thief just take away the money and leave the empty tin behind?

ELLERY: *He wanted to conceal the fact that there'd been a theft, Nikki* — to make it look as if the money'd been burned up in the fire. What would he logically do? He'd take twenty *one*-dollar bills — a small investment in return for the same number of *thousand*-dollar bills! — and burn them in the tin.

INSPECTOR: Then when old Jake'd report his loss, we'd look and find a fire-bent tin, with the proper amount of authentic currency paper-ashes inside, and we'd never suspect that theft had occurred!

ELLERY: Exactly, Dad. But it takes time to burn bills in a tin, and fire-treat the tin so that it would look like part of the bigger fire to come. And the thief knew Jacob's simple brother Simon might come in at any moment and spot him — Simon said he was in and out all day. So our too-clever thief elected to do the business at home and plant the tin in the débris *after* the fire the next day. We *know* he must have done that, because we *know* the tin wasn't on the premises during the fire — if it had been, it would have melted.

VELIE: I get it now! *The whole series o' fires was just a cover-up of that last fire* — to make us think it was all the work of a fire-bug . . . prob'ly Simple Simon!

NIKKI: Yes, and that last fire was designed to cover up the theft of Jacob Tinker's twenty thousand dollars.

ELLERY: Right. Now who was the thief? Who took the tin away and after the fire planted it in the ruins of Tinker's back-room? Only two possible culprits.

INSPECTOR: How do you figure that, son?

ELLERY: Didn't your own men guard the burned pawnshop all night, Dad? (*Inspector ad lib*) Sergeant, didn't you tell us no one had been allowed to examine the ashes before we arrived this morning? (*Velie ad lib*) So the tin couldn't have been returned and buried in the ruins until *after we arrived this morning!*

NIKKI: *After* we arrived! But —

ELLERY: Therefore the tin must have been planted in the ruins *between the time we came and the time Jacob Tinker dug it out of the débris!*

VELIE: But nobody was there exceptin' us and old Jake himself!

NIKKI: You mean the pawnbroker smuggled the tin into the débris while he was pretending to be looking for it, and then dramatically dug it out to show it to us?

INSPECTOR: Can't be Tinker, Nikki. Old Jake couldn't have had any motive to steal the tin and the money in the first place. It was his own money!

NIKKI: That's so!

INSPECTOR: No, son, I see whom you mean — there *was* one other outsider there with us, Velie — so he's the only one who *could* have planted the tin under our noses — probably while we were all poking around in the ashes! He's the

smart lad who had the first fire — probably a pure accident — and the fire gave him the idea for a whole chain of fire-bug blazes to lead up to his theft of old Jake's money-box, so that he could recoup his own fire-losses.

ELLERY: (*Chuckling*) Yes, Dad!

NIKKI: Of course —

VELIE: It was —

NIKKI & VELIE: (*Together*) *Ferguson!*

(*The music comes up.*)

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Stolen Formula *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

From midway between the two shallow ladder impressions in the soft earth Fordney picked up a brass button. He stared at it, h'mmm-h'mmmed, stared again. Where *had* he seen buttons like it? He gave it up.

"No prints on the ladder, Joe," Inspector Kelley announced, popping a jujube into his mouth. "Surface too rough." He looked at the button in Fordney's hand, asked:

"What, oh pundit, is the bauble which so engages the mind of the master?"

"I'm stymied, Jim," admitted the Professor. "What do you make of it?"

"Stymied! Incredible! Why, what will the little rollos at the University think!" Kelley glanced at the button again and roared. "This button that so baffles the so beautiful brains of our bonny Professor and gives the barefooted Balmoral to our sage's infallibility is, oh learned one, the badge and symbol of that notable institution — the circus! It's worn on the blue coat of —"

"And the circus grounds are only a mile distant," interrupted Fordney. "Let's go back into the laboratory."

"I was checking my formula when I became hungry," said Oscar Gibli. "I went downstairs — I was all alone — had a snack and returned here in time to see a man climb out that window and go down the ladder. The formula was gone. I —"

"That's the vitamin formula you were turning over to the Sterling Company for $50,000 — though you had larger offers — isn't it?" Fordney asked.

"That's right. Sterling financed my researches so, while I lose a fortune, it is only fair."

"Quite," agreed the criminologist. "Let me have the formula, Mr. Gibli. No one" — he turned to Kelley — "in or out of the circus, burgled this room!"

What single clue told Fordney the theft was faked?

Solution

The ladder impressions in the SOFT earth were SHALLOW. Had a man gone up or down the ladder, they would have been deep.

The League of Forgotten Men

NUMBER 5

Philo Gubb

In this issue we bring back to you the first, the original (but not the only) Correspondence-School Detective — Philo Gubb, created by the famous author of "Pigs Is Pigs." If you'll pardon a bit of bibble-babble, it has always struck your Editor as extraordinarily odd that Ellis Parker Butler could have chosen the first name of Philo for his simple-minded, rustic detective and made it seem so appropriate; and yet, a round dozen years later, S. S. Van Dine selected the identical first-name for his sophisticated dilettante, Philo Vance, and again made it seem *le nom juste*. . . . For a modern version of the Correspondence-School Detective, watch for Percival Wilde's "P. Moran, Shadow," scheduled to appear soon.

THE CORRESPONDENCE-SCHOOL DETECTIVE; or, Philo Gubb's Greatest Case

by ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

PHILO GUBB, wrapped in his bathrobe, went to the door of the room that was the headquarters of his business of paper-hanging and decorating as well as the office of his detective business, and opened the door a crack. It was still early in the morning, but Mr. Gubb was a modest man, and, lest any one should see him in his scanty attire, he peered through the crack of the door before he stepped hastily into the hall and captured his copy of the "Riverbank Daily Eagle." When he had secured the still damp newspaper, he returned to his cot bed and spread himself out to read comfortably.

It was a hot Iowa morning. Business was so slack that if Mr. Gubb had not taken out his set of eight varieties of false whiskers daily and brushed them carefully, the moths would have been able to devour them at leisure.

P. Gubb opened the "Eagle." The first words that met his eye caused him to sit upright on his cot. At the top of the first column of the first page were the headlines.

MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF HENRY SMITZ

Body Found in Mississippi River by Boatman Early This A.M.

Foul Play Suspected

Mr. Gubb unfolded the paper and read the item under the headlines with the most intense interest. Foul play meant the possibility of an opportunity to put to use once more the precepts of the Course of Twelve Lessons, and with them fresh in his mind Detective Gubb was eager to undertake the solution of any mystery that Riverbank could furnish. This was the article: —

Just as we go to press we receive word through Policeman Michael O'Toole that the well-known mussel dredger and boatman, Samuel Fliggis (Long Sam), while dredging for mussels last night just below the bridge, recovered the body of Henry Smitz, late of this place.

Mr. Smitz had been missing for three days and his wife had been greatly worried. Mr. Brownson, of the Brownson Packing Company, by whom he was employed, admitted that Mr. Smitz had been missing for several days.

The body was found sewed in a sack. Foul play is suspected.

"I should think foul play would be suspected," exclaimed Philo Gubb, "if a man was sewed into a bag and deposited into the Mississippi River until dead."

He propped the paper against the foot of the cot bed and was still reading when someone knocked on his door. He wrapped his bathrobe carefully about him and opened the door. A young woman with tear-dimmed eyes stood in the doorway.

"Mr. P. Gubb?" she asked. "I'm sorry to disturb you so early in the morning, Mr. Gubb, but I couldn't sleep all night. I came on a matter of business, as you might say. There's a couple of things I want you to do."

"Paper-hanging or deteckating?" asked P. Gubb.

"Both," said the young woman. "My name is Smitz — Emily Smitz. My husband —"

"I'm aware of the knowledge of your loss, ma'am," said the paper-hanger detective gently.

"Lots of people know of it," said Mrs. Smitz. "I guess everybody knows of it — I told the police to try to find Henry, so it is no secret. And I want you to come up as soon as you get dressed, and paper my bedroom."

Mr. Gubb looked at the young woman as if he thought she had gone insane under the burden of her woe.

"And then I want you to find Henry," she said, "because I've heard you can do so well in the detecting line."

Mr. Gubb suddenly realized that the poor creature did not yet know the full extent of her loss. He gazed down upon her with pity in his bird-like eyes.

"I know you'll think it strange," the young woman went on, "that I should ask you to paper a bedroom first, when my husband is lost; but if he is gone it is because I was a mean, stubborn thing. We never quarreled in our lives, Mr. Gubb, until I picked out the wall-paper for our bedroom, and Henry said parrots and birds-of-paradise and tropical flowers that were as big as umbrellas would look awful on our bedroom wall. So I said he hadn't anything but Low Dutch taste, and he got mad. 'All right, have it your own way,' he said, and I went and had Mr. Skaggs put the paper on the wall, and the next day Henry didn't come home at all.

"If I'd thought Henry would take it that way, I'd rather had the wall bare, Mr. Gubb. I've cried and cried, and last night I made up my mind it was all my fault and that when Henry came home he'd find a decent paper on the wall. I don't mind telling you, Mr. Gubb, that when the paper was on the wall it looked worse than it looked in the roll. It looked crazy."

"Yes'm," said Mr. Gubb, "it often does. But, however, there's something you'd ought to know right away about Henry."

The young woman stared wide-eyed at Mr. Gubb for a moment; she turned as white as her shirtwaist.

"Henry is dead!" she cried, and collapsed into Mr. Gubb's long, thin arms.

Mr. Gubb, the inert form of the young woman in his arms, glanced around with a startled gaze. He stood miserably, not knowing what to do, when suddenly he saw Policeman O'Toole coming toward him down the hall. Policeman O'Toole was leading by the arm a man whose wrists bore clanking handcuffs.

"What's this now?" asked the policeman none too gently, as he saw the bathrobed Mr. Gubb holding the fainting woman in his arms.

"I am exceedingly glad you have come," said Mr. Gubb. "The only meaning into it, is that this Mrs. H. Smitz, widow-lady, fainted onto me against my will and wishes."

"I was only askin'," said Policeman O'Toole politely enough.

"You shouldn't ask such things until you're asked to ask," said Mr. Gubb.

After looking into Mr. Gubb's room to see that there was no easy means of escape, O'Toole pushed his prisoner into the room and took the limp form of Mrs. Smitz from Mr. Gubb, who entered the room and closed the door.

"I may as well say what I want to say right now," said the handcuffed man as soon as he was alone with Mr. Gubb. "I've heard of Detective Gubb, off and on, many a time, and as soon as I got into this trouble I said, 'Gubb's the man that can get me out if anyone can.' My name is Herman Wiggins."

"Glad to meet you," said Mr. Gubb, slipping his long legs into his trousers.

"And I give you my word for what it is worth," continued Mr. Wiggins, "that I'm as innocent of this crime as the babe unborn."

"What crime?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Why, killing Hen Smitz — what crime did you think?" said Mr. Wiggins. "Do I look like a man that would go and murder a man just because —"

He hesitated and Mr. Gubb, who was slipping his suspenders over his bony shoulders, looked at Mr. Wiggins with keen eyes.

"Well, just because him and me had words in fun," said Mr. Wiggins, "I leave it to you, can't a man say words in fun once in a while?"

"Certainly sure," said Mr. Gubb.

"I guess so," said Mr. Wiggins. "Anybody'd know a man don't mean all he says. When I went and told Hen Smitz I'd murder him as sure as green apples grow on a tree, I was just fooling. But this fool policeman —"

"Mr. O'Toole?"

"Yes. They gave him this Hen Smitz case to look into, and the first thing he did was to arrest me for murder. Nervy, I call it."

Policeman O'Toole opened the door a crack and peeked in. Seeing Mr. Gubb well along in his dressing operations, he opened the door wider and assisted Mrs. Smitz to a chair. She was still limp, but she was a brave little woman and was trying to control her sobs.

"Through?" O'Toole asked Wiggins. "If you are, come along back to jail."

"Now, don't talk to me in that tone of voice," said Mr. Wiggins angrily. "No, I'm not through. You don't know how to treat a gentleman like a gentleman, and never did."

He turned to Mr. Gubb.

"The long and short of it is this: I'm arrested for the murder of Hen Smitz, and I didn't murder him and I want you to take my case and get me out of jail."

"Ah, stuff!" exclaimed O'Toole. "You murdered him and you know you did. What's the use talkin'?"

Mrs. Smitz leaned forward in her chair.

"Murdered Henry?" she cried. "He never murdered Henry. I murdered him."

"Now, ma'am," said O'Toole politely, "I hate to contradict a lady, but you never murdered him at all. This man here murdered him, and I've got the proof on him."

"I murdered him!" cried Mrs. Smitz again. "I drove him out of his right mind and made him kill himself."

"Nothing of the sort," declared O'Toole. "This man Wiggins murdered him."

"I did not!" exclaimed Mr. Wiggins indignantly. "Some other man did it."

It seemed a deadlock, for each was quite positive. Mr. Gubb looked from one to the other doubtfully.

"All right, take me back to jail," said Mr. Wiggins. "You look up the case, Mr. Gubb; that's all I came here for. Will you do it? Dig into it, hey?"

"I most certainly shall be glad to so do," said Mr. Gubb, "at the regular terms."

O'Toole led his prisoner away.

For a few minutes Mrs. Smitz sat silent, her hands clasped, staring at the floor. Then she looked up into Mr. Gubb's eyes.

"You will work on this case, Mr. Gubb, won't you?" she begged. "I have a little money — I'll give it all to have you do your best. It is cruel — cruel to have that poor man suffer under the charge of murder when I know so well Henry killed himself because I was cross with him. You can prove he killed himself — that it was my fault. You will?"

"The way the deteckative profession operates onto a case," said Mr. Gubb, "isn't to go to work to prove anything particularly especial. It finds

a clue or clues and follows them to where they lead to. That I shall be willing to do."

"That is all I could ask," said Mrs. Smitz gratefully.

Arising from her seat with difficulty, she walked tremblingly to the door. Mr. Gubb assisted her down the stairs, and it was not until she was gone that he remembered that she did not know the body of her husband had been found — sewed in a sack and at the bottom of the river. Young husbands have been known to quarrel with their wives over matters as trivial as bedroom wall-paper; they have even been known to leave home for several days at a time when angry; in extreme cases they have even been known to seek death at their own hands; but it is not at all usual for a young husband to leave home for several days and then in cold blood sew himself in a sack and jump into the river. In the first place there are easier ways of terminating one's life; in the second place a man can jump into the river with perfect ease without going to the trouble of sewing himself in a sack; and in the third place it is exceedingly difficult for a man to sew himself into a sack. It is almost impossible.

To sew himself into a sack a man must have no little skill, and he must have a large, roomy sack. He takes, let us say, a sack-needle, threaded with a good length of twine; he steps into the sack and pulls it up over his head; he then reaches above his head, holding the mouth of the sack together with one hand while he sews with the other hand. In hot anger this would be quite impossible.

Philo Gubb thought of all this as he looked through his disguises, selecting one suitable for the work he had in hand. He had just decided that the most appropriate disguise would be "Number 13, Undertaker," and had picked up the close black wig, and long, drooping mustache, when he had another thought. Given a bag sufficiently loose to permit free motion of the hands and arms, and a man, even in hot anger, might sew himself in. A man, intent on suicidally bagging himself, would sew the mouth of the bag shut and would then cut a slit in the front of the bag large enough to crawl into. He would then crawl into the bag and sew up the slit, which would be immediately in front of his hands. It could be done! Philo Gubb chose from his wardrobe a black frock coat and a silk hat with a wide band of crape. He carefully locked his door and went down to the street.

On a day as hot as this day promised to be, a frock coat and a silk hat could be nothing but distressingly uncomfortable. Between his door and

the corner, eight various citizens spoke to Philo Gubb, calling him by name. In fact, Riverbank was as accustomed to seeing P. Gubb in disguise as out of disguise, and while a few children might be interested by the sight of Detective Gubb in disguise, the older citizens thought no more of it, as a rule, than of seeing Banker Jennings appear in a pink shirt one day and a blue striped one the next. No one ever accused Banker Jennings of trying to hide his identity by a change of shirts, and no one imagined that P. Gubb was trying to disguise himself when he put on a disguise. They considered it a mere business custom, just as a butcher tied on a white apron before he went behind his counter.

This was why, instead of wondering who the tall, dark-garbed stranger might be, Banker Jennings greeted Philo cheerfully.

"Ah, Gubb!" he said. "So you are going to work on this Smitz case, are you? Glad of it, and wish you luck. Hope you place the crime on the right man and get him the full penalty. Let me tell you there's nothing in this rumor of Smitz being short of money. We did lend him money, but we never pressed him for it. We never even asked him for interest. I told him a dozen times he could have as much more from us as he wanted, within reason, whenever he wanted it, and that he could pay me when his invention was on the market."

"No report of news of any such rumor has as yet come to my hearing," said P. Gubb, "but since you mention it, I'll take it for less than it is worth."

"And that's less than nothing," said the banker. "Have you any clue?"

"I'm on my way to find one at the present moment of time," said Mr. Gubb.

"Well, let me give you a pointer," said the banker. "Get a line on Herman Wiggins or some of his crew, understand? Don't say I said a word, — I don't want to be brought into this, — but Smitz was afraid of Wiggins and his crew. He told me so. He said Wiggins had threatened to murder him."

"Mr. Wiggins is at present in the custody of the county jail for killing H. Smitz with intent to murder him," said Mr. Gubb.

"Oh, then — then it's all settled," said the banker. "They've proved it on him. I thought they would. Well, I suppose you've got to do your little bit of detecting just the same. Got to air the camphor out of the false hair, eh?"

The banker waved a cheerful hand at P. Gubb and passed into his banking institution.

Detective Gubb, cordially greeted by his many friends and admirers,

passed on down the main street, and by the time he reached the street that led to the river he was followed by a large and growing group intent on the pleasant occupation of watching a detective detect.

As Mr. Gubb walked toward the river, other citizens joined the group, but all kept a respectful distance behind him. When Mr. Gubb reached River Street and his false mustache fell off, the interest of the audience stopped short three paces behind him and stood until he had rescued the mustache and once more placed its wires in his nostrils. Then, when he moved forward again, they too moved forward. Never, perhaps, in the history of crime was a detective favored with a more respectful gallery.

On the edge of the river, Mr. Gubb found Long Sam Fliggis, the mussel dredger, seated on an empty tar-barrel with his own audience ranged before him listening while he told, for the fortieth time, the story of his finding of the body of H. Smitz. As Philo Gubb approached, Long Sam ceased speaking, and his audience and Mr. Gubb's gallery merged into one great circle which respectfully looked and listened while Mr. Gubb questioned the mussel dredger.

"Suicide?" said Long Sam scoffingly. "Why, he wan't no more a suicide than I am right now. He was murdered or wan't nothin'! I've dredged up some suicides in my day, and some of 'em had stones tied to 'em, to make sure they'd sink, and some thought they'd sink without no ballast, but nary one of 'em ever sewed himself into a bag, and I give my word," he said positively, "that Hen Smitz couldn't have sewed himself into that burlap bag unless some one done the sewing. Then the feller that did it was an assistant-suicide, and the way I look at it is that an assistant-suicide is jest the same as a murderer."

The crowd murmured approval, but Mr. Gubb held up his hand for silence.

"In certain kinds of burlap bags it is possibly probable a man could sew himself into it," said Mr. Gubb, and the crowd, seeing the logic of the remark, applauded gently but feelingly.

"You ain't seen the way he was sewed up," said Long Sam, "or you wouldn't talk like that."

"I haven't yet took a look," admitted Mr. Gubb, "but I aim so to do immediately after I find a clue onto which to work up my case. An A-1 deteckative can't set forth to work until he has a clue, that being a rule of the game."

"What kind of a clue was you lookin' for?" asked Long Sam. "What's a clue, anyway?"

"A clue," said P. Gubb, "is almost anything connected with the late lamented, but generally something that nobody but a deteckative would think had anything to do with anything whatsoever. Not infrequently often it is a button."

"Well, I've got no button except them that is sewed onto me," said Long Sam, "but if this here sack-needle will do any good —"

He brought from his pocket the point of a heavy sack-needle and laid it in Philo Gubb's palm. Mr. Gubb looked at it carefully. In the eye of the needle still remained a few inches of twine.

"I cut that off'n the burlap he was sewed up in," volunteered Long Sam, "I thought I'd keep it as a sort of nice little souvenir. I'd like it back again when you don't need it for a clue no more."

"Certainly sure," agreed Mr. Gubb, and he examined the needle carefully.

There are two kinds of sack-needles in general use. In both, the point of the needle is curved to facilitate pushing it into and out of a closely filled sack; in both, the curved portion is somewhat flattened so that the thumb and finger may secure a firm grasp to pull the needle through; but in one style the eye is at the end of the shaft while in the other it is near the point. This needle was like neither; the eye was midway of the shaft; the needle was pointed at each end and the curved portions were not flattened. Mr. Gubb noticed another thing — the twine was not the ordinary loosely twisted hemp twine, but a hard, smooth cotton cord, like carpet warp.

"Thank you," said Mr. Gubb, "and now I will go elsewhere to investigate to a further extent, and it is not necessarily imperative that everybody should accompany along with me if they don't want to."

But everybody did want to, it seemed. Long Sam and his audience joined Mr. Gubb's gallery and, with a dozen or so newcomers, they followed Mr. Gubb at a decent distance as he walked toward the plant of the Brownson Packing Company, which stood on the riverbank some two blocks away.

It was here Henry Smitz had worked. Six or eight buildings of various sizes, the largest of which stood immediately on the river's edge, together with the "yards" or pens, all enclosed by a high board fence, constituted the plant of the packing company, and as Mr. Gubb appeared at the gate the watchman there stood aside to let him enter.

"Good-morning, Mr. Gubb," he said pleasantly. "I been sort of expecting you. Always right on the job when there's crime being done, ain't you? You'll find Merkel and Brill and Jokosky and the rest of Wiggins's crew in the main building, and I guess they'll tell you just what they told the police. They hate it, but what else can they say? It's the truth."

"What is the truth?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"That Wiggins was dead sore at Hen Smitz," said the watchman. "That Wiggins told Hen he'd do for him if he lost them their jobs like he said he would. That's the truth."

Mr. Gubb — his admiring followers were halted at the gate by the watchman — entered the large building and inquired his way to Mr. Wiggins's department. He found it on the side of the building toward the river and on the ground floor. On one side the vast room led into the refrigerating room of the company; on the other it opened upon a long but narrow dock that ran the width of the building.

Along the outer edge of the dock were tied two barges, and into these barges some of Wiggins's crew were dumping mutton — not legs of mutton but entire sheep, neatly sewed in burlap. The large room was the packing and shipping room, and the work of Wiggins's crew was that of sewing the slaughtered and refrigerated sheep carcasses in burlap for shipment. Bales of burlap stood against one wall; strands of hemp twine ready for the needle hung from pegs in the wall and the posts that supported the floor above. The contiguity of the refrigerating room gave the room a pleasantly cool atmosphere.

Mr. Gubb glanced sharply around. Here was the burlap, here were needles, here was twine. Yonder was the river into which Hen Smitz had been thrown. He glanced across the narrow dock at the blue river. As his eye returned he noticed one of the men carefully sweeping the dock with a broom — sweeping fragments of glass into the river. As the men in the room watched him curiously, Mr. Gubb picked up a piece of burlap and put it in his pocket, wrapped a strand of twine around his finger and pocketed the twine, examined the needles stuck in improvised needle-holders made by boring gimlet holes in the wall, and then walked to the dock and picked up one of the pieces of glass.

"Clues," he remarked, and gave his attention to the work of questioning the men.

Although manifestly reluctant, they honestly admitted that Wiggins

had more than once threatened Hen Smitz — that he hated Hen Smitz with the hatred of a man who has been threatened with the loss of his job. Mr. Gubb learned that Hen Smitz had been the foreman for the entire building — a sort of autocrat with, as Wiggins' crew informed him, an easy job. He had only to see that the crews in the building turned out more work this year than they did last year. "'Ficiency" had been his motto, they said, and they hated "'Ficiency."

Mr. Gubb's gallery was awaiting him at the gate, and its members were in a heated discussion as to what Mr. Gubb had been doing. They ceased at once when he appeared and fell in behind him as he walked away from the packing house and toward the undertaking establishment of Mr. Holworthy Bartman, on the main street. Here, joining the curious group already assembled, the gallery was forced to wait while Mr. Gubb entered. His task was an unpleasant but necessary one. He must visit the little "morgue" at the back of Mr. Bartman's establishment.

The body of poor Hen Smitz had not yet been removed from the bag in which it had been found, and it was to the bag Mr. Gubb gave his closest attention. The bag — in order that the body might be identified — had not been ripped, but had been cut, and not a stitch had been severed. It did not take Mr. Gubb a moment to see that Hen Smitz had not been sewed in a bag at all. He had been sewed in burlap — burlap "yard goods," to use a shopkeeper's term — and it was burlap identical with that used by Mr. Wiggins and his crew. It was no loose bag of burlap — but a close-fitting wrapping of burlap; a cocoon of burlap that had been drawn tight around the body, as burlap is drawn tight around the carcass of sheep for shipment, like a mummy's wrappings.

It would have been utterly impossible for Hen Smitz to have sewed himself into the casing, not only because it bound his arms tight to his sides, but because the burlap was lapped over and sewed from the outside. This, once and for all, ended the suicide theory. The question was: Who was the murderer?

As Philo Gubb turned away from the bier, Undertaker Bartman entered the morgue.

"The crowd outside is getting impatient, Mr. Gubb," he said in his soft, undertakery voice. "It is getting on toward their lunch hour, and they want to crowd into my front office to find out what you've learned. I'm afraid they'll break my plate-glass windows, they're pushing so hard against

them. I don't want to hurry you, but if you would go out and tell them Wiggins is the murderer they'll go away. Of course there's no doubt about Wiggins being the murderer, since he has admitted he asked the stockkeeper for the electric-light bulb."

"What bulb?" asked Philo Gubb.

"The electric-light bulb we found sewed inside this burlap when we sliced it open," said Bartman. "Matter of fact, we found it in Hen's hand. O'Toole took it for a clue and I guess it fixes the murder on Wiggins beyond all doubt. The stockkeeper says Wiggins got it from him."

"And what does Wiggins remark on that subject?" asked Mr. Gubb.

"Not a word," said Bartman. "His lawyer told him not to open his mouth, and he won't. Listen to that crowd out there!"

"I will attend to that crowd right presently," said P. Gubb, sternly. "What I should wish to know now is why Mister Wiggins went and sewed an electric-light bulb in with the corpse for."

"In the first place," said Mr. Bartman, "he didn't sew it in with any corpse, because Hen Smitz wasn't a corpse when he was sewed in that burlap, unless Wiggins drowned him first, for Dr. Mortimer says Hen Smitz died of drowning; and in the second place, if you had a live man to sew in burlap, and had to hold him while you sewed him, you'd be liable to sew anything in with him.

"My idea is that Wiggins and some of his crew jumped on Hen Smitz and threw him down, and some of them held him while the others sewed him in. My idea is that Wiggins got that electric-light bulb to replace one that had burned out, and that he met Hen Smitz and had words with him, and they clinched, and Hen Smitz grabbed the bulb, and then the others came, and they sewed him into the burlap and dumped him into the river.

"So all you've got to do is to go out and tell that crowd that Wiggins did it and that you'll let them know who helped him as soon as you find out. And you better do it before they break my windows."

Detective Gubb turned and went out of the morgue. As he left the undertaker's establishment the crowd gave a slight cheer, but Mr. Gubb walked hurriedly toward the jail. He found Policeman O'Toole there and questioned him about the bulb; and O'Toole, proud to be the center of so large and interested a gathering of his fellow citizens, pulled the bulb from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Gubb, while he repeated in more detail the facts given by Mr. Bartman. Mr. Gubb looked at the bulb.

"I presume to suppose," he said, "that Mr. Wiggins asked the stock-keeper for a new bulb to replace one that was burned out?"

"You're right," said O'Toole. "Why?"

"For the reason that this bulb is a burned-out bulb," said Mr. Gubb.

And so it was. The inner surface of the bulb was darkened slightly, and the filament of carbon was severed. O'Toole took the bulb and examined it curiously.

"That's odd, ain't it?" he said.

"It might so seem to the non-deteckative mind," said Mr. Gubb, "but to the deteckative mind, nothing is odd."

"No, no, this ain't so odd, either," said O'Toole, "for whether Hen Smitz grabbed the bulb before Wiggins changed the new one for the old one, or after he changed it, don't make so much difference, when you come to think of it."

"To the deteckative mind," said Mr. Gubb, "it makes the difference that this ain't the bulb you thought it was, and hence consequently it ain't the bulb Mister Wiggins got from the stock-keeper."

Mr. Gubb started away. The crowd followed him. He did not go in search of the original bulb at once. He returned first to his room, where he changed his undertaker disguise for Number Six, that of a blue shirted laboring-man with a long brown beard. Then he led the way back to the packing house.

Again the crowd was halted at the gate, but again P. Gubb passed inside, and he found the stock-keeper eating his luncheon out of a tin pail. The stock-keeper was perfectly willing to talk.

"It was like this," said the stock-keeper. "We've been working overtime in some departments down here, and Wiggins and his crew had to work overtime the night Hen Smitz was murdered. Hen and Wiggins was at outs, or anyway I heard Hen tell Wiggins he'd better be hunting another job because he wouldn't have this one long, and Wiggins told Hen that if he lost his job he'd murder him — Wiggins would murder Hen, that is. I didn't think it was much of anything but loose talk at the time. But Hen was working overtime, too. He'd been working nights up in that little room of his on the second floor for quite some time, and this night Wiggins come to me and he says Hen had asked him for a fresh thirty-two-candle-power bulb. So I give it to Wiggins, and then I went home. And, come to find out, Wiggins sewed that bulb up with Hen."

"Perhaps maybe you have sack-needles like this into your stock-room," said P. Gubb, producing the needle Long Sam had given him. The stock-keeper took the needle and examined it carefully.

"Never had any like that," he said.

"Now, if," said Philo Gubb, — "if the bulb that was sewed up into the burlap with Henry Smitz wasn't a new bulb, and if Mr. Wiggins had given the new bulb to Henry, and if Henry had changed the new bulb for an old one, where would he have changed it at?"

"Up in his room, where he was always tinkering at that machine of his," said the stock-keeper.

"Could I have the pleasure of taking a look into that there room for a moment of time?" asked Mr. Gubb.

The stock-keeper arose and led the way up the stairs. He opened the door of the room Henry Smitz had used as a workroom, and P. Gubb walked in. The room was in some confusion, but, except in one or two particulars, no more than a workroom is apt to be. A rather cumbrous machine — the invention on which Henry Smitz had been working — stood as the murdered man had left it, all its levers, wheels, arms, and cogs intact. A chair, tipped over, lay on the floor. A roll of burlap stood on a roller by the machine. Looking up, Mr. Gubb saw, on the ceiling, the lighting fixture of the room, and in it was a clean, shining thirty-two-candle-power bulb. Where another similar bulb might have been in the other socket was a plug from which an insulated wire, evidently to furnish power, ran to the small motor connected with the machine on which Henry Smitz had been working.

The stock-keeper was the first to speak.

"Hello!" he said. "Somebody broke that window!" And it was true. Somebody had not only broken the window, but had broken every pane and the sash itself. But Mr. Gubb was not interested in this. He was gazing at the electric bulb and thinking of Part Two, Lesson Six of the Course of Twelve Lessons — "How to Identify by Finger-Prints, with General Remarks on the Bertillon System." He looked about for some means of reaching the bulb above his head. His eye lit on the fallen chair. By placing the chair upright and placing one foot on the frame of Henry Smitz's machine and the other on the chair-back, he could reach the bulb. He righted the chair and stepped onto its seat. He put one foot on the frame of Henry Smitz's machine; very carefully he put the other foot on the top of the chair-back. He reached upward and unscrewed the bulb.

The stock-keeper saw the chair totter. He sprang forward to steady it, but he was too late. Philo Gubb, grasping the air, fell on the broad, level board that formed the middle part of Henry Smitz's machine.

The effect was instantaneous. The cogs and wheels of the machine began to revolve rapidly. Two strong, steel arms flopped down and held Detective Gubb to the table, clamping his arms to his side. The roll of burlap unrolled, and as it unrolled, the loose end was seized and slipped under Mr. Gubb and wrapped around him and drawn taut, bundling him as a sheep's carcass is bundled. An arm reached down and back and forth, with a sewing motion, and passed from Mr. Gubb's head to his feet. As it reached his feet a knife sliced the burlap in which he was wrapped from the burlap on the roll.

And then a most surprising thing happened. As if the board on which he lay had been a catapult, it suddenly and unexpectedly raised Philo Gubb and tossed him through the open window. The stock-keeper heard a muffled scream and then a great splash, but when he ran to the window, the great paper-hanger detective had disappeared in the bosom of the Mississippi.

Like Henry Smitz he had tried to reach the ceiling by standing on the chair-back; like Henry Smitz he had fallen upon the newly invented burlaping and loading machine; like Henry Smitz he had been wrapped and thrown through the window into the river; but, unlike Henry Smitz, he had not been sewn into the burlap, because Philo Gubb had the double-pointed shuttle-action needle in his pocket.

Page Seventeen of Lesson Eleven of the Rising Sun Detective Agency's Correspondence School of Detecting's Course of Twelve Lessons, says: —

In cases of extreme difficulty of solution it is well for the detective to reenact as nearly as possible the probable action of the crime.

Mr. Philo Gubb had done so. He had also proved that a man may be sewn in a sack and drowned in a river without committing willful suicide or being the victim of foul play.

"O"

A return visit by the hero of "The Maltese Falcon" — rough, tough Sam Spade, in a typical Hammett thriller.

THEY CAN ONLY HANG YOU ONCE

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

SAMUEL SPADE said: "My name is Ronald Ames. I want to see Mr. Binnett — Mr. Timothy Binnett."

"Mr. Binnett is resting now, sir," the butler replied hesitantly.

"Will you find out when I can see him? It's important." Spade cleared his throat. "I'm — uh — just back from Australia, and it's about some of his properties there."

The butler turned on his heel while saying "I'll see, sir," and was going up the front stairs before he had finished speaking.

Spade made and lit a cigarette.

The butler came downstairs again. "I'm sorry; he can't be disturbed now, but Mr. Wallace Binnett — Mr. Timothy's nephew — will see you."

Spade said, "Thanks," and followed the butler upstairs.

Wallace Binnett was a slender, handsome, dark man of about Spade's age — thirty-eight — who rose smiling from a brocaded chair, said, "How do you do, Mr. Ames?" waved his hand at another chair, and sat down again. "You're from Australia?"

"Got in this morning."

"You're a business associate of Uncle Tim's?"

Spade smiled and shook his head. "Hardly that, but I've some information I think he ought to have — quick."

Wallace Binnett looked thoughtfully at the floor, then up at Spade. "I'll do my best to persuade him to see you, Mr. Ames, but, frankly, I don't know."

Spade seemed mildly surprised. "Why?"

Binnett shrugged. "He's peculiar sometimes. Understand, his mind seems perfectly all right, but he has the testiness and eccentricity of an old man in ill health and — well — at times he can be difficult."

Spade asked slowly: "He's already refused to see me?"

"Yes."

Spade rose from his chair. His blond satan's face was expressionless.

Binnett raised a hand quickly. "Wait, wait," he said. "I'll do what I can to make him change his mind. Perhaps if —" His dark eyes suddenly became wary. "You're not simply trying to sell him something, are you?"

"No."

The wary gleam went out of Binnett's eyes. "Well, then, I think I can —"

A young woman came in crying angrily, "Wally, that old fool has —" She broke off with a hand to her breast when she saw Spade.

Spade and Binnett had risen together. Binnett said suavely: "Joyce, this is Mr. Ames. My sister-in-law, Joyce Court."

Spade bowed.

Joyce Court uttered a short, embarrassed laugh and said: "Please excuse my whirlwind entrance." She was a tall, blue-eyed, dark woman of twenty-four or -five with good shoulders and a strong, slim body. Her features made up in warmth what they lacked in regularity. She wore wide-legged blue satin pajamas.

Binnett smiled good-naturedly at her and asked: "Now what's all the excitement?"

Anger darkened her eyes again and she started to speak. Then she looked at Spade and said: "But we shouldn't bore Mr. Ames with our stupid domestic affairs. If —" She hesitated.

Spade bowed again. "Sure," he said, "certainly."

"I won't be a minute," Binnett promised, and left the room with her.

Spade went to the open doorway through which they had vanished and, standing just inside, listened. Their footsteps became inaudible. Nothing else could be heard. Spade was standing there — his yellow-gray eyes dreamy — when he heard the scream. It was a woman's scream, high and shrill with terror. Spade was through the doorway when he heard the shot. It was a pistol shot, magnified, reverberated by walls and ceilings.

Twenty feet from the doorway Spade found a staircase, and went up it three steps at a time. He turned to the left. Halfway down the hallway a woman lay on her back on the floor.

Wallace Binnett knelt beside her, fondling one of her hands desperately, crying in a low, beseeching voice: "Darling, Molly, darling!"

Joyce Court stood behind him and wrung her hands while tears streaked her cheeks.

The woman on the floor resembled Joyce Court but was older, and her face had a hardness the younger one's had not.

"She's dead, she's been killed," Wallace Binnett said incredulously, raising his white face towards Spade. When Binnett moved his head Spade could see the round hole in the woman's tan dress over her heart and the dark stain which was rapidly spreading below it.

Spade touched Joyce Court's arm. "Police, emergency hospital — phone," he said. As she ran towards the stairs he addressed Wallace Binnett: "Who did —"

A voice groaned feebly behind Spade.

He turned swiftly. Through an open doorway he could see an old man in white pajamas lying sprawled across a rumpled bed. His head, a shoulder, an arm dangled over the edge of the bed. His other hand held his throat tightly. He groaned again and his eyelids twitched, but did not open.

Spade lifted the old man's head and shoulders and put them up on the pillows. The old man groaned again and took his hand from his throat. His throat was red with half a dozen bruises. He was a gaunt man with a seamed face that probably exaggerated his age.

A glass of water was on a table beside the bed. Spade put water on the old man's face and, when the old man's eyes twitched again, leaned down and growled softly: "Who did it?"

The twitching eyelids went up far enough to show a narrow strip of bloodshot gray eyes. The old man spoke painfully, putting a hand to his throat again: "A man — he —" He coughed.

Spade made an impatient grimace. His lips almost touched the old man's ear. "Where'd he go?" His voice was urgent.

A gaunt hand moved weakly to indicate the rear of the house and fell back on the bed.

The butler and two frightened female servants had joined Wallace Binnett beside the dead woman in the hallway.

"Who did it?" Spade asked them.

They stared at him blankly.

"Somebody look after the old man," he growled, and went down the hallway.

At the end of the hallway was a rear staircase. He descended two flights and went through a pantry into the kitchen. He saw nobody. The kitchen door was shut but, when he tried it, not locked. He crossed a narrow back yard to a gate that was shut, not locked. He opened the gate. There was nobody in the narrow alley behind it.

He sighed, shut the gate, and returned to the house.

Spade sat comfortably slack in a deep leather chair in a room that ran across the front second story of Wallace Binnett's house. There were shelves of books and the lights were on. The window showed outer darkness weakly diluted by a distant street lamp. Facing Spade, Detective Sergeant Polhaus — a big, carelessly shaven, florid man in dark clothes that needed pressing — was sprawled in another leather chair; Lieutenant Dundy — smaller, compactly built, square-faced — stood with legs apart, head thrust a little forward, in the center of the room.

Spade was saying: ". . . and the doctor would only let me talk to the old man a couple of minutes. We can try it again when he's rested a little, but it doesn't look like he knows much. He was catching a nap and he woke up with somebody's hands on his throat dragging him around the bed. The best he got was a one-eyed look at the fellow choking him. A big fellow, he says, with a soft hat pulled down over his eyes, dark, needing a shave. Sounds like Tom." Spade nodded at Polhaus.

The detective sergeant chuckled, but Dundy said, "Go on," curtly.

Spade grinned and went on: "He's pretty far gone when he hears Mrs. Binnett scream at the door. The hands go away from his throat and he hears the shot and just before passing out he gets a flash of the big fellow heading for the rear of the house and Mrs. Binnett tumbling down on the hall floor. He says he never saw the big fellow before."

"What size gun was it?" Dundy asked.

"Thirty-eight. Well, nobody in the house is much more help. Wallace and his sister-in-law, Joyce, were in her room, so they say, and didn't see anything but the dead woman when they ran out, though they think they heard something that could've been somebody running downstairs — the back stairs.

"The butler — his name's Jarboe — was in here when he heard the scream and shot, so he says. Irene Kelly, the maid, was down on the ground floor, so she says. The cook, Margaret Finn, was in her room — third floor back — and didn't even hear anything, so she says. She's deaf as a post, so everybody else says. The back door and gate were unlocked, but are supposed to be kept locked, so everybody says. Nobody says they were in or around the kitchen or yard at the time." Spade spread his hands in a gesture of finality. "That's the crop."

Dundy shook his head. "Not exactly," he said. "How come you were here?"

Spade's face brightened. "Maybe my client killed her," he said. "He's Wallace's cousin, Ira Binnett. Know him?"

Dundy shook his head. His blue eyes were hard and suspicious.

"He's a San Francisco lawyer," Spade said, "respectable and all that. A couple of days ago he came to me with a story about his uncle Timothy, a miserly old skinflint, lousy with money and pretty well broken up by hard living. He was the black sheep of the family. None of them had heard of him for years. But six or eight months ago he showed up in pretty bad shape every way except financially — he seems to have taken a lot of money out of Australia — wanting to spend his last days with his only living relatives, his nephews Wallace and Ira.

"That was all right with them. 'Only living relatives' meant 'only heirs' in their language. But by and by the nephews began to think it was better to be an heir than to be one of a couple of heirs — twice as good, in fact — and started fiddling for the inside track with the old man. At least, that's what Ira told me about Wallace, and I wouldn't be surprised if Wallace would say the same thing about Ira, though Wallace seems to be the harder up of the two. Anyhow, the nephews fell out, and then Uncle Tim, who had been staying at Ira's, came over here. That was a couple of months ago, and Ira hasn't seen Uncle Tim since, and hasn't been able to get in touch with him by phone or mail.

"That's what he wanted a private detective about. He didn't think Uncle Tim would come to any harm here — oh, no, he went to a lot of trouble to make that clear — but he thought maybe undue pressure was being brought to bear on the old boy, or he was being hornswoggled somehow, and at least being told lies about his loving nephew Ira. He wanted to know what was what. I waited until today, when a boat from Australia docked, and came up here as a Mr. Ames with some important information for Uncle Tim about his properties down there. All I wanted was fifteen minutes alone with him." Spade frowned thoughtfully. "Well, I didn't get them. Wallace told me the old man refused to see me. I don't know."

Suspicion had deepened in Dundy's cold blue eyes. "And where is this Ira Binnett now?" he asked.

Spade's yellow-gray eyes were as guileless as his voice. "I wish I knew. I phoned his house and office and left word for him to come right over, but I'm afraid —"

Knuckles knocked sharply twice on the other side of the room's one door.

The three men in the room turned to face the door.

Dundy called, "Come in."

The door was opened by a sunburned blond policeman whose left hand held the right wrist of a plump man of forty or forty-five in well-fitting gray clothes. The policeman pushed the plump man into the room. "Found him monkeying with the kitchen door," he said.

Spade looked up and said: "Ah!" His tone expressed satisfaction. "Mr. Ira Wallace, Lieutenant Dundy, Sergeant Polhaus."

Ira Binnett said rapidly: "Mr. Spade, will you tell this man that —"

Dundy addressed the policeman: "All right. Good work. You can leave him."

The policeman moved a hand vaguely towards his cap and went away.

Dundy glowered at Ira Binnett and demanded, "Well?"

Binnett looked from Dundy to Spade. "Has something —"

Spade said: "Better tell him why you were at the back door instead of the front."

Ira Binnett suddenly blushed. He cleared his throat in embarrassment. He said: "I — uh — I should explain. It wasn't my fault, of course, but when Jarboe — he's the butler — phoned me that Uncle Tim wanted to see me he told me he'd leave the kitchen door unlocked, so Wallace wouldn't have to know I'd —"

"What'd he want to see you about?" Dundy asked.

"I don't know. He didn't say. He said it was very important."

"Didn't you get my message?" Spade asked.

Ira Binnett's eyes widened. "No. What was it? Has anything happened? What is —"

Spade was moving towards the door. "Go ahead," he said to Dundy. "I'll be right back."

He shut the door carefully behind him and went up to the third floor.

The butler Jarboe was on his knees at Timothy Binnett's door with an eye to the keyhole. On the floor beside him was a tray holding an egg in an egg-cup, toast, a pot of coffee, china, silver, and a napkin.

Spade said: "Your toast's going to get cold."

Jarboe, scrambling to his feet, almost upsetting the coffeepot in his haste, his face red and sheepish, stammered: "I — er — beg your pardon, sir. I wanted to make sure Mr. Timothy was awake before I took this in." He picked up the tray. "I didn't want to disturb his rest if —"

Spade, who had reached the door, said, "Sure, sure," and bent over to put his eye to the keyhole. When he straightened up he said in a mildly complaining tone: "You can't see the bed — only a chair and part of the window."

The butler replied quickly: "Yes, sir, I found that out."

Spade laughed.

The butler coughed, seemed about to say something, but did not. He hesitated, then knocked lightly on the door.

A tired voice said, "Come in."

Spade asked quickly in a low voice: "Where's Miss Court?"

"In her room, I think, sir, the second door on the left," the butler said.

The tired voice inside the room said petulantly: "Well, come on in."

The butler opened the door and went in. Through the door, before the butler shut it, Spade caught a glimpse of Timothy Binnett propped up on pillows in his bed.

Spade went to the second door on the left and knocked. The door was opened almost immediately by Joyce Court. She stood in the doorway, not smiling, not speaking.

He said: "Miss Court, when you came into the room where I was with your brother-in-law you said, 'Wally, that old fool has —' Meaning Timothy?"

She stared at Spade for a moment. Then: "Yes."

"Mind telling me what the rest of the sentence would have been?"

She said slowly: "I don't know who you really are or why you ask, but I don't mind telling you. It would have been 'sent for Ira.' Jarboe had just told me."

"Thanks."

She shut the door before he had turned away.

He returned to Timothy Binnett's door and knocked on it.

"Who is it now?" the old man's voice demanded.

Spade opened the door. The old man was sitting up in bed.

Spade said: "This Jarboe was peeping through your keyhole a few minutes ago," and returned to the library.

Ira Binnett, seated in the chair Spade had occupied, was saying to Dundy and Polhaus: "And Wallace got caught in the crash, like most of us, but he seems to have juggled accounts trying to save himself. He was expelled from the Stock Exchange."

Dundy waved a hand to indicate the room and its furnishings. "Pretty classy layout for a man that's busted."

"His wife has some money," Ira Binnett said, "and he always lived beyond his means."

Dundy scowled at Binnett. "And you really think he and his missus weren't on good terms?"

"I don't think it," Binnett replied evenly. "I know it."

Dundy nodded. "And you know he's got a yen for the sister-in-law, this Court?"

"I don't know that. But I've heard plenty of gossip to the same effect."

Dundy made a growling noise in his throat, then asked sharply: "How does the old man's will read?"

"I don't know. I don't know whether he's made one." He addressed Spade now, earnestly: "I've told everything I know, every single thing."

Dundy said, "It's not enough." He jerked a thumb at the door. "Show him where to wait, Tom, and let's have the widower in again."

Big Polhaus said, "Right," went out with Ira Binnett, and returned with Wallace Binnett, whose face was hard and pale.

Dundy asked: "Has your uncle made a will?"

"I don't know," Binnett replied.

Spade put the next question, softly: "Did your wife?"

Binnett's mouth tightened in a mirthless smile. He spoke deliberately: "I'm going to say some things I'd rather not have to say. My wife, properly, had no money. When I got into financial trouble some time ago I made some property over to her, to save it. She turned it into money without my knowing about it till afterwards. She paid our bills — our living expenses — out of it, but she refused to return it to me and she assured me that in no event — whether she lived or died or we stayed together or were divorced — would I ever be able to get hold of a penny of it. I believed her, and still do."

"You wanted a divorce?" Dundy asked.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"It wasn't a happy marriage."

"Joyce Court?"

Binnett's face flushed. He said stiffly: "I admire Joyce Court tremendously, but I'd've wanted a divorce anyway."

Spade said: "And you're sure — still absolutely sure — you don't know anybody who fits your uncle's description of the man who choked him?"

"Absolutely sure."

The sound of the doorbell ringing came faintly into the room.

Dundy said sourly, "That'll do."

Binnett went out.

Polhaus said: "That guy's as wrong as they make them. And —"

From below came the heavy report of a pistol fired indoors.

The lights went out.

In darkness the three detectives collided with one another going through the doorway into the dark hall. Spade reached the stairs first. There was a clatter of footsteps below him, but nothing could be seen until he reached a bend in the stairs. Then enough light came from the street through the open front door to show the dark figure of a man standing with his back to the open door.

A flashlight clicked in Dundy's hand — he was at Spade's heels — and threw a glaring white beam of light on the man's face. He was Ira Binnett. He blinked in the light and pointed at something on the floor in front of him.

Dundy turned the beam of his light down on the floor. Jarboe lay there on his face, bleeding from a bullet hole in the back of his head.

Spade grunted softly.

Tom Polhaus came blundering down the stairs, Wallace Binnett close behind him. Joyce Court's frightened voice came from farther up: "Oh, what's happened? Wally, what's happened?"

"Where's the light switch?" Dundy barked.

"Inside the cellar door, under these stairs," Wallace Binnett said. "What is it?"

Polhaus pushed past Binnett towards the cellar door.

Spade made an inarticulate sound in his throat and, pushing Wallace Binnett aside, sprang up the stairs. He brushed past Joyce Court and went on, heedless of her startled scream. He was halfway up the stairs to the third floor when the pistol went off up there.

He ran to Timothy Binnett's door. The door was open. He went in.

Something hard and angular struck him above his right ear, knocking him across the room, bringing him down on one knee. Something thumped and clattered on the floor just outside the door.

The lights came on.

On the floor, in the center of the room, Timothy Binnett lay on his back bleeding from a bullet wound in his left forearm. His pajama jacket was torn. His eyes were shut.

Spade stood up and put a hand to his head. He scowled at the old man on the floor, at the room, at the black automatic pistol lying on the hallway floor. He said: "Come on, you old cutthroat. Get up and sit on a chair and I'll see if I can stop that bleeding till the doctor gets here."

The man on the floor did not move.

There were footsteps in the hallway and Dundy came in, followed by the two younger Binnetts. Dundy's face was dark and furious. "Kitchen door wide open," he said in a choked voice. "They run in and out like —"

"Forget it," Spade said. "Uncle Tim is our meat." He paid no attention to Wallace Binnett's gasp, to the incredulous looks on Dundy's and Ira Binnett's faces. "Come on, get up," he said to the old man on the floor, "and tell us what it was the butler saw when he peeped through the keyhole."

The old man did not stir.

"He killed the butler because I told him the butler had peeped," Spade explained to Dundy. "I peeped, too, but didn't see anything except that chair and the window, though we'd made enough racket by then to scare him back to bed. Suppose you take the chair apart while I go over the window." He went to the window and began to examine it carefully. He shook his head, put a hand out behind him, and said: "Give me the flashlight."

Dundy put the flashlight in his hand.

Spade raised the window and leaned out, turning the light on the outside of the building. Presently he grunted and put his other hand out, tugging at a brick a little below the sill. Presently the brick came loose. He put it on the window sill and stuck his hand into the hole its removal had made. Out of the opening, one at a time, he brought an empty black pistol holster, a partially filled box of cartridges, and an unsealed manila envelope.

Holding these things in his hands, he turned to face the others. Joyce Court came in with a basin of water and a roll of gauze and knelt beside Timothy Binnett. Spade put the holster and cartridges on a table and opened the manila envelope. Inside were two sheets of paper, covered on both sides with boldly penciled writing. Spade read a paragraph to himself, suddenly laughed, and began at the beginning again, reading aloud:

" 'I, Timothy Kieran Binnett, being sound of mind and body, do declare

this to be my last will and testament. To my dear nephews, Ira Binnett and Wallace Bourke Binnett, in recognition of the loving kindness with which they have received me into their homes and attended my declining years, I give and bequeath, share and share alike, all my worldly possessions of whatever kind, to wit, my carcass and the clothes I stand in.

" 'I bequeath them, furthermore, the expense of my funeral and these memories: First, the memory of their credulity in believing that the fifteen years I spent in Sing Sing were spent in Australia; second, the memory of their optimism in supposing that those fifteen years had brought me great wealth, and that if I lived on them, borrowed from them, and never spent any of my own money, it was because I was a miser whose hoard they would inherit; and not because I had no money except what I shook them down for; third, for their hopefulness in thinking that I would leave either of them anything if I had it; and, lastly, because their painful lack of any decent sense of humor will keep them from ever seeing how funny this has all been. Signed and sealed this —' "

Spade looked up to say: "There is no date, but it's signed Timothy Kieran Binnett with flourishes."

Ira Binnett was purple with anger, Wallace's face was ghastly in its pallor and his whole body was trembling. Joyce Court had stopped working on Timothy Binnett's arm.

The old man sat up and opened his eyes. He looked at his nephews and began to laugh. There was in his laughter neither hysteria nor madness: it was sane, hearty laughter, and subsided slowly.

Spade said: "All right, now you've had your fun. Let's talk about the killings."

"I know nothing more about the first one than I've told you," the old man said, "and this one's not a killing, since I'm only —"

Wallace Binnett, still trembling violently, said painfully through his teeth: "That's a lie. You killed Molly. Joyce and I came out of her room when we heard Molly scream, and heard the shot and saw her fall out of your room, and nobody came out afterwards."

The old man said calmly: "Well, I'll tell you: it was an accident. They told me there was a fellow from Australia here to see me about some of my properties there. I knew there was something funny about that somewhere" — he grinned — "not ever having been there. I didn't know whether one of my dear nephews was getting suspicious and putting up a game on me or

what, but I knew that if Wally wasn't in on it he'd certainly try to pump the gentleman from Australia about me and maybe I'd lose one of my free boarding houses." He chuckled.

"So I figured I'd get in touch with Ira so I could go back to his house if things worked out bad here, and I'd try to get rid of this Australian. Wally's always thought I'm half-cracked" — he leered at his nephew — "and's afraid they'll lug me off to a madhouse before I could make a will in his favor, or they'll break it if I do. You see, he's got a pretty bad reputation, what with that Stock Exchange trouble and all, and he knows no court would appoint him to handle my affairs if I went screwy — not as long as I've got another nephew" — he turned his leer on Ira — "who's a respectable lawyer. So now I know that rather than have me kick up a row that might wind me up in the madhouse, he'll chase this visitor, and I put on a show for Molly, who happened to be the nearest one to hand. She took it too seriously, though.

"I had a gun and I did a lot of raving about being spied on by my enemies in Australia and that I was going down and shoot this fellow. But she got too excited and tried to take the gun away from me, and the first thing I knew it had gone off, and I had to make these marks on my neck and think up that story about the big dark man." He looked contemptuously at Wallace. "I didn't know he was covering me up. Little as I thought of him, I never thought he'd be low enough to cover up his wife's murderer — even if he didn't like her — just for the sake of money."

Spade said: "Never mind that. Now about the butler?"

"I don't know anything about the butler," the old man replied, looking at Spade with steady eyes.

Spade said: "You had to kill him quick, before he had time to do or say anything. So you slip down the back stairs, open the kitchen door to fool people, go to the front door, ring the bell, shut the door, and hide in the shadow of the cellar door under the front steps. When Jarboe answered the doorbell you shot him — the hole was in the back of his head — pulled the light switch, just inside the cellar door, and ducked up the back stairs in the dark and shot yourself carefully in the arm. I got up there too soon for you; so you smacked me with the gun, chucked it through the door, and spread yourself on the floor while I was shaking pinwheels out of my noodle."

The old man sniffed again. "You're just —"

"Stop it," Spade said patiently. "Don't let's argue. The first killing was

an accident — all right. The second couldn't be. And it ought to be easy to show that both bullets, and the one in your arm, were fired from the same gun. What difference does it make which killing we can prove first-degree murder on? They can only hang you once." He smiled pleasantly. "And they will."

A MINUTE MYSTERY

The Case of the Libyan Manhunt *by Roy Post and Austin Ripley*

Over after-dinner coffee, the genial Professor recounted several of his African experiences during the early part of the war.

"I was keenly interested in observing first hand the methods employed in ferreting out criminals on the desert," he began. "Consequently when Captain Whitside of British Intelligence in Cairo invited me to accompany him on a camel trek into the Libyan desert, I enthusiastically accepted. The wanted man was a fanatical Mohammedan, Sidi Jedid, notorious murderer and now Italian spy.

"I was amazed at the incredibly keen observational powers of the British Captain. He read from those shifting sands messages wholly obscured from me. Unerringly and grimly he directed our little corps over completely trackless wastes. Late on the fourth day, shortly after we passed a rude cross over a freshly made grave, he said, 'We'll soon be up with the beggars!'

"He was right. Within two hours we came upon a Moslem party camped about an oasis. A fierce looking Arab greeted us sorrowfully.

"They had found their brother, Sidi Jedid, lying dead in the desert, shot by some Fascist dog. Was it to be wondered that they grieved?

"Upon inquiry we learned they had buried Sidi Jedid in the grave we had passed — the more quickly to seek his Italian murderers and avenge his death!

"Calling on Allah and the Prophet to bring a thousand curses on the head of their beloved brother's assassin, they started to leave when Whitside shouted, 'Dog of a dog, you lie!'

"Five minutes later," Fordney concluded, "Whitside had his man."

"But how," asked a guest, "did Whitside know *the Arab was lying?" And that's* our *question to* you.

Solution

Not all the gold in Mussolini's dwindling coffers would induce any true Mohammedan to mark the grave of a brother with a cross.

During the last meeting of the Baker Street Irregulars, each member and guest was mysteriously provided with a blank sheet of paper and a pencil. This occurred midway between two sacred and ritualistic toasts concerning which no more can be said. Then Mr. Christopher Morley — that grand man — proceeded to give certain oral instructions and definitions with a view to determining the answer to a question that has long perplexed the inner circle. Of this question and answer, Mr. Morley tells more below, as only Mr. Morley can. Suffice it to say (in your Editor's cryptic fashion) that it was only with the greatest of difficulty and the most persistent of coaxing that your Editor finally persuaded Mr. Morley to allow this "irregular" printing of the Mycroft Magic Square, heretofore unknown to the outside world; and thus reveal to the public that stupendous secret which until now has been shrouded in mystery — an esoteric and cabalistic rite performed only once before, and then within the time-honored walls of the Murray Hill Hotel, New York City, on January 9th, in the year of our Lord 1942. . . .

THE MYCROFT MAGIC SQUARE

by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

You are of course familiar with the theory, advanced by some learned men — Father Ronald Knox, for instance, and (less vigorously) our good friend the late Archie Macdonell — that Mycroft and Moriarty were in cahoots; or even the same person. (The problem of the Colonel Moriarty who was stationmaster in the West of England I reject: this was merely Dr. Watson's muddled misunderstanding of the overheard remark that Colonel Moriarty was "stationed" in the W. of England — perhaps at Weston-super-Mare's Nest).

Wishing to test the matter I applied myself to a magic square of 64 cells. Why 64? Because Sherlock was 64 when he finally retired from any kind of investigations, at the end of the First Great War.

Trusting to automatic writing and subconscious impulse, I began filling in the square. I began by writing the word MYCROFT both horizontally and vertically, since my purpose was to test whether Mycroft was really on the level and equally an upright fellow. Thus:

M	Y	C	R	O	F	T	1
Y	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
C	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
R	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
O	23	24	25	26	27	28	29
F	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
T	37	38	39	40	41	42	43
44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51

Then, filling in the other cells in the usual order, *moving from left to right and downward through all vacancies*, I wrote:

Mycroft's surname (one word of six letters, in boxes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6).

Then: Mycroft's brother's first name and initial of surname (one word of eight letters, in boxes 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14; and initial in box 15).

Then: the name of the work in which the crucial clue was found (two words of nine letters and seven letters respectively, in boxes 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 (giving, of course, its own cell to the apostrophe!), and 25; and the second word in boxes 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32).

Then: the title and initial of surname of Sherlock's biographer (abbreviated title in boxes 33 and 34; and initial in box 35).

Then: Sherlock's obvious comment (one word of ten letters, in boxes 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, and 45).

And finally: the first word of the title of the story in which the truth becomes known (six letters, in boxes 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, and 51).

* * *

EDITOR'S QUERY: Can you solve the Mycroft Magic Square?

(*Answer on following page.*)

ANSWER

M	Y	C	R	O	F	T	H
Y	O	L	M	E	S	S	H
C	E	R	L	O	C	K	H
R	W	H	I	T	A	K	E
O	R	'	S	A	L	M	A
F	N	A	C	D	R	W	E
T	L	E	M	E	N	T	A
R	Y	V	A	L	L	E	Y

If Mycroft was on the level and an upright fellow (as demonstrated), could he possibly be one and the same as, or even in cahoots with, Moriarty, who is now proved an obviously oblique fellow?

The defense rests. . . .

"O"

Excerpt from letter to the Editor

Dear Ellery:

I still fear you overrate the merit of the Mycroft Magic Square: it was put together to amuse a young nephew who is somewhat stricken with sherlockophily. . . .

C. M.

Excerpt from letter to Mr. Morley

Dear Chris:

I dissent vigorously.

Any new light thrown on the Sacred Writings — especially so important a revelation as this one, which in one diagonal swoop not only establishes Mycroft's innocence but clears his good name for all time — such new light, I repeat, is of vital interest to all Devotees of Doyle and Sycophants of Sherlock.

If you are still fearful, good Chris, you may henceforth consider the Editor and all readers of this magazine new members of your family-circle — "nephews," equally afflicted with that incurable malady, "sherlockophily."

Your steadfast admirer,

E. Q.

. . . if you enjoyed this issue let us enter a subscription for you so that ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will be delivered to your home regularly. These days copies of EQMM are disappearing from the newsstands faster and faster and with the curtailment of raw materials the best way to make sure of getting your copy every other month as published is to fill in and mail the coupon below.

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Q3–43

(Continued from other side)

Somebody must remember seeing you—with the lady in the orange hat.

The bartender. Sure, he saw you . . . but nobody was with you. The cab driver. He remembered picking you up and taking you to the restaurant . . . but you were alone. The headwaiter saw you, too. But he had only served one person, he said. There it was, on your table reservation and on your check. Dinner for ONE!

NOBODY — not the doorman, or the ticket-taker, or the usher, or the trap-drummer in the theatre pit band — had seen her! They remembered you, because you had come in after curtain was up. They certainly would have seen a woman in an orange hat. But they swore you were alone! And now you're starting down that "last mile"—with the electric chair staring you in the face!

YOU'LL really cheer as the impact of this thrilling, suspense-packed new mystery, PHANTOM LADY, hits you squarely between the eyes! WHAT A BOOK! PHANTOM LADY is brand new. The author's name is brand new. The book is selling everywhere for $2.00. But we don't want to sell it to you—we want to give it to you. Yes, GIVE it to you — to show detective book fans the *kind* of stories they will receive from the Detective Book Club.

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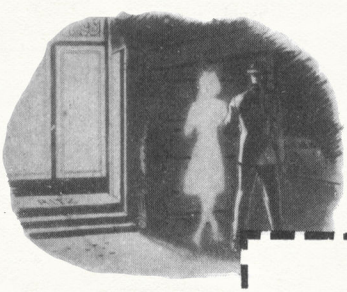

Out into the night went Scott Henderson with a phantom lady! For when he went on trial for murder, bartenders, cab drivers, waiters, doormen SWORE they had seen him that night—but he had been ALONE!

Do you realize that about 300 new detective books are published every year? You can't read them all. It's hard to find the best. But there's one *sure* guide. If a mystery is by an author like Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, Rex Stout, R. Austin Freeman, Frank Gruber, or Frances and Richard Lockridge, it's *sure* to be good! All of *these* and many other famous top-notch writers have had their books selected by the Editorial Committee of the DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB.

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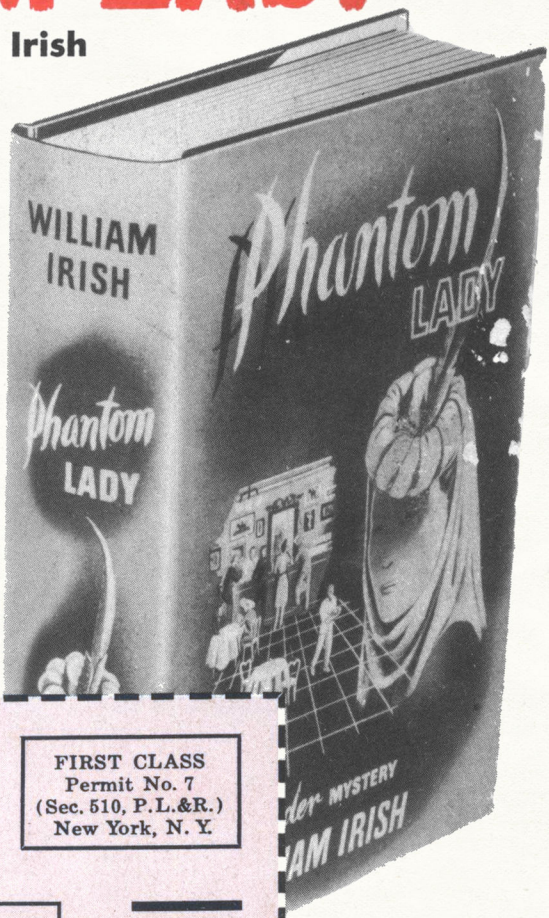

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