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One of the key books of detective short stories is THE SINGING BONE *(1912) in which R. Austin Freeman invented what is now called the "inverted" detective story. In the conventional detective story, according to Dr. Freeman, the interest is made to focus on the all-important question: "Who did it?" The identity of the criminal is kept a secret to the very end of the story, and its disclosure (still quoting Dr. Freeman) forms the final climax.*

Dr. Freeman, a man of true scientific curiosity, posed to himself the interesting question: "Would it be possible to write a detective story in which from the outset the reader was taken entirely into the author's confidence, was made an actual witness of the crime and furnished with every fact that could possibly be used in its detection?" In other words, reverse the usual procedure: let the reader know everything, the detective nothing. Would the reader, in possession of all the facts, be able to foresee in advance how the detective would solve the mystery? Or would the reader be so occupied with the crime and its concomitant drama that he would overlook the evidence and still be dependent on the detective to find out how the case could be cracked?

Dr. Freeman was a courageous craftsman thus to challenge a technique in which deliberately he threw overboard the elements of puzzle, surprise, and suspense; but his dangerous and noble experiment was an historic success. The Freeman "inverted" detective stories were a monumental contribution to the development of the genre, and from them stem some of the great modern masterpieces of crime writing — especially those purely psychological studies in which the reader follows step by step the terrifying events leading up to the tragedy.

In the field of the contemporary detective short story the most brilliant manipulator of the "inverted" method is, in your Editor's opinion, Roy Vickers. Perhaps you haven't thought of Mr. Vickers's Department of Dead Ends tales as "inverted" detective stories. Yet they are — in the purest tradition of the difficult form originated by Dr. Freeman. Consider: Doesn't Mr. Vickers relate the full case history of his unusual murders — or as Dr. Freeman explained his own innovation: Isn't the first part of each Department of Dead Ends story "a minute and detailed description of the crime, setting forth the antecedents, motives, and all attendant circumstances"? Doesn't the reader of a Vickers story "see the crime committed, know all about the criminal"? Isn't the one small item of evidence (in previous stories, a child's rubber trumpet, a bracelet, a wristwatch) by which the Department of Dead Ends ultimately solves the case always clearly set forth, for the reader to lay hold of and pursue relentlessly to its inevitable catalytic meaning?

The Department of Dead Ends tales are not as deductively conceived

as Dr. Freeman's "inverted" stories; the nature of the evidence is not as scientific or irrefutable. But compared with Dr. Freeman's earlier classics, they are even more gripping in their psychological interest, and they generate a suspense that Dr. Freeman never achieved.

So, with this rather scholarly introduction, we give you the fourth exploit of the Department of Dead Ends to appear in EQMM. Inexorably as fate, "Mean Man's Murder" unfolds the complete background — the situation, the characters, the motive, the modus operandi *of the crime itself. Again only one point, seemingly irrelevant and immaterial, sticks in the craw of the Department of Dead Ends — the little matter of the fishing rod. . . .*

In one respect "Mean Man's Murder" differs from the three earlier Department of Dead Ends tales — "The Rubber Trumpet" (EQMM, November 1943), "The Man Who Murdered in Public" (EQMM, July 1944), and "The Case of the Merry Andrew" (EQMM, May 1945). The three previous stories were reprints — that is, they had had prior magazine publication before appearing in EQMM. But "Mean Man's Murder" is a brand-new story, written especially for your Editor and for the readers of EQMM. Yes, we have asked Mr. Vickers to make "Mean Man's Murder" the first of a new series — so keep your fingers crossed!

MEAN MAN'S MURDER

by ROY VICKERS

After his conviction most of the comic miser stories were pinned on to Cecil Arnoth, with the humor left out and a spice of malice added. This was to reassure the public, who felt a twinge of uneasiness at his execution without normal trial.

As a matter of fact, lots of men have the money fear just as badly as Cecil Arnoth had it. These are the men who ingeniously dodge their call in a round of drinks, knowing the other men know they are dodging, and suffering agonies of self-contempt — and self-contempt is one of the ingredients in the make-up of the murderer.

The circumstances of Cecil Arnoth's crime were unusual, in that, within twenty-four hours of its perpetration, every fact was known of which a judge and jury could take cognizance.

At approximately five in the morning on October 12th, 1934, a constable on patrol noticed a sedan car parked in Carmoddel Lane, off Hampstead Heath

— that stretch of almost wild country within half a dozen miles of Central London. In the back of the car he found the dead bodies of a man, with no overcoat, and a woman, in a fur coat. The bodies bore no obvious signs of violence.

By seven o'clock the bodies, and the car and its contents, had yielded a great deal of positive information. The two had died of poisoning. Subsequent investigation established the poison as galvanium taken in whisky and water, in the ratio of 1.7 of galvanium to 5 of whisky and water. This chemical proportion left no doubt that they had been poisoned by the same draught. Clinging to an apparently empty medicine bottle on the floor of the car was a solution of galvanium and whisky also in the ratio of 1.7 to 5. Moreover, in the dead man's flat there was found, in a pint milk-jug, a few drops of the same solution in the same proportions. A small amount of the liquid spilled on the sideboard of the flat was in very nearly the same proportion. The slight difference could be ascribed to evaporation. It was therefore practically, though not theoretically, certain that the draught had been prepared in the flat of the deceased man, transferred in whole or in part to the medicine bottle, and subsequently consumed by the deceased.

These chemical facts were not available until the following day. But within the first few hours the medical men were able to add the information that the woman could not have been in the car at the moment of death. On the other hand, the man might or might not have died in the car.

Papers found on the man showed that his name was Hugh Trainder, that he was a commercial traveller in varnish, and that the car was his own. In his flat in Kilburn a first search had revealed in the breast pocket of a light overcoat a check for three hundred pounds signed by Cecil Arnoth — and a small suitcase later identified as the property of the dead woman, containing a nightdress, dressing gown, slippers, tooth-brush and an underslip. A wardress said she thought it must have been packed by a man who did not know much about women.

A letter in the dead woman's handbag, which included a payment slip from H. M. Commissioners in Lunacy, showed that she was the wife of a certified lunatic named Rawlings, but that she was living as Mrs. Cecil Arnoth at Yolsum, Backe's Way, Golders Green — that is, about a mile and a quarter from Carmoddel Lane.

"Arnoth! I remember that name," said Borns, the local superintendent. "Came here about a year ago. There was a piece about him in the local paper saying he had invented some kind of automobile engine — young man with a great future and all that. Looks like a love triangle to me."

It looked like a love triangle to nearly everybody — but the catch lay in the word 'love', for it was soon established that, at the time of her

death, neither man had been in love with the woman in any deeply romantic sense.

Borns, accompanied by an assistant, called at Yolsum at eight-thirty — a five-roomed house with built-in garage, standing by itself in half an acre, in a quiet country-like road. A middle-aged maid-servant showed them into the dining room. In a few minutes Cecil Arnoth, in his dressing gown, burst into the room and shattered all the conventions of a police enquiry.

"I can guess why you're here. Hugh Trainder and the woman who was living with me as my wife! Are they dead?"

"Well, yes, I'm sorry to say they are," muttered Borns, "but what made you think they were dead, Mr. Arnoth?"

"You! Your uniform! Besides, Trainder admitted he had had too many drinks to be able to drive his own car. He began by letting me drive for him — as far as Mrs. Birchman's. Then he insisted on taking over. How did the accident happen?"

"They were not killed in a road accident. They were found poisoned in Trainder's car — in Carmoddel Lane up by the Heath."

Borns expected some emotional reaction, but Arnoth merely looked indifferent. At thirty-one he possessed an unusual power of detachment, in contrast to his general air of alertness. Iron-gray hair made him look like a vigorous man of forty. His voice was of pleasing timbre, and a queer little mannerism in his intonation suggested that his hearer had already expressed agreement with him.

"You don't seem very surprised, Mr. Arnoth?" suggested Borns.

"Yes — and no. She was the hysterical type — might do anything. But he — yes, that does surprise me. He wasn't a nervy man. One just can't see him taking poison."

They talked for a couple of hours. Eventually, a statement was produced which Arnoth signed. Shorn of its formalities and repetitions it read as follows:

"My association with Mabel Rawlings was known to all our friends, who treated us as if we were legally married. For the last six months our relationship was one of domestic friendliness only. My work absorbed all my time and energy and I necessarily neglected her. Last night I was working at home in my study on the first floor. It was the maid's evening out. Mabel was going to a party given by our friend, Mrs. Birchman. At about eight, Mabel came into my room, wearing a fur coat. She said that Trainder had obtained it on approval for her and that it could be bought very cheaply at three hundred pounds. I said that was a large sum for us to pay for a garment and that I must think it over. Our conversation was interrupted by one of the two mechanics I employ in my experimental workshop. He had been working overtime and wished to consult me. I admitted him myself because it was our maid's evening out. I returned to

my study in about ten minutes. Mabel now spoke to me angrily about my hesitation to buy the fur coat. A quarrel developed and she said: 'All right, if you won't buy it for me, Hugh Trainder will. I am walking out of your house now and I am going to his, and I shall stay there and I shan't ever come back to you.' I believe those to be the exact words she used. She left the house at once, wearing the fur coat. A few minutes later, Mrs. Birchman asked me on the telephone why Mabel had not come and I told her that Mabel had left me for Trainder. But at about nine Mabel returned, and apologized for her ill temper. She said it was nonsense about her going to Trainder. She had only said it to annoy me. She was very ashamed of herself, so to comfort her I said that I would buy the coat for her. While we were still talking about this, Trainder himself came — about nine-fifteen. Mabel had been crying and said she would come down later when she had made her face up.

"Trainder asked me rather abusively why I had told Mrs. Birchman on the telephone that Mabel had joined him. I think he had been drinking, though he could not be called drunk. I gave him a check for three hundred pounds and he gave me a receipt. Then he said he wanted to know how he stood and he must see Mabel in my presence and I went upstairs and brought her down with me. Trainder said: 'Mabel, did you keep the promise you made to me last May that you would tell Arnoth that you and I were lovers?' I was surprised and a bit angry. Mabel was overcome and said she would leave the house at once. Trainder said he supposed she must come with him. From the way he said it I thought that he was hoping she would refuse. But Mabel accepted his offer, said she would leave at once, and that she would not even wait to pack a handbag for the night. She said she would come for her clothes the next day when I was out. So I went upstairs and put some of her clothes in a small bag which I gave to Trainder. As I did so I said: 'Trainder, you are not fit to drive,' and he answered: 'Quite right, I am a bit upset and no wonder!' So I said I would drive them to his flat and on the way back I would look in at Mrs. Birchman's party and tell her what we had decided. So I drove his car. But when we approached Mrs. Birchman's, which was on the way, he said he felt better and insisted that I step out. So I got out and spent a few minutes at Mrs. Birchman's party. This was about ten-thirty o'clock. I was home again about eleven."

Throughout the subsequent investigation by Scotland Yard, not a single detail of Arnoth's story was shaken. In fact, every detail was strengthened. Merle Birchman, in the Coroner's court, revealed her dislike of Cecil Arnoth. She said vindictively that he had neglected Mabel and in that sense was responsible for the tragedy. It served him right that Mabel had deceived him, if indeed there had been any deceit in the matter, which

she doubted. It was small wonder that Trainder, who was by nature an open man, had become disgusted with himself and Mabel, as men always do in a furtive love affair. Trainder had admitted that he no longer desired to elope with Mabel, though everyone knew he had been in love with her for years! In short, while wishing to blacken Arnoth's character, she gave backbone to the theory that Trainder, morally committed to a woman he no longer desired, had staged a suicide pact — a theory rammed home by the Government analyst's evidence of the galvanium traces found in Trainder's flat.

The logic of the case, as revealed by police investigation and the Coroner's inquest, was simple enough. Medical evidence declared that death must have occurred within the extreme limits of nine o'clock at night and one o'clock in the morning. Mabel had died outside the car in a prone position. Microscopic examination of her shoes and the fur coat yielded only the unhelpful statement that if she had died on Hampstead Heath, she must have been lying on a rug. The doctors could not say whether man or woman had died first. The two might have agreed to take the poison draught together. Trainder might have waited until she was dead and then carried her to the car; or the two might have taken the poison elsewhere, their bodies being placed in the car after death by a third person, who might or might not have administered the poison to both. But the latter assumption was rendered fantastic by the evidence of time and place.

"Taking Mr. Arnoth's house, Yolsum, as a focal point," said the Coroner in his summing up, "you will note that the distance from Yolsum to Mrs. Birchman's house in Hampstead is approximately a mile and a half. Trainder's flat in Kilburn is another two miles onwards in virtually the same direction. Carmoddel Lane, where the bodies were found in Trainder's car, is about two miles from Mrs. Birchman's house, and about three and a half from Trainder's flat and from Yolsum. (Visualize a triangle, with Yolsum, Trainder's flat and Carmoddel Lane at the three points, and the Birchman house almost midway between Yolsum and Trainder's flat.) As to times, Mr. Arnoth has told us that he left his house, in company with Trainder and Mabel Rawlings, himself driving Trainder's car, at about twenty past ten. A few minutes later, at ten-thirty, Mr. Arnoth was in Mrs. Birchman's house, where he remained for five or ten minutes. Half an hour later — about the time it would take an ordinary person to walk that distance — he was in his own house saying goodnight to his cook-housekeeper. As far as you are concerned, Mr. Arnoth ceases to be of interest after ten-thirty.

"Of Trainder we know that he arrived at Mrs. Birchman's party at about nine. Here he received information which decided him to go at once to Yolsum, where he arrived about nine-fifteen. He received the check

for three hundred pounds — in the circumstances, a very generous act on the part of Mr. Arnoth — and subsequently created an emotional scene which is doubtless the pivot of this tragedy. He was thus in Mr. Arnoth's company, until about ten-thirty. We have no direct evidence of his subsequent movements. But we have two items of circumstantial evidence indicating that Trainder drove on to his flat. One item is the suitcase of the deceased woman, packed by Mr. Arnoth before ten-thirty, which was found in Trainder's flat. The other item is the traces of poison found in the milk-jug and on the sideboard of Trainder's flat. Is it conceivable that Trainder mixed the poison *before* going to Mrs. Birchman's party? Remember that he was unaware, until he arrived at that party, that a crisis was impending in his relationship with Mabel Rawlings. He was procuring a fur coat for her, which suggests at least that he assumed she would continue to exist. True, we know nothing of the movements of the two deceased after they left Trainder's flat — but for our present purpose we do not need to know. If you are satisfied that at some time later than ten-thirty, Trainder, probably in a semi-drunken and hysterical state, mixed the fatal draught and subsequently administered it to the woman — with or without her consent — and then took a dose himself, your duty is plain."

The jury obediently returned a verdict of murder and suicide against Hugh Trainder, adding the rider that there was no evidence to show how Trainder had obtained possession of the galvanium.

As we now know that Cecil Arnoth actually murdered them both, we have to admit at this stage that the crime, as a crime, had the quality of perfection. By virtue of its loose ends — by the apparently inconsequent behavior of the victims — it imitated the meandering planlessness of most genuine suicide pacts. Moreover, Arnoth's alibi was realistic because, unlike most fake alibis, it did not prove that it was physically impossible for him to be guilty. It merely suggested that it was overwhelmingly improbable that Cecil Arnoth, within fifty-five minutes of his appearance at Mrs. Birchman's party at ten-thirty, could have made contact with the two persons, induced them to take poison, disposed of the bodies, and returned home on foot from Carmoddel Lane.

The Coroner had made much of Cecil Arnoth's generosity. Those who knew him to be an almost comically mean man laughed when they read that eulogy. Arnoth did not care.

After the verdict Arnoth closed his experimental workshop for a month and took a holiday, during which he visited engineering exhibitions at Manchester, Rotterdam and Lyons.

So far, we see him as a cardboard figure, giving all the help he could to the police, behaving as any decent fellow without a spark of individuality would behave. The first act stamped with his true personality occurred

after the inquest, just before he went on holiday — the little matter of the fishing rod and the creel.

A street dealer brought to Scotland Yard a fishing rod and creel which he had bought in the street for eight and sixpence, though the rod was worth its purchase price of three pounds and the creel was worth about ten shillings. The dealer believed the goods to have been stolen, and his purpose was to curry favor with the police.

Scotland Yard traced the rod to a water-bailiff in a Devonshire village who sold it to Cecil Arnoth some fifteen months previously. Arnoth had left rod and creel in the village by mistake and the bailiff had not known Arnoth's address until it appeared in the newspaper account of the Coroner's inquest. Who then had sold these goods for a mere few shillings to the street dealer? The dealer was able to answer the question by giving a fairly exact description of Arnoth himself.

That a prosperous inventor should sell goods at a knockout price to a street dealer was astonishing as a social incongruity; but it certainly could not be used to prove that Arnoth had been in unlawful possession of galvanium, still less that he had feloniously administered it. Yet the Arnoth case had annoyed Scotland Yard because they had failed to discover where the galvanium had been procured. So rod and creel drifted to the Department of Dead Ends.

As soon as he had time, Detective Inspector Rason ran down to Devonshire and interviewed Abel Ridding, the water-bailiff. A week later he was calling upon Cecil's aunt, a charming old lady who lived in Scotland. Believing him to be a friend of Cecil's she told him many things that had as little, or as much, to do with the death of Mabel Rawlings and Hugh Trainder as had the rod and creel. Among other things she showed him a letter written more than twenty years previously, from a schoolmaster at Brighton.

In 1913, Cecil Arnoth, a bright spirited boy of ten, was at one of the more expensive preparatory schools at Brighton. On June 19th his mother made the hour's train journey from London to see him, as she was accustomed to do every week or so. Florence Arnoth was a charming creature of her period — plump, pretty, a devoted but inefficient wife and mother, unselfish, sweet-tempered, feather-brained, with a veiled contralto, which gave a wistful huskiness to her speaking voice. She was probably the first non-flier in Europe to be killed by an airplane; for two days later a wing-tip caught her at a "circus" held at Brooklands Racing Track.

We know that June 19th was one of the few wet days in an almost tropical summer. Florence took the boy to tea at the Metropole Hotel. From the evidence of a hospital nurse, uncovered without her knowledge some twenty years later, we can reconstruct the events of that fateful afternoon. We can even assert that,

at the moment when Florence passed her son a couple of coins, the hotel orchestra was playing *Alexander's Ragtime Band*, which had just crossed the Atlantic.

Florence had found out that the boy had come to the end of his pocket money. She opened her purse. Golden sovereigns, half sovereigns, a jumble of silver and bronze! She hesitated, wondering what to give him. She had given him a sovereign last time, but she couldn't quite remember how long ago. Her husband would often tell her, between kisses, that she was a darling little muddlehead with money. She didn't want Cecil to "inherit" her own weaknesses. Better not give him a sovereign this time. She took out two half crowns.

" 'Scrambled eggs in the new mown hay,' " she hummed. "You're just a little bit of a muddlehead with money, aren't you, Cecil? You're old enough now to learn to manage money properly. Money is important, you know. You wouldn't like Daddy to have to go on earning money for you after you're a grown-up man, would you? Here are five shillings for you. See how much of that you have left when I come down for the Old Boys' Day, next week."

Now even in those days five shillings was a meagre allowance for a schoolboy of the prosperous middle classes. But Cecil's mother could do no wrong. The faint huskiness of her voice had robbed the reproof of harshness, making it the more potent.

"I'll be careful, Mother. You'll see! I won't spend any of it! I'll have the money in my hand all ready for you."

One imagines that Florence often made the grown-up version of that speech to her husband. She was not to suspect that the boy meant it — and with a rather formidable intensity.

That evening, in the five minutes "rot-about" before dormitory, the thirteen-year-old captain of the school was occupying himself in one of his more tiresome administrative duties.

"Ah, there you are, young Arnoth! I want a bob from you for the groundsmen's tip on Old Boys' Day."

"Leave me out!" said Cecil. "I don't see why we should tip them for doing their work."

"Don't be an ass — everybody else is subscribing. You aren't *mean* are you, young Arnoth? You've got the oof. Your mater was down this afternoon."

Now small boys know each other's affairs. One small boy, unctuously defending the indefensible, piped up:

"His mater only gave him five bob."

"Then his mater must be as mean as he is."

The other boys laughed — laughed, as it seemed to Cecil, at his mother's meanness. Like a maddened young animal he rushed in — tried to fight them all at once — did enough damage to the thirteen-year-old boy to necessitate a mopping up by the matron. There was no disciplinary action. But next term, in a letter dated November 10th, the Head wrote a very thoughtful and sympathetic letter to

Cecil's father, suggesting his removal from the school.

"*He does not get on well with his schoolmates. He has a reputation for personal meanness which the efforts of my staff and myself have failed to dislodge from the minds of the other boys. I think the truth is that the poor lad has not yet recovered from the tragic death of his mother and that the shock has made him, in some queer way, afraid to spend his pocket money.*"

The record picks him up again at Oxford at the age of eighteen, where he held two scholarships, one in mathematics, the other in chemistry. Socially, something went wrong at Oxford, though he gained some popularity as a footballer. At the end of his first year, with his father's consent, he resigned his scholarships and entered himself as a non-resident student of London University, where he took a degree in Engineering.

He spent most of his vacations with his aunt Elsie, his mother's sister who lived in Scotland and lavished affection upon him. His relations with his father seem to have been unnaturally cold, though there was never any quarrel. Thus in 1926, at the age of twenty-three, he wrote thanking his father for past generosity and announcing that, as he had obtained a junior position with Rolls Royce, he would, in future, support himself. (*You wouldn't like Daddy to have to go on earning money for you after you're a grown-up man.*) His father urged him to accept an allowance, at least for a few years, but Cecil replied that he thought he had a gift for managing money and would be quite comfortable on his salary. This is noteworthy, for he was spending more than half his salary on private laboratory work, extending the Dalston Experiment of treating iron alloys with galvanium.

Cecil soon discovered that, to build a career, he must mix with other men likely to be directly or indirectly useful. From this period come a crop of stories about dodging the round of drinks and leaving the other fellow to pay the taxi — of dinner invitations and other acts of hospitality accepted and not returned.

Nevertheless, he was succeeding. For when Rolls Royce decided that it would not suit them to develop the Arnoth engine he obtained an introduction to an American director on a pleasure tour, who promptly offered to take both the engine and its inventor back to the United States. But while preparations were being made, the American, with the flimsiest excuse, withdrew that part of his offer which concerned the person of Cecil Arnoth and instead substantially increased his offer for the patent rights only. Cecil accepted with every appearance of satisfaction.

The price was higher than he would have dared to ask. In human terms it meant that the American was paying quite a considerable amount in order to avoid foisting Cecil Arnoth on his colleagues. Cecil, who was anything but a fool, understood this — and the understanding gave him a nervous

breakdown. Before a month had passed, melancholia had gripped him and he used some of his stock of galvanium in his whisky. By the merest chance — one is bound to say an unlucky chance — a medical acquaintance happened to butt in. Just in time — for a large dose of galvanium will kill almost like a knife thrust. He saved Cecil's life by a margin of seconds, put him in a nursing home, and threw a smoke-screen round the attempt to commit suicide.

In the nursing home, during the bad period, Cecil raved about an American director demanding a shilling subscription for Old Boys' Day under threat of letting the United States know that Cecil Arnoth had a mean mother. At the end of three months the doctor recommended a small hotel in Devonshire and advised him to take up trout fishing.

Cecil was a limp shadow of his former self, convinced that he would never again do any work worth the doing. The weakness — the money fear — lay heavily upon him. With a legacy from his father and the purchase price of his engine he had some twenty-seven thousand pounds. He paid the three hundred demanded by the nursing home without a murmur, but he slunk out of the place without presents to the nurses nor tips to the staff — to the village of Gendon, where he was soon to meet Mabel Rawlings.

He bought a fishing rod from the river bailiff, for three pounds, and a creel for ten shillings. As was customary, he handed his catch to the hotel to be cooked for him. At the end of the week he asked for a rebate on his bill on account of the trout which he had himself supplied. This created an atmosphere which decided him to take rooms with a cottager nearby.

In the weeks that followed, melancholy settled deeply upon him, allied to the fear that he was losing his reason. He had been roughing out a new idea when he was taken ill, and now could barely remember what it was about. His social courage vanished. He became sullen and shifty, avoiding human contacts.

With him was the little tin deed-box in which he kept his intimately personal effects. Three letters from his mother; three studio photographs of her and five snapshots; a litter of chemical and engineering notes; and the small phial of galvanium, enough to poison the whole village, ample for the elimination of Cecil Arnoth.

He would take out the phial, stare at it for an hour, then shrink away at the memory of the painful treatment to which the doctor had subjected him. His sense of failure was so acute that he was certain he would bungle the second attempt to kill himself. Each time he put the phial back in the deed-box he sank deeper in the morass of self-contempt.

One evening he was passing the hotel. The window of the little office was open and through it he heard a woman's voice:

"I am surprised and hurt that you are taking this attitude. I have told

you that I will wire you the money as soon as I get home. It's absurd to talk of detaining my luggage!"

Cecil did not take in the words — only the voice. That voice, we may safely say, filled Cecil's world with music. It was as if a ghostly orchestra were thudding out the forgotten melody, *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. In the fraction of a second he remembered the whole of the new idea on which he had been working. He forgave the American for paying for the right to be rid of Cecil Arnoth.

The landlord was saying something rude to the woman. Cecil could not see. Cecil dropped the fishing rod on the side of the road — he would never need that boring instrument again — dropped the half-filled creel on top of it and strode into the hotel office.

Scrambled eggs in the new mown hay.

"It's all right about your luggage," he said to the girl. "I'll pay your bill. I have the money in my hand all ready for you."

We are concerned with Cecil Arnoth, not as a lover but as a murderer. It will suffice to say that Mrs. Mabel Rawlings was about his own age. She was liberally curved and rather more than tolerably good looking. Her dress just escaped shabbiness. For the rest, she was sweet-tempered, unselfish, feather-brained, and she had a veiled contralto voice. She was trained to no occupation and lived in a boarding house in London on the trifling residue of the income of the lunatic husband — from whom, in those days, the law could offer her no release.

There was nothing furtive in their union. They took each other in the old Roman fashion. That is, they gave a party to a roomful of Mabel's friends and announced that henceforth they would live as man and wife and further pledged themselves to order their lives exactly as if they had gone through the usual ceremony. Hugh Trainder was at this party.

It is equally true that there was nothing furtive about Hugh Trainder. Cecil Arnoth records in his diary in humorous vein: "A cad but rather amusing. When the party was breaking up he drew me aside and said: 'I've been trying for nearly a year to get Mabel. All the same, good luck to you, old fellow! Better tell Mabel not to ask me to your house. As you probably know, she hasn't much sense!' "

The warning, if warning it was, was not taken seriously. Cecil Arnoth, like most murderers, had a fundamental vanity which protected him from sexual jealousy. Moreover, in this brief phase of his life he was utterly confident that he was master of his own destiny. He saw himself not only as the most successful of lovers but also as an engineer who would mould the future of the internal combustion engine — a boast that was not quite so fantastic as it sounds.

For seven months this brilliant but turbulent brain found happiness and rest with Mabel Rawlings. For their honeymoon he took her to the Metropole at Brighton. In the afternoons

they would sit in the lounge. Every day the orchestra would play "by request" the now outmoded *Alexander's Ragtime Band.*

The impact of that trivial little woman's personality can only be likened to a beam of sunlight directed into a dark attic believed to be inhabited by hobgoblins. Her childish babble healed his wounded spirit. Every hour in her company was a fresh step in the direction of normality and the realization of his mechanical genius.

As he had been shabbily dressed at the time of their meeting, Mabel had assumed that he had very little more than she had, though he had obviously saved a bit. She tactfully protested at the extravagance of going to the Metropole when they could have made love just as happily in cheap lodgings. He gave her no details of his financial position because he knew she had no understanding of money. He took her breath away when he rented the five-roomed house in Golders Green, and again when they bought furniture for cash, instead of going to an instalment firm. She was bewildered when he explained: "Until I have made our fortune, we must get value for every penny we spend, including the pennies we spend on pleasure. Shoddy furniture is as bad an investment as a shoddy hotel for a honeymoon. We're going to buy furniture that will always be worth the money we paid for it."

In this period he became able to handle money much as a normal man handles fire — carefully, knowing its special danger — but without fear or compulsional reflex. It cost four hundred pounds in cash to furnish the five-roomed house. Mabel told him she thought she could run it comfortably on three hundred a year. He agreed, with the mental reservation that it would cost five hundred.

They gave a housewarming party to her friends — the same roomful, including Trainder. And thereafter many parties, always including Trainder. More than once, after an evening's work, he called for Mabel at Trainder's flat in Kilburn.

Cecil Arnoth was unable to see any cloud in his own sky. At thirty he was beginning life afresh in ideal circumstances. Six months after his honeymoon he threw himself into the creation of his second engine, Arnoth II.

He took a tiny workshop a mile and a half away at Hendon, engaged a couple of first-class mechanics to work for him in shifts, and a laborer to wait on them. Soon he was putting in a twelve-hour day, including most weekends.

Six months slipped by. Now and again she would ask how he was getting on with his work, and when he replied "Fine," she assumed vaguely that he had had a rise in salary.

This assumption was strengthened by his invariably high spirits, even when he was dog-tired, and his equally invariable readiness to settle the small extra bills that now began to drift in with increasing frequency, bringing their household expenditure up to five

hundred a year, though if she exceeded that rate, even by a few shillings a month, he would make a fuss. He encouraged her to give and attend parties in his absence. In short, while being utterly contented with her, he paid her practically no attention.

Sometimes he would come home early to work on theory in his little study over the kitchen. On October 11th, 1934, he was thus engaged when at seven minutes past eight, Mabel crept into the room.

"I'm going to Merle Birchman's party. I must rush or I shall be late. Mrs. Hall will be back at eleven and will knock on your door to see if you want anything before she goes to bed." He murmured acknowledgement, but as he did not look up, she added: "Do I look nice?"

"As nice as ever and that's a lot," he answered absently. That was the standard exchange when she acquired a new frock. Presently it dawned on him that this time it was not a frock but a coat. "New coat, eh! Splendid!"

"It's a fur coat, Cecil." He knew nothing whatever about women's clothes. "It's rather expensive but it's dirt cheap *really*, because Hugh got it for me on approval from someone's estate who's died or something, and it's really worth more than double, Hugh said, and Hugh knows all about that sort of thing."

"Double what, darling?"

One imagines Mabel taking a deep breath.

"Three hundred pounds, Cecil!" At his blank astonishment she added: "Hugh said it's really an investment and — and would always be worth the money we paid for it."

"Hugh? Oh, Hugh Trainder! He's talking through his hat, darling. How can it be an investment? If it's worth three hundred now, what will it be worth after five years' wear?"

"Maybe you're right. But I thought p'haps you'd like to buy it for me. Hugh said they're not in a hurry for the cash."

"I'd love to buy it for you. But I just can't afford pretty well a year's housekeeping for one garment. You see that, don't you, Mabel?"

Mabel sighed. She had overestimated his "rise in salary." She took her disappointment in good part, like any other wife, and was about to say so, when there was a double knock on the front door, which Cecil recognized as that of his second mechanic. He hurried downstairs.

While Cecil was talking to the mechanic Mabel ran her eye over the writing table.

Prominent were his check book and passbook. She stared at the passbook, unable to believe her eyes. It was some minutes before her consciousness could grasp with certainty that, standing to Cecil Arnoth's credit in the bank, was the sum of twenty-five thousand six hundred and thirty-two pounds, fourteen shillings.

She stood rolling the figures over her tongue in a state of dangerous fury. In mitigation, one must remember that, in Mabel's world, the conception of money as capital — as a

tool of work — did not exist. If you wanted something nice that cost five pounds and you happened to have the five pounds plus a little over for next week's rent, you could afford that nice thing. And with over twenty-five thousand pounds in the bank, Cecil had told her that he could not afford three hundred pounds for her coat.

In a few minutes Cecil came back. She told him she had examined his passbook as if she were telling him that she had found love letters from another woman. She even asked him if he had anything to say for himself. In vain he tried to explain the difference between income and capital. After each explanation she harked back to the starting point.

"Whatever you say, you can't deny that you told me you couldn't afford three hundred pounds for my coat. And all the time you had all those thousands."

"My dear, it's hopeless. We'd better drop it."

"You've *said* it! We'll drop the whole thing, that's what we'll do. I tell you I'm sick of the whole thing. The truth is, Cecil Arnoth, you're a mean man. Mean to the bone, that's what you are! I haven't forgotten what you said about this furniture being an investment. I thought you were being generous at the time, but you've never been generous once in your life. You're mean — mean — *mean!*"

The husky contralto had taken on a cruel shrillness, tearing a dream which for Cecil had become a sterling reality. He knew then that the wound in his brain, unconsciously inflicted by his mother, had not been healed, but only numbed. The hobgoblins crowded back into the attic.

"There's one thing I didn't tell you," the voice shrilled on. "Hugh as good as said he'd buy the coat for me, if you didn't. And I said I wouldn't take it from him, but I'll take it now all right. I'm going to leave you for him, and what's more I'm going now, this minute. I'll come back for my things when you aren't here. And you may as well know that these last few months he and I have been everything to each other."

She left the house, slamming the door behind her. Through the fog that had settled on his brain, Cecil heard the telephone and mechanically answered it.

"Merle here. Sorry to disturb you. What's become of Mabel? She promised to come to my party."

"Mabel?" He could barely focus on the trivial question. "Mabel's gone away."

"How d'you mean — *gone away!* She didn't tell me. Where's she gone to?"

"Trainder," said Cecil, and cut off.

The melancholia was returning in force, numbing his faculties, coursing through his blood and slowing his physical movements. The vanity swung back to the old self-contempt, the inability to stand up to life. He felt as he had felt when the American had paid to be relieved of his com-

pany. He remembered the months in the nursing home, when he hovered on the brink of mental and emotional death — the weary business of trying to recover sanity in Devonshire with the aid of a fishing rod. He would have gone under if he had not been able to fool himself with Mabel's husky voice — with the shadow of his mother. This time there was no hope of a respite — and so on, with the logic of the melancholiac.

The little tin box came out and was unlocked. The phial of galvanium — still containing enough to kill a whole village.

Downstairs to pour out a whisky, diluted with water, half and half. Upstairs again. He had no fear of bungling the job this time. He was alone in the house. And the galvanium would work as quickly as a knife thrust. He tipped into the glass enough to kill three men quickly.

There was nothing to attend to. He had made a will in Mabel's favor, and that could stand. Trainder would benefit, no doubt, but he had no grudge against Trainder. Nothing at all mattered except, in some small degree, the new engine. A skilled engineer would be able to continue the work from the existing plans. He laughed. He would humiliate the American by making him a free gift of the plans. A short letter would be enough.

"Cecil! I'm sorry I was so beastly!"

He had not heard Mabel come in — could not guess that after a walk to the end of the road she had picked up another angle on that twenty-five thousand. He looked at her as if she were a stranger — as indeed, in a sense, she was. His one immediate purpose was to pack her off to that party and write to the American before he forgot — for already he had the melancholiac's fear that his brain was failing.

"That's all right, Mabel — forget it!" With an effort he remembered their quarrel. That fur coat! Well, tomorrow she would learn that she herself had "all those thousands." He said aloud: "You'll be able to buy that fur coat after all." Perceiving her bewilderment he added: "I mean, it can come out of the twenty-five thousand."

"Cecil, you *darling!*" She flung her arms round his neck. What a silly, feather-brained mercenary she was, he thought.

"Of course, what I said about Hugh being my lover was all rot — I said it to make you mad. As if I could look at anybody else when I have you!"

He did not believe her denial. Anyhow, it didn't matter now. If Trainder wanted her, he was welcome. He wished she would stop hugging him. His senses now perceived that she was fat and that she smelt of sickly perfumes like a druggist's store. Fancy being able to fool himself with that! He discovered that he hated her. Not because of Trainder, but because she had tricked his imagination with her husky contralto.

"Somebody rang up who's expecting you at a party," he said.

"That was Merle. I must fly. But I want a drink first."

"I left the bottle downstairs."

"Never mind. I'll pinch half your drink." She raised the tumbler containing the whisky that was heavily loaded with galvanium, put her thumb at a halfway mark. "I won't take more than half, I promise. Here's to the most generous husband in the world!"

So the sordid little cheat was going to kill herself! The melancholiac was amused.

"Cecil, you never have a drink in here by yourself," she said. "Did you have it tonight because you were so miserable?"

He nodded. She was posing with the glass.

"You're rather a pet, Cecil. Only a little boy at heart. I believe that's why I fell for you. It was sort of mother instinct to start with. Why did you fall for me?"

That husky contralto! *Scrambled eggs in the new mown hay!*

"Go on — drink your half," said Cecil Arnoth.

With those words he made himself a murderer.

When she had drunk, he took the glass from her hand. When she died, his melancholy vanished. More accurately, the psychological pendulum swung, and he was seized with the opposite mood of self-inflation. He felt as a knight who had slain a dragon, a man who had conquered all evil. The egomania of the murderer gave him an intense desire to live.

To live now would need a certain amount of carefulness. He must behave exactly as any other husband would behave whose wife had accidentally poisoned herself. Ring for a doctor.

"But I told that confounded Merle woman that Mabel had gone off with Trainder!"

He did not panic. For some minutes he studied his position, as if it had been a problem in engineering — a problem in timing. "*Mrs. Hall will be back at eleven and will knock to see if you want anything!*" He started as a knock sounded. But it was on the front door — and this time it was not his mechanic's knock.

He locked the door of his study behind him. On the way to the stairs he noticed that the light was on in the bedroom. He turned it off. A glance at the hall clock told him it was nine-fifteen. Plenty of time before eleven.

He opened the front door to Hugh Trainder.

"Arnoth, I must see Mabel at once. It's no good saying she's not at home. I saw the light in her room as I came up the path — and that's her bag on the bench there."

Hugh Trainder had been to Merle Birchman's party. Merle had buttonholed him in the hall, and told him about her 'phone conversation with Cecil Arnoth. Trainder, in some agitation, denied that Mabel had joined him.

"Well, it looks as if something has gone off bang," said Merle. "And, dear boy, you and Mabel have been rather

careless lately, haven't you?"

"No reason why we shouldn't be! Arnoth knows all about it — they're sick of each other, and I don't blame him. I believe Mabel is trying to pull a fast one on me. Sorry, but I must see Arnoth at once and have a showdown."

Cecil Arnoth knew from Trainder's manner that he would not leave the house without seeing Mabel. Therefore Trainder must never leave the house. Cecil took him into the dining room, exerting himself to soothe Trainder.

"We had a bit of a row and she slammed out of the house saying she was leaving me. As you had always been perfectly frank with me, old man, I assumed she was going to you. Then she came back and said she was only leg-pulling. I was always an ass with women, or I'd have spotted it."

Trainder was undoubtedly soothed, but he remained firm in his demand to see Mabel.

"She said she had a headache and was going to bed," asserted Cecil. "I'll ask her to slip something on and come down." At the dramatically correct moment, Cecil turned back from the door. "Oh, that fur coat! I promised her I'd let her have it. If we get that settled she's more likely to come down in a good temper. Three hundred, wasn't it? I'll write you a check now."

The check, of course, would never be presented — if Trainder persisted in his desire to see Mabel. The only loss would be the twopenny stamp. Trainder was pleased, for he was drawing a secret commission.

"Thanks, Arnoth." He put the check in the breast pocket of his overcoat. "Look here — Merle didn't altogether believe me when I said Mabel and I hadn't done anything behind your back."

"My dear fellow, of course you haven't! Anyway, I'm not interested in that side of things. Mabel seems comfortable here. And I find her a good housewife who makes it easy for me to work at odd hours. And that's that as far as I'm concerned."

"All the same, I told Merle I'd have a showdown with the three of us. Must do it. Can't afford to be labelled a gigolo — especially with this check of yours in my pocket."

So there was no means of saving Trainder's life.

"Right! I'll tell her to come down."

Arnoth left the room. Upstairs, he unlocked the door of his room. Keeping his eye from straying to the floor, he took up the glass from which Mabel had drunk considerably less than half, then, glass in hand, returned to the dining room.

"She's all smiles and she'll be down in five minutes," he announced. "I was having a drink when you came. I'm going to mix one for you."

"Good. I shall need it."

"By the way, old man, while we're waiting for her, do you mind writing me a receipt?"

Cecil Arnoth produced a sheet of notepaper, lent Trainder his pen. While Trainder was writing the re-

ceipt, Arnoth poured out a whisky, diluted it with water, set it by the side of the glass containing the potion that had killed Mabel. Trainder finished writing the receipt. Arnoth put it in his pocket, then handed Trainder the glass from which Mabel had drunk.

"Well, Arnoth! We're a couple of queer chaps, you and I. Here's to both of us!"

When Trainder drank and exclaimed at the taste, Arnoth took the glass from him and set it down before any was spilled. The poison did not work quite like a knife thrust. Trainder realized that he had been poisoned and attacked Arnoth. But Arnoth secured a grip and was able to pin Trainder into a chair until he was dead.

Nine-twenty-five. Roughly an hour and a half before Mrs. Hall would knock at the door of his study to know if he wanted anything. He must move quickly — more important, he must think quickly. There is a principle in mechanics of localizing strain. Cecil Arnoth, having no desire to live in dread of every policeman, decided to localize the strain of his double murder into the next two hours. He was aware of the truism that the majority of murderers are caught through their excessive precaution in disposing of the body — their unwillingness to leave anything to chance. Cecil Arnoth intended to leave a great deal to chance — to take enormous risks in the next two hours, so that, if he survived the night, he would be free of all fear of conviction.

Trainder's car was parked at the curb. Arnoth ran it into his garage beside his motorcycle. Four minutes.

Into a medicine bottle, from which he removed the label, he poured the remainder of the poison draught from the glass from which both Mabel and Trainder had drunk, and washed the glass. He put the medicine bottle in his breast pocket. Eleven minutes.

He packed a small suitcase with Mabel's clothes, put it in Trainder's car, together with Mabel's handbag. Then came the labor of transferring the bodies to the same car, and covering the faces with a mackintosh. Thirteen minutes.

When he had finished, he changed his collar and shirt, tidied himself up and at four minutes past ten he was driving Trainder's car out of the garage. By eleven minutes past he had covered the three and a half miles to Trainder's flat. He took the first enormous risk when he parked the car — directly under a street lamp — so that a chance passerby could not easily have seen into the interior. He took a second enormous risk when, with Trainder's latchkey, he entered the flat. Here he poured the contents of the medicine bottle into a milk-jug, swilled it round so as to wet the whole of the jug, taking care to spill a little on the sideboard. Then he emptied the poisoned whisky down the sink and flushed the sink. He re-corked the medicine bottle, and when he regained the car, dropped it in the rear of the car.

He was back in the car at twenty-one minutes past ten, and outside Merle Birchman's house in Hampstead, seven minutes later. The risk of leaving the car, though still enormous, was not as great as previously, because the house had an old stable yard, available as a private parking space.

Everyone at the party had been told of Trainder's mission. Cecil Arnoth's arrival without Mabel or Trainder virtually stopped the party. Cecil Arnoth explained: "Little more than a year ago, I told you all that Mabel and I regarded ourselves as married. I therefore felt that I must tell you tonight that we now regard ourselves as divorced. Mabel has joined forces with Hugh Trainder."

"I don't believe it."

He never knew who said that, but he became aware that everyone agreed with the speaker.

"I don't care twopence whether you believe it or not. I have told you for my own satisfaction. Goodbye, everybody."

But Merle laid hold of him.

"Cecil, dear, you really can't flounce off in a huff like this without any explanation. Hugh was here this evening just after you and I spoke on the 'phone. He definitely denied that he was joining up with Mabel — in fact, he made it clear that he had no intention of doing so."

"He had no intention of doing so. But he demanded what he called a showdown between the three of us. Mabel felt that her dignity required her to leave my house at once. She left with Trainder. If any of you want to see Mabel, and hear her version, she will be back tomorrow about lunch time — when I shall be out — to collect her clothes. She only took with her enough for the night."

Merle saw him to the door, quizzing him and chattering. But he added no single item of information. When she let him out he waited long enough for her to rejoin her guests, then re-entered Trainder's car at twenty-five minutes to eleven.

He reached Carmoddel Lane in four minutes. By a quarter to eleven he had replaced Trainder's latchkey and was already walking away from the car, the mackintosh over his arm. He now had to make an average speed of more than seven miles an hour for he had a task to perform on the way. From his pocket he took the original phial and poured the remainder of the galvanium down a street drain. Half a mile on he broke the phial and dropped the fragments down another street drain. It was eight minutes past eleven when he reached Yolsum. He felt no anxiety now — he had the gambler's intuitive knowledge that his luck was in.

Mrs. Hall was in the kitchen making herself a cup of tea before going to bed. Cecil Arnoth went up to his study and waited. At thirteen minutes past eleven Mrs. Hall knocked on his door.

"Is there anything you want, sir, before I go to bed?"

He wanted life and she had given it

to him. He opened the door, hoped that she had enjoyed the film and, by thus showing himself to her, riveted his alibi. He knew now that he had nothing to fear from the police.

The Coroner's inquest, the police investigation, were to him no more than a tedious aftermath. While he was making preparation for his holiday the rod and creel were delivered by the railway company at a door charge of eight and sixpence for carriage and expenses.

The fishing rod carried painful and humiliating memories. It brought on a bad attack of the money fear — which prevented him from impulsively destroying it and made him bitterly resentful of having had to pay the eight and sixpence. Obsessed with the idea of recouping his loss, he tried to sell rod and creel in various West End stores, knowing none other, to be informed coldly that they did not deal in second-hand goods. Eventually, he spotted a street dealer from whom he asked only the eight and sixpence, for both rod and creel.

On his return from his holiday, he went back to Yolsum to remove his personal effects before the sale of the furniture. He had written to the house agents saying that he would call for the keys at about eleven in the morning. When Cecil entered what were still his premises, he saw a man in the garden — a madman or at least an eccentric, who ignored the owner's presence. The man was in town dress. But slung over his shoulders was a creel, and the man himself was flourishing a fishing rod, without line, thrashing an imaginary stream for trout.

"Good morning!" said Cecil, as inhospitably as these words can be said. Then followed one of those fantastic dialogues which are sometimes repeated in the witness box but are always summarized in stereotyped police phraseology.

"Good *morning*, Mr. Arnoth. Lovely rod — plenty of whip — but just the tiniest bit heavy for me. My name's Rason, Detective Inspector. They brought this little outfit to us saying it must have been stolen, as it was sold to a street dealer for only eight and sixpence. And I thought perhaps you'd be glad we've found it for you."

"Thank you, but I am not interested. There is nothing irregular. I sold it to the street dealer myself."

"You having admitted that to be so, Mr. Arnoth," said Rason, "I have to inform you that you will be detained in custody on suspicion of being concerned in the murder of Hugh Trainder and Mabel Rawlings."

"What on earth . . ." Cecil definitely laughed, ". . . what on earth is the connection? . . ."

"Eight and sixpence," said the detective. "Chasing that eight and sixpence didn't seem to add up with paying three hundred quid for a fur coat. Not in those circumstances it didn't. The rod gave me a line, if you'll pardon the pun, to your aunt in Scotland, then to the Rebworth Nurs-

ing Home. I have a car at the corner of the road. Coming?"

"Yes, I'll come. Not my affair, really. You know your job. But I also know mine."

"Ah! Inventing automobile engines is yours. Very clever work, if I may say so. You'll be interested in cars. Well, two nights ago we left a car parked outside Trainder's flat in Kilburn. In the back of the car we put a couple of wax models looking more dead than they'd look in real life, if you understand me. I'll own up we were surprised at what happened. We left it there, not a few minutes, mark you, but the whole night. Hundreds of people passed that car. Not one o' them called the constable on point duty twenty yards away. Oh, that reminds me. There's something else I'd nearly forgotten."

He led the way to the garage, built into the side of the house. It was padlocked and sealed. He broke the seals and opened the padlock. But for Cecil's motorcycle, the garage was, as usual, empty.

"It's this I wanted to ask you about." He directed Cecil's attention to a dripping of oil. From its position it might have been — in fact, as Cecil knew must have been — dropped by Trainder's engine.

"Probably from my bike," he said. "I don't always put it in the corner there."

"Anybody else's car been put in here?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Not to your knowledge. That carries us a stage further. Wash out that bit about your being detained on suspicion. I now have to arrest you on the charge of murder, Mr. Arnoth."

"If I may ask," said Cecil, "why didn't you bring all this nonsense up at the time of the inquest?"

"Ah! We keep getting back to that eight and sixpence. We jumped to it that the check for three hundred was the pivot of your alibi. If you weren't as generous as the Coroner thought, that was the end of your alibi, and we started working on the eight and sixpence instead of the three hundred. Of course, we found out at the time of the inquest that you had had access to galvanium a couple of years ago. But the laboratory log accounted for all you had obtained and we didn't see any reason why you should have faked the log — until we saw from the Case Book at the nursing home that for three days you had been treated for mild galvanium poisoning. Then we figured that the check was a trick to get Trainder to have a drink — galvanium cocktail, to be precise — your only way of preventing him from finding out that Mabel was already dead upstairs. By the way, that oil spot in your garage is Castrol vegetable oil, which Trainder used. You used Shell mineral oil in your bike."

Rason knew his job and being of the Department of Dead Ends was allowed to use his own methods. Inside the police car were two juniors. He told them to get out and return by tube.

"Your aunt," said Rason as the car

started, "is a very charming lady. She thought I was a friend of yours, and duty prevented me from explaining I was your enemy — though nothing personal, of course. She told me how you had lost your mother when you were a nipper and that it had affected you all your life. I feel bad about that, because we shall have to put that in evidence — together with one thing and another bearing on the eight and sixpence and the three hundred quid. Oh, sorry! I ought to have warned you that anything you say may be used against you. Better not say anything — it never does either side any good in the end. And it all has to be copied out in triplicate.

"I was going to tell you about that nursing home. The doctors and nurses wouldn't talk, but that Case Book — well, as they were treating you for a nervous obsession about money they had to take a note of everything you said in delirium and in your sleep and so on. I'm afraid that will have to be put in too."

The melancholy had already come back to Cecil Arnoth.

"Brilliant work. You almost convince me that I must be guilty." He laughed stupidly.

We may assume that he felt no remorse, only a sense of waste. For eight and sixpence he had thrown his life and his work away. The self-contempt this time welled up like a viscous mire that clogged and finally choked his courage. He had tried to escape by loving Mabel Rawlings, had tried again to escape by killing her.

"Suppose, Inspector, I were to plead guilty?"

"You mustn't talk like that!" The detective was shocked. "You wouldn't get a trial if you were to plead guilty. The judge would sentence you in Chambers . . ."

"And none of your evidence would be produced. Bad luck, Inspector! That's just what I'm going to do."

"D'you mean you intend to confess, Mr. Arnoth?"

"Certainly not. I intend to plead guilty. And neither you, nor the Judge, nor anyone else, will ever be — quite sure."

When he was sentenced he was whistling under his breath a melody which, twenty years previously, had crossed the Atlantic and taken England by storm.

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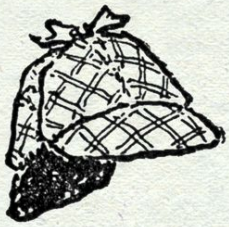
TREATISE ON 'TEC TRADEMARKS

In the field of the detective story comparatively few writers have capitalized on the advertising advantages and identification value of a pictorial trademark; and of the few attempts made, nearly all have failed to achieve their objective — "the shock of recognition." For example: most of Edgar Wallace's books show somewhere — on the dust wrapper, on the cover, or on the verso of the half-title — a red circle (black, when inside the book) with a holograph signature of Wallace slashed across the bottom; but how many of you associate this trademark with Wallace, or even remember it at all? In the early days of Ellery Queen, we sported a small line-cut, usually placed in the lower right-hand corner of the dust jacket: a drawing of two playing cards (Queens of Diamonds) with a detectival dagger transfixing both at the top; but this piece of juvenilia was quickly abandoned; it didn't "take" and we were glad of it . . . By all odds the most successful 'tec trademark is the cartoon figure and rakish halo that represent none other than Simon Templar, The Saint. This seemingly childish picture has charm and sophistication, and effectively identifies the modern Robin Hood of fictional felony created by Leslie Charteris. Indeed, it is surprising in view of the catchy success of Charteris's gay little figure that imitative cartoons did not multiply rabbitly among other crimeteers . . . The hallmark of a partially unfurled umbrella would point to quite a few fictional ferrets — Edgar Wallace's Mr. J. G. Reeder and Eric Ambler's Dr. Jan Czissar, among others; but in all likelihood you would not think of them. The homely, humble bumbershoot seems exclusively the property of Gilbert K. Chesterton's Father Brown, although no serious attempt has been made by Chesterton's publishers to exploit such a fixed idea . . . If you came upon the likeness of a tweedy deerstalker, you wouldn't need two guesses. The device of a deerstalker means only one detective — Sherlock Holmes. And yet it can be said that for once a 'tec trademark oversold itself, became too *successful. For the deerstalker (like the magnifying glass) has acquired a universal significance: it has come to identify all detectives in general even more than Holmes in particular. The criminological chapeau shown was drawn by the greatest of all Sherlockian artists, the late Frederic Dorr Steele; it is one of a group of Holmesian hats that Mr. Steele sketched especially for your Editor's anthology,* THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(1944) . . . It is not generally known that Stuart Palmer, creator of Hildegarde Withers, also has his armorial bearings, so to speak. It is a personal symbol of which only his intimates are aware. Mr. Palmer signs all his letters to your Editor with a more-or-less*



hastily scrawled "Stu," but when the mood is upon him, he sometimes adds a little pen-and-ink insignia — a cute Disney-like creature with a sad eye and an air of pathetic loneliness. There are two poses — plain and fancy — as the drawings below reveal. The source of Stu's personal trademark is easy to trace: it stems from his first great success, THE PENGUIN POOL MURDER, *published by Brentano's in 1931. This book was snapped up by Katharine Brown, then East Coast story editor for RKO, as a vehicle for the late Edna May Oliver. (The same Katharine Brown, by the way, who later scooped all her competitors when she snapped up* GONE WITH THE WIND.*) Edna May Oliver — and wasn't she grand as Hildy? — was teamed with Jimmy Gleason as Inspector Piper, another happy casting choice. Later, because of Miss Oliver's fading health, the role of Hildy was assigned to Helen Broderick, and then to Zasu Pitts. The trained penguin who appeared in the first picture was named Oscar, and apparently he won an eternal niche in Stu's affections. Stu recalls how Oscar, who had a tendency to faint under the glare of Klieg lights — temperamental little actor, that Oscar! — finally had to be given a stand-in. No, we're not kidding — this is on the level! The stand-in was a duck, so help us! The name of the duck is not recorded — could it have been the great Donald himself, incognito, sort of playing the Caliph of Bagdad in true Hollywood style? There are other amusing anecdotes of Stuart Palmer's life among the* Aptenodytes forsteri: *for example, when Stu was last in London the keeper of the penguins at Regent's Park gave Stu the key to the Zoo, and Stu (obviously the patron saint of penguins) spent afternoons sketching, photographing, and playing games with the big Emperors — doing everything, but sit on an egg, a sedentary service seductively suggested by the rotary come-hither of one lady penguin's flipperlike wing.*

SNAFU MURDER

by STUART PALMER

"I SUPPOSE," muttered the sergeant belligerently, "that *you* think you know all about women?"

Mike Maloney, the bartender, mopped thoughtfully at the damp mahogany of the bar. "Only from hearsay, soldier. My weakness is horses."

"Well, how is anybody going to figure a dame who drops a guy cold just because he's got permanent duty

right here in little old New York, and turns him down for a sad sack buck private who's going to be shipped out overseas any day, where he won't be no good to her whatever? It don't make sense."

Mike brightened. "Oh, you mean the mouse who was in here with you Saturday, the one who always wants a Manhattan with two cherries, and half the time she eats them and leaves the drink?" He drew another beer. "She plays the field, I guess. Maybe she likes saying goodbye."

"It'll be goodbye for that sad sack if I run into them tonight," the sergeant promised. Then he put twenty cents down on the bar and went out.

"Trouble, looking for a place to happen," Mike diagnosed. "Well, as long as it don't happen in here — "

"Naturally," said Miss Hildegarde Withers, "I'm more than flattered at being called upon for help by the Federal Bureau of Investigation." She beamed. "Now anything I can do — "

"It wasn't exactly advice that I was looking for," admitted the pleasant if somewhat gimlet-eyed young man who sat on the edge of Miss Wither's best chair. "Just information. You see, there was a disturbance of the peace at the Longacre Bar and Grill last Thursday night, with two soldiers fighting over a girl. What do you know about it?"

The maiden schoolteacher blinked, and then a wry smile cracked her somewhat equine features. "I? Why, my dear young man, you flatter me! But I have an alibi; I was in the auditorium at Public School 38, at a Parent-Teachers' meeting. So the soldiers weren't battling for my favors. As a matter of fact, even in my heyday —— "

Mr. McCabe of the FBI had no sense of humor. "I just wanted you to explain something, ma'am. This girl who was the cause of the trouble, she slipped away while the soldiers were being held for the military police. But the cop on the beat got her name, and it was Hildegarde Withers, address 232 West 96th Street, which happens to be a warehouse."

"I suppose it has occurred to you that the girl, to avoid publicity, gave a false name?"

"Yeah. But why yours?"

"I know," countered the schoolteacher, "that it isn't polite to answer a question with another one. But tell me, why is the FBI so interested in a ginmill fracas?"

He hesitated. "It is just possible that there are some other angles. We were tipped off that this girl — the bartenders of the bright light section call her 'Cherries' because she always asks for two in her drinks — well, she hangs out in the bars where servicemen congregate. Sometimes she picks one up, in a genteel sort of way. But one of the first things she always wants to know is whether he is shipping out overseas or not."

"Now I begin to see," Miss Withers said. "You think she might be a Mata Hari?"

He winced. "Naturally we are sus-

picious of anyone who shows an interest in troop movements. Too bad we have such a poor description of her — just that she is medium-sized, brownish-blonde hair, and young. A quiet type."

"In spite of the Manhattans?"

"She usually just eats the cherries and leaves the drink. Anyway, we believe that she knows you, because your name came to her mind when she had to think of an alias in a hurry."

Miss Withers frowned. "Young man, I have had hundreds of pupils — "

"Ever have one named Mazda? One of the soldiers said she had told him that was her first name. And her last name begins with 'V', because on another date she carried a handbag with big block initials 'MV'."

"Mazda V. Unusual name. No, Mr. McCabe, I never had a pupil named Mazda anything. I think she got it off a light bulb. But I'll think about the problem, and if I have the slightest inspiration I'll call you."

"That won't be necessary — "

"It's no trouble at all. I'll be delighted to help. You see, they wouldn't let me enlist in the WACs, and I don't feel that I can entertain the troops as a dancing partner at the USO, but a problem like this is right up my alley. I'll report to you tomorrow — "

"I bet she will," Mr. McCabe muttered to himself, after her door had closed upon him. "I should never have mentioned the whole thing." He departed, shoulders sagging.

But Miss Hildegarde Withers was in the Seventh Heaven. She made herself a strong cup of orange pekoe, washed her hair, and then spent some time studying the inhabitants of her tank of tropical fish — all three being usual sources of inspiration. Finally she dug out a well-worn looseleaf notebook from her desk drawer, and fell to checking it with a determined grimness.

"Oh, it's you," said Inspector Oscar Piper somewhat later that day, as he pushed aside the remains of his dinner.

Miss Withers surveyed the liverwurst sandwich and container of coffee, and sniffed. "Oscar, you ought to let the Homicide Squad run itself for long enough to go out and get a good hot meal for yourself."

The wiry little Irishman looked at her quizzically. "You didn't come down to Headquarters to discuss my diet. Sit down and get it off your chest."

"You needn't be indelicate. Oscar, you'll be surprised to hear that I am doing some special work for the FBI, and I need your help. I want you to have some of your detectives locate a Miss Mina Vance."

"Why?" asked the Inspector, not unreasonably.

She told him of her interview with McCabe. "Of course it is obvious, Oscar, that the whole thing revolves on the fact that this mysterious Mata Hari person gave my name when she had to think of something quick."

"She might have picked it out of the phone book."

"Which she happened to be carry-

ing under her arm? Don't be silly."

"So what? Maybe she's an old pupil of yours. Anyway, it is departmental policy to let the FBI do their own work, and I advise you to take the same attitude. Besides, the girl is probably just trying to do something for the boys. We get a lot of juvenile delinquents who are khaki-happy."

"This girl is no juvenile. From her description she is between nineteen and twenty-three. That means, since she would have been eight or nine in third grade, that if she was ever a pupil of mine it would have been between the years 1929 and '34. As you know, I keep a file of the names of my pupils. Many of them I could eliminate at once, because I've kept in touch with them. Besides, there are very few surnames beginning with 'V'."

"You're working on the theory that the girl, like most amateurs mixed up in monkey-business, kept her own initials?"

"Except for Thursday night, yes. She departed from tradition then. But you've explained it often enough — it simplifies monograms and things. Anyway, I found that in the years mentioned I had twelve pupils with the initials 'MV'. I could eliminate seven of the twelve at once, either because I know where they are now or because of physical peculiarities which would presumably prevent them from growing up to be sirens. Then I turned to the back copies of the Manhattan telephone book, which I manage to retain for reference, and found just one of the names listed there — and that was only for the summer issue for 1942. 'Vance, Mina, 444 Barrow, PA 5-6763.' No listing for her in later issues, so she evidently moved or didn't pay her phone bill or both. That is why I want you to help me trace her."

The Inspector picked up a dead dank cigar and set it methodically afire. "Look, Hildegarde, this is strictly needle-in-a-haystack. Just because for a few months a long time ago an ex-pupil of yours lived somewhere down in the Village doesn't mean that we have any interest — "

As he spoke, the Inspector was casually shuffling over a stack of routine reports from the precinct homicide men, which was his usual way of signifying that the interview was closed. Suddenly he stopped and whistled — something of a feat since he whistled without disturbing the cigar clamped in his jaws. He whirled suddenly to face his visitor. "Hildegarde, just *where* was it you said that Mina Vance lived?"

"Four-forty-four Barrow. Why?"

"I'll tell you why." There was a wild gleam in the Inspector's eye. "Because you've gone and stumbled into something again! See this report that just came in ten minutes ago? It says there was a homicide in the Ninth Precinct, reported at five-thirty P.M. today, name PFC Ralph Henning, cause of death, strangulation. And the address is 444 Barrow!"

"Oh, my prophetic soul!" quoted

Miss Withers. "Oscar, this must be something more than coincidence."

"It's the long nose of Hildegarde Withers," he retorted unkindly. "Just when everything was nice and quiet, you had to come along — "

"I'm coming along to Barrow Street, too. So let us go."

The address specified turned out to be a four-storey remodelled brownstone at the end of a narrow street a few blocks from Sheridan Square, in the heart of Greenwich Village. On the surface it didn't appear to be much of a case, or so the precinct boys thought. They were quite obviously surprised and uneasy that Centre Street was taking so much interest in an ordinary mugging.

The body had been discovered by some neighborhood urchins who claimed to have been scouting for waste paper but who were suspected to be in the hot baby-buggy racket. It had been jammed most unceremoniously into the narrow nook beneath the stairs on the first floor of the apartment, at the rear of the hall.

"Around four o'clock this afternoon," was the guess of the medical examiner's assistant. The victim, now awaiting the arrival of the Board of Health truck with its grim wicker basket, turned out to be a thin, wiry young man, dressed in the winter uniform of an Army private, first class. In addition to the heavy G.I. overcoat, fastened neatly on the left-hand buttons, he wore a woman's silk stocking tied cruelly tight around his neck.

The precinct detective said "So some come-on dame lured the kid in here with the promise of the old you-know-what, and — "

"And took off her stocking and strangled him with it?" Miss Withers interrupted.

"She probably had a boy-friend waiting. The doors in these old apartment buildings are always on the latch, and they're pretty deserted during the day. If you wanta see his stuff, it's back here."

The detective gestured, and Miss Withers turned willingly away from the deeply-purpled face of the victim to gaze upon the contents of his pockets, now turned out upon the the window sill at the end of the hall.

There was a cheap metal watch, still ticking. There was a leather wallet, empty except for a wad of airmail stamps. There was a Zippo lighter, a crumpled pack of cigarettes, a Scout jackknife, a rabbit's-foot key-chain with no key, and a small green pamphlet entitled "So You're Shipping Out" and containing facts, figures and advice over the imprint of the Morale Services Division, Army Service Forces.

"Typical mugging," the Inspector agreed. "Nothing missing but the money."

"Nothing?" inquired Miss Withers with meaning.

"Oh, you mean his Army identification and dog tags? We got those, that's how he was identified. We turned 'em over to the Provost Marshal's office at the Fort."

"I didn't mean that. Look, Oscar. If Private Henning came to the city on leave or on a furlough or whatever they call it, then where are his papers — or his pass?"

"Huh? Well, maybe he was AWOL, how do I know?"

"And his shoes are so unshined, and his uniform so rumpled, and his overcoat buttoned wrong — " Miss Withers shook her head dubiously. "I suppose you're going to interview all the residents of the house?"

"In a way. We're going to have them all down to look at the body, to see if any of them know the poor guy or show any reaction. Psychological stuff, you know."

"I know," said Miss Withers. She watched, from the background, while the residents of the building were paraded before the stiffening exhibit in the hall. Most of the people, she decided, were obviously respectable, honestly shocked at what they had to see, and glad to get back to their little apartments and their private lives.

But not all. There was the stiff, clipped young Navy lieutenant j.g. who held his wife's plump arm tightly in his grasp and stared at the corpse for what seemed and probably was an unnecessarily long time before shaking his head. There were three young men who shared an apartment in which they made lampshades and printed linoleum-cut Christmas cards. They thought for a little while, or pretended to think, that the deceased looked a little like somebody known as "Helmuth" but finally decided it wasn't, after all.

There were two girls, barely out of the bobby-sock stage, who wore Air Corps insignia in defiance of Army regulations, and who went pale and then blushed furiously as they looked at the remains. There was a tall, expensive-looking girl in black hat and silver-fox cape, who gave her name as Miss Andrea Winton. Andrea, Miss Withers noted, looked at the dead man's shoes instead of at his face, which hardly showed any sincere desire to aid in his identification.

"Did you notice, Oscar," she whispered, "that the young lady who just left had very unusual hands? They were rough and reddened, as if she had been washing them over and over again in cold water."

He grinned. "Maybe she just doesn't use the stuff on the right radio program."

"Perhaps. But remember — 'All the perfumes of Araby will not sweeten this little hand.' Macbeth."

"I'll make a note of it," the Inspector said wearily.

The remainder of the tenants were even less interesting, and Miss Withers quietly detached herself from the group and slipped forward along the hall into the foyer, where she spent some time in studying the list of tenant's names on the wall. There were, she discovered, no girls living here who had the initials "MV". There was no girl living alone here at all, except for Miss Andrea Winton, although the second floor front appeared to be vacant.

The curious schoolteacher also paused briefly near the front door, unlocked as usual, to study the large amount of recent but unclaimed mail which rested on a table there. Most of it was advertising or bills, and all of it addressed to names not now listed among the tenants. Evidently this building was a place favored by people who moved often and left no forwarding address.

Miss Withers went out, past the uniformed cop at the portal, and then hesitated. There had been a card in the hall, underneath the list of tenants, which read *For Manager, ring basement bell.* Like Alice with the bottle marked *Drink Me*, the schoolteacher felt a compulsion to obey. So she turned and went down a narrow stair, the steps of which had been covered with rough boards which creaked dismally under her feet. She found the bell button, and leaned against it.

There was a light within, and the sound of voices, but no answer. She pressed again and then the door opened and a swarthy young man appeared, hastily and modestly adjusting his suspenders. His would have been a pleasant face if he had been smiling, which he was not.

"Sorry ma'am, we got no vacancies."

Behind him, in a crowded narrow room, Miss Withers could see a table set for supper, and there was the smell of cooking.

"I wasn't looking for an apartment," Hildegarde explained hastily. "I'm just trying to locate a friend of mine who used to live here. Her name was Vance, Mina Vance."

The man scowled. "I don't think we got anybody by that name. They come and go so fast, though — want to come inside?"

Miss Withers already was in. The place seemed barely to have room for a visitor, it was so crowded with furniture, with mahogany bookcases full of gift editions, with a baby grand piano, with a mammoth radio-phonograph, with heavy rugs and fringed lamps and end-tables and gimcracks.

There were ivory billikins from Alaska, a Japanese flag and two curved swords, plaster pottery from Pompeii, a grass skirt, and even a hideous little *tsantsa*, one of the shrunken heads faked by enterprising Canal Zone curio dealers.

"My wife's brother sends that stuff home," offered the host. "He's in the Army. Crowds the place up some, don't it — a little hole like this. But what are you going to do nowadays? Only way to get an apartment was to take the job of managing the place. And we get rent free. Just a minute. About this friend of yours, I'll ask the wife, because she keeps the books." He turned and raising his voice, called "Baby!"

There was a sudden clatter of pans from the kitchen. "You will have to excuse us," the man said, "for having dinner so late. But there was an accident upstairs, and the cops have been running us ragged. . . ."

A girl, face flushed red from cooking, came into the room, drying her

hands on a dish towel. She looked pleasant, small-townish, and pretty, although there was flour on her cheek and damp curls of reddish hair stuck to her forehead.

"This is Mrs. Tewalt," said the man, a faint note of pride in his voice. "Baby, meet Mrs — ?"

"Miss Withers," said the schoolteacher.

"She's come to ask some questions about a Mina Vance who used to live here," Tewalt went on.

The girl stood solidly upon her flat bedroom slippers, and knotted the towel. She was a tiny thing, Miss Withers realized, and she was deeply frightened.

"I — " she began. Then she caught her breath. "But — "

"She's all upset," the man said. "The body and all. We were the first ones to see it — after the kids, I mean. Sit down, honey."

But the girl didn't sit. She stared at Miss Withers accusingly. "*That* isn't why you're here! You're not worrying about anybody who used to live here!" She whirled on her husband. "Max, she's a detective! She's with the police!"

There was an uncomfortable pause. "I'm afraid you have seen some misleading publicity," Miss Withers said. "I'm not very close to the police, especially not at the moment. It's really as I said. I'm trying to locate Mina Vance, who once lived here, because I think there is just a faint chance that she may be involved with this murder."

The couple looked at each other. "You do want to see it solved, don't you?" the schoolteacher pressed.

Tewalt spoke. "Of course. We were just — Baby, get the book. We'll look it up."

Silently, the girl went over to a shelf above the fireplace and took down a large account book. "If anybody named Vance ever lived here it must have been a long time ago," she said. "I'll see."

"It was the summer of 1942," Miss Withers said.

"Here it is," the girl said. She showed the record, which proved that from May 15th to December 15th of that year, Mina Vance had occupied the third-floor rear apartment, paying her rent very irregularly indeed. "She moved out owing three months. I bet I know why it ran so long, too. Before I married him, Max was what you call susceptible, especially for tramps."

Tewalt laughed easily, as if somehow flattered. "She wasn't any tramp, Baby. Had a job as an accountant or something. I never knew where." He shrugged. "Baby here figures she reformed me when we got married last year."

"I wonder — " began Miss Withers, and then cocked her head. "Don't look now," she said softly, "but I just heard somebody come softly down those outside steps. And that same somebody hasn't rung the bell."

She turned and crossed the room, flinging open the door. Inspector Oscar Piper stood outside, looking

sheepish. "What," cried Miss Withers, "are you doing here?"

"I'm asking the same question," he barked back. Then he came in, displaying his badge. The young wife gave her husband an "I told you so" look.

"Relax," said the Inspector. "I just wanted to ask some routine questions, but I see somebody beat me to it."

Hastily Miss Withers filled in on what had happened. "I was just about to ask," she continued pleasantly, "if Miss Vance, who once lived here, had left a forwarding address?"

The manager and his wife looked, and found. that she hadn't. People who moved without paying three month's rent rarely did.

"Yes," said Mrs. Tewalt bitterly, "and I'll bet — " Suddenly she stiffened. "Oh, heavens, the steaks!" She turned and ran out of the room.

After some more crashing of pans in the kitchen she returned, bearing a platter on which two luscious T-bones were steaming. Another trip, and she produced baked potatoes, broiled mushrooms, a salad, and bread and butter.

"Oscar, we needn't keep this young couple from their dinner," Miss Withers reminded him. "One last question and we're off. Mr. Tewalt, can you tell me if any of your feminine tenants run around a good deal with servicemen?"

"Huh? Why, all of them do, the single ones I mean. There aren't many of us 4F's left, you know. There's Miss Chandler and Miss Carlsen on the third floor, and Miss Winton on the fourth — they all usually have dates with soldiers and sailors."

His wife added, gently, "But we don't pay a lot of attention to other people's business, do we, Max?"

The Inspector looked at Miss Withers, with meaning in his glance. "Well, Hildegarde?"

"Yes, Oscar. I was going to ask if any of the tenants here had shown any sudden signs of prosperity, but we won't linger for that now. Good night, Mr. and Mrs. Tewalt, and thank you."

The girl went to the door with them. "I don't mind answering that," she said, "Nobody has struck it rich around here. Oh, I mean a lot of people are making more money than they used to, but that's one of the bright spots about a war, isn't it?"

"Good night!" said Miss Withers, with what seemed to the Inspector unnecessary firmness. They went up the creaky stairs together. Oscar Piper suggested a hamburger, but the schoolteacher said she was anxious to get home.

Once back in her little apartment on West Seventy Fourth Street, she made herself a cup of tea and then settled down on a stool before her aquarium. For a happy hour she lost herself in that glowing wonderland, in that marine jungle peopled by jewelled neon tetras, by smooth dark mollies, bulging guppies, and fanciful, delicate bettas out of a Dali painting.

She even liked watching one of the big river-snails, which had determined to get a breath of air and was

inching its way toward the surface of the tank. She waited, feeling that her progress in this murder case was slower even than his, until the greenish-black gasteropod reached the top, took his snifter of air through one sucker, blew it out gustily, and then let go and floated peacefully down to the bottom, bubbling a little.

"An excellent idea, relaxation," observed Miss Withers to herself. She turned out the light over the tank, and immediately her wonderland became a plain glass box full of murky water peopled with colorless minnows. But it turned out to be easier for the snail to let go than it was for the maiden schoolteacher. She turned and tossed most of the night, and when she finally slept she dreamed of hiking through the snow, and of going back mile after mile along her own trail, looking for something she had lost and could never find again.

Nor could she find it upon wakening. Her first thought was one of guilt at the lateness of the hour, and then she remembered that this was vacation week, and that she need not make her first class today. The day was free — free for worry about the case of the strangled soldier. Somehow she had counted upon her subconscious to come up with the answer to the whole problem in her sleep, but she was right where she had started.

A phone call from the Inspector, arriving as she loaded her percolator for action, did not help. "Just thought you might like to know that we broke the Henning case," he informed her.

"Say no more. I'll be right down."

She arrived at Centre Street twenty minutes later, to find the Inspector in one of his happier moods. "Don't feel bad," he advised her. "This was no job for fancy sleuthing. Nothing you could have done. The case was washed up by pure routine. We just checked with the Army, and — "

"And what?"

"They're bringing the killer in this morning. Stick around, I'll give you the picture. This Henning, he was due to ship out overseas only he got delayed. And he didn't like sitting around in the staging area, so he tried to make a break for it, without a pass. He ran up against a tough MP, an old-timer who never made a mistake or wouldn't admit it if he had, a guy named Rapf, Sergeant Rapf. Anyway he was taking Henning to the clink, and the soldier broke away from him. Made a clean getaway, I guess he was dying for New York's bright lights.

"But the sergeant figured he knew where his escaped prisoner was heading, so he got some time off, grabbed a taxi, and beat the train here. It was a point of pride with him, see? He hung out in Penn Station, figuring that Henning would have to come through there. Sure enough he saw him, and made the pinch. But he was off duty, and before he could get the regular military police in the station to back him up, Henning had clipped him a judo smack and got away again. So he followed him down in the Village — "

"How much of this is a confession, Oscar?"

"Most of it. All of it, except he says he lost Henning on the subway, and gave it up. We figure, and so does Military Intelligence, that the sergeant, who has had twenty years in the service without ever losing his man, went off the deep end when he caught up with him — hit him too hard, and then tried to cover it up to look like a regular mugging."

"I'd like to meet the prisoner," Miss Withers said dryly. "Especially if he carries silk stockings around with him."

"We got an answer to that too. Men who have served in Central and South America — and the sergeant was in the Canal Zone for awhile — had a chance to buy stuff like that. They like to cart it home for their lady friends. Well, we figure Sergeant Rapf had a pair of silk stockings with him that he was saving for some girl, and when he found he had to cover up a murder, he used one to try and make it look like a woman's job."

"I'm still not satisfied," the schoolteacher objected. "Why did Henning come to 444 Barrow?"

"I can answer that one, too," announced Piper triumphantly. "Look, we even checked and found that about four weeks ago a license was issued at City Hall for Ralph Henning and Miriam Voorhis. And *she* gave that address! I don't know why, maybe she once lived there and didn't want to give her real location. Anyway, Henning was only trying to locate his missing bride, and the MP he had got away from tagged after him and erased him. In spite of the attempt to cover the thing up, I think the killer ought to get off with a plea of manslaughter."

"How nice for him!" said Miss Withers without conviction. That was all she had a chance to say before the prisoner, a tanned, tubby man in his fifties, with a heavy jaw and a pair of dogged bewildered eyes, was brought in by two MPs and a stiff young captain.

"Your prisoner," said the officer. "As long as you have a warrant, the Army is willing to let you have him. However — " his voice trailed away. It was evident that the captain wanted no part of this.

"How about it, Rapf?" challenged the Inspector. "Make it easy for yourself."

The grizzled sergeant wiped his nose on his sleeve, hash-marks of service notwithstanding, and shook his head. "Look, I'm a family man with three kids at Fort Bragg. The Army's my life. Do you think — ?"

"The Army's your life, and you knew you'd be busted for letting a prisoner escape. So you followed him, tangled with him, and finally killed him. We know all about that."

The prisoner licked his lips. "Excuse me, sir, but that ain't it. I'm not saying I wouldn't have liked to beat some sense into his thick head, him trying to bust out of a staging area just to see a dame. But why should I snafu everything up by bumping him — "

"Why should you what?" Miss

Withers cut in, blankly.

The men looked at her, all annoyed.

"Army talk," the Inspector said. "Snafu means *situation normal: all fouled up*, or something like that."

The young captain nodded. "By the way, Inspector, this man has an excellent record."

"And he had to keep it perfect, even if it meant killing. Sorry, we're holding him for first-degree murder. Maybe, since over-zealousness was the motive, the D.A. will accept a lesser plea, I don't know."

Sergeant Rapf was led away.

Miss Withers button-holed the Inspector. "Oscar, that phrase fits your case admirably — *situation normal: all fouled up*. Because that sergeant didn't kill anybody and if he did he wouldn't strangle them with a silk stocking."

"Oh, you can tell the innocent from the guilty just by looking at 'em, huh? Like they wore a mark on their face?"

The schoolteacher's eyes widened. "The Mark of Cain! Yes, Oscar, I mean just that. Sometimes, anyway. And to think that it was right in front of me all the time. . . ."

"What was right in front of you? Look, I'm busy — I've got to see the D.A."

"Very well. But as a personal friend, I advise you to book the sergeant on some minor charge, such as being a material witness. And I also advise you to send a telegram, at once."

Piper rubbed his thinning hair. "A telegram to who?"

"To *whom*, please. Well, I really don't know. It will take a trip to City Hall to find that out. However, I can give you the body of the telegram. It should read 'DARLING HAVE THIRTY DAYS FURLOUGH ARRIVE TONIGHT'. . ."

"And signed what?"

"I don't know that either," she said. And hastily departed.

When the telegram was finally dispatched, somewhat against the Inspector's better judgment, it was addressed to a party who, up to this time, had not appeared in the case at all. A Mrs. Robert Ballentyne was the recipient, address 444 Barrow Street, and it was simply signed "Bob." Moreover, the messenger had instructions to leave it on the hall table.

"I still don't get it," the Inspector protested. "Why not just pick a name out of the phone book?"

"Wait and see," Miss Withers retorted. "Oscar, you don't get the significance of the Mark of Cain — nor of the fact that a Corporal Robert Ballentyne married Mavis Vidor at City Hall last June."

"Still barking up that same tree about the mysterious lady spy with the initials 'MV'?"

"Somewhat vulgarly phrased, but essentially correct. By the way, Oscar, if an officer is still stationed in the hallway where the body was found, I want him taken away."

"I sometimes wish somebody would take you away," said the Inspector wearily. "But I suppose I've got to play along, just to give you rope enough — "

"Rope enough to hang a murderer," she concluded crisply. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll summon the FBI."

"Why them?" demanded the Inspector.

He was still asking questions at eight o'clock that evening when he met Miss Withers by appointment at the Sheridan Square subway stop. "At least you're on time," the schoolteacher said. "I wish — oh, there he is."

She made the Inspector wait for a moment, and then they walked down the street, a few dozen paces behind the young man in Army uniform, who carried a bulging canvas case and had his overseas cap at a jaunty angle. He finally turned into the doorway of 444 Barrow. As they came inside he was going quickly up the stairs.

The Inspector, intrigued in spite of himself, started to follow, but Miss Withers caught his arm. "Look, Oscar," she whispered. "The telegram's gone — and if you'll notice — " She pointed to the clean new card, neatly lettered, which had appeared somehow on the bulletin board. It read *Ballentyne, 2nd Floor Front.*

They went up the stairs, arriving in time to see the soldier they had been following press his thumb against the bell of the second floor front. Then the door opened, and a girl stood there. Without hesitation she flung her arms around the neck of the soldier, crying "Bob! Bob darling!"

She was held tight and firm, but not lovingly. And the young man who embraced her suddenly became very cold and gimlet-eyed indeed.

"The name isn't Bob. I'm McCabe, of the FBI. You're under arrest, Mrs. Ballentyne. . . ."

"Alias Mrs. Max Tewalt, alias Cherries, alias a dozen other names, but originally Mina Vance," put in the schoolteacher, as she and the Inspector came closer. "Thank you, Mr. McCabe, for the impersonation. I was certain that a young lady who made a profession of marrying soldiers for their allotment checks wouldn't be sure of the faces of all her victims."

The girl said something unprintable.

"You should have your mouth washed out with soap," Miss Withers told her. "Yes, I remember you, Mina. You used to cheat in your quizzes, and when we had the Christmas party you went through the line three times and got three bags of candy. As the twig is bent — "

The Inspector had heard enough. "I'm afraid I'll have to take over, Mr. McCabe," he said. "We have a murder rap against this girl."

"And we want her for espionage. So — "

Miss Withers managed to shoo them all back into the small, neat little apartment, into a living room obviously not too lived-in. The two men were politely wrangling over their prisoner, who snarled at both of them. But Miss Withers quietly found the girl's handbag on a dresser, took a ring of keys from it, and then tiptoed out of the room.

Five minutes later she was back, white and shaken. The argument was still going on, with both McCabe and the Inspector standing on their rights.

"If you'll just listen to me — " she began.

The Inspector waved her to silence. "I'm sorry, Mr. McCabe, but in a case of this kind. . . ."

"Neither of you knows what kind of case this is!" Miss Withers burst forth. "There's no espionage — Mina simply wanted to know about troop movements so she could be sure her husbands would be leaving immediately. She married the manager of the building so she could keep an apartment always available in case one of her husbands came home — and so the allotment checks could come in and be thrown on the hall table with the other mail."

McCabe was stubborn. "I still think I have a better case against her than you have. After all, it's pretty likely that the murder was committed by this Tewalt fellow. . . ."

"It's pretty unlikely," Miss Withers cut in. "Because Max Tewalt is lying downstairs in the middle of the living room, with a silk stocking knotted around his neck. He was interrupted in the midst of burning the files in which this precious couple kept their records of the names and description of the men Mina married, and copies of her letters to them."

The girl sagged suddenly, so that the Inspector and McCabe had to catch her and ease her into a chair.

"She evidently planned to drop Tewalt and the whole business and go away somewhere as Mrs. Ballentyne," Miss Withers said. "Oscar, you should have known that no matter how wonderful a soldier her brother was, he would not have sent back Japanese swords and pottery from Pompeii and Central American souvenirs and Alaskan ivory. The curios downstairs proved that she was in touch with a lot of soldiers in *different* theaters of war."

"Yeah, but — "

"And one husband, a man she thought was safe on his way overseas, came back unexpectedly and had to be put away. She killed Ralph Henning — *because only a woman buttons her coat as his was buttoned.* It was all as plain as the nose on your face — remember what I said about the Mark of Cain?"

"Yeah, what about that?" The Inspector and McCabe were both waiting, but it was not to either of them that Miss Withers gave the answer.

"It was the flour on your cheek, dearie," she told the writhing prisoner. "An artistic touch — but much *too* artistic. Because I saw the dinner you cooked last night and *there was nothing in it which required the use of flour!* So you got caught cheating, just as you used to get caught in P.S. 38."

That was it. The girl was taken away, and Mr. McCabe shook hands with the Inspector and then with Miss Withers. "It's been a pleasure being one of your pupils, ma'am," he said.

The Inspector promised to bring her a red apple someday soon.

The first person who realized the possibilities of using the Sherlock Holmes stories as a means of secret communication was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself. In his fascinating autobiography, MEMORIES AND ADVENTURES *(1924), Sir Arthur related how in 1915 he contrived to "establish a secret correspondence" with British prisoners of war at Magdeburg.*

Sir Arthur selected one of his own books — surely a Holmes tale! — and beginning with the third chapter (he foresaw that the censor would examine the first and possibly the second chapters too thoroughly), Sir Arthur put tiny needle-pricks under various printed letters, thus spelling out the secret message. In a letter accompanying the book, Sir Arthur informed the recipient that the story was rather slow in the beginning but that from Chapter III on it was more interesting. That was as obvious a clue as he dared to give.

This ingenious trick fooled the Germans completely. Its success was proved in a roundabout way — by the increased number of seemingly innocent requests by prisoners to have more of Doyle's books sent to them!

Thirty years later a second person realized the possibilities of conveying a secret message through the medium of the Sherlock Holmes stories. This second person was Christopher Morley who planted the idea in the clever brains of Sherlock Holmes's niece and Dove Dulcet.

You remember Dove Dulcet? We "revived him" (Mr. Morley's own phrase) in our issue of July 1944, when we reprinted that fine literary detective story, "The Curious Case of Kenelm Digby." Well, Dove Dulcet is doing his bit: for the duration he has given up his vocations (literary agent and poet) and since '39 has been with Naval Intelligence in Washington. But Dulcet did not give up his avocation — he is still the amateur detective, now lending his unique talents to the capture and defeat of the greatest criminals in world history.

"Codeine (7 per cent)" is the first public record of Dove Dulcet's adventures as a Secret Service Agent. Every mystery "fan" will find a subtle pleasure in this story, but if you are a lover of Sherlock Holmes, you will derive an extra-subtle pleasure from the brilliant hidden message sent by Holmes's niece to her chief, Dove Dulcet. Again the Sacred Writings fooled the Nazis — but what could you expect from a one-book people who had no time for such non-Aryan trifles as the saga of Sherlock?

CODEINE (7 PER CENT)

by CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

I HADN'T seen Dove Dulcet, former literary agent and amateur detective, for a long time — not since he went into Naval Intelligence in '39. But last winter the Baker Street Irregulars, that famous club of Sher-

lock Holmes devotees, invited him to be a guest at their annual dinner. Dulcet is shy and would have preferred not to speak, but of course he was called on and made a very agreeable little impromptu which I supposed the B & O from Washington had given him time to think out.

What Dulcet did was propose a toast to Sherlock Holmes's unknown sister. She was a good deal younger than either Mycroft or Sherlock, he suggested. The basis of his fancy was Sherlock's famous remark to Miss Hunter when she was offered that dubious position as governess at the Copper Beeches. "It is not the situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for," said Sherlock Holmes. Dulcet maintained that no man would say that unless he actually *did* have a sister; and offered ingenious suggestions why Watson had never mentioned her.

The Irregulars, who were getting a bit noisy by then (it was late in the evening), accused Dulcet of being "whimsical," and chaffed him a good deal. There's something in Dove's innocent demeanor, his broad bland face and selvage of saffron-colored hair under an ivory scalp, that encourages good-natured teasing. He was twitted about the supposed inefficiency of our Intelligence Services — how G2, for instance, was caught actually moving its offices on D-Day, with all its phones and devices cut off so they didn't even know what was happening. He replied that maybe that was exactly what G2 wanted people to think; perhaps they had Planned It That Way. He suggested gently (he speaks in a voice so soft that people really keep quiet in order to listen) that sometimes the Intelligence people work longer ahead than we suppose. I noticed that he paused then a moment, as though he had more to say and thought better of it. "And now, gentlemen," he concluded, "you'll pardon me if I excuse myself and retire. I've got one of those delicious fin de siècle rooms here at the old Murray Hill and I can't wait to get to it. You know the kind of thing, a big brass bedstead, and lace drapes, and a rose-colored secretary with wonderful scrollwork." Of course this gave the stags a laugh, and I caught a small private wink from him as he sat down. So presently I followed him up to his room.

"That was an ingenious surmise of yours," I said, "about Holmes having a sister."

"No surmise at all," he said. "I knew her. Or rather, to be exact, I know her daughter. Violet Hargreave; she works for me."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "*Hargreave?* The New York Police Department? As mentioned in The Dancing Men?"

"Of course. Violet's mother married Sherlock's friend, Wilson Hargreave. She was Sibyl Holmes, one of the Holmeses who stayed in this country. I didn't want to mention names at your dinner. In our kind of job you don't do it. When I went into Intelligence I took Violet with me.

She's absolutely indispensable. Wonderful gift for languages; we use her mostly as an agent overseas."

If I had asked further questions Dove would have shut up; he always says that the first shot you take in Government work is a transfusion of clam-juice. But we are very old friends and he trusts me. He poured me a drink and then fetched his wallet from under his pillow.

"I had this in my pocket tonight," he said, taking out a letter. "I would have loved to mention it when one of your members was talking about cryptography, codes, ciphers, and so on. The best codes are the simplest, not methodical at all but based on some completely personal association. She's safe at home now, so I can show you how Violet used to get her stuff out of Berlin when it wasn't easy. Sometimes it was only a few words on a picture postcard; the Nazis never seemed to suspect anything so naive as that. When she had more to say she used some stationery she swiped from the Museum of Natural History, to look professional, and then overprinted a new letterhead.

I examined the paper. At the top of the sheet was the legend AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, and under it:

Professor Challenger's Expedition
Oceanic Ornithology
c/o S.Y. *Matilda Briggs*

"She couldn't get much on a postcard, not with a handwriting like that," I said, glancing at the lines of large heavily-inked script. "Very different from the small neat hand of her uncle."

"She has several handwritings, as occasion requires. Go ahead and read the letter."

It went thus:

Dear Friend:

Everything very interesting, and German scientists most helpful. Hope to come back by way of Pacific, Hawaii and Alleutians, studying migrations of gulls and goonies. If can take Kodiak will have wonderful pictures. Goonies (*phalacrocorax carbo*, a kind of cormorant, dangerous to lighthouse keepers) have regular schedule, fly Midway or Wake in October, Aleutians in June. Hope to get mail at Honolulu before you take up Conk-Singleton papers.

Yours always,
VIOLET H. HARGREAVE

"She really is an ornithologist, isn't she," I said.

"So the Berlin censor thought, as he let it come through. Does nothing else strike you?"

"Well, I haven't got my convex lens," I said. "Are there any secret watermarks in the paper? The only thing I notice is that surely a scientific investigator should spell geography correctly. Isn't there only one l in Aleutians?"

"Good man. Of course that would tickle the German censor; he'd just think another ignorant American. You can be quite sure any member of

the Holmes family would know how to spell. That's our private signal. Whenever Violet spells something wrong I know there's a double meaning. So the gulls and goonies are Japs."

"Say, she's good! And the allusions to the Holmes cases — sure, I get it. Cormorant and lighthouse keeper — that suggests politician; the story of the Veiled Lodger; it means get this warning across to the government. But what about Conk-Singleton?"

"Don't you remember the end of the Six Napoleons? Holmes says, before you get out the Conk-Singleton papers *put the pearl in the safe.* Just what we didn't do with Pearl Harbor."

"But what's the date of this letter?" I exclaimed. "Why, its spring of '41, six months before Pearl Harbor."

"I told you we have to work ahead of time," Dove said. "Violet had just been tipped off, in Berlin, about the secret terms of the German-Japanese alliance. Hitler told the Japs he'd be in Moscow by Christmas, they'd be perfectly safe to strike in December. And you can check those goony dates, which by the way are correct for the bird migrations. The Japs landed at Attu and Kiska in June, just as she said."

"I always wondered what they thought they could do up there on those godforsaken rocks."

"Maybe they were attracted by the name of that group. Ever notice it on the map? The Rat Islands."

I was beginning to get the inwardness of this Baker Street code. "Goodness, even the name of the yacht, *Matilda Briggs* — in the Sussex Vampire; why yes, that was the story of the Giant Rat of Sumatra —"

"For which the world *is not prepared,*" Dove finished for me.

"Golly, the State Department must have turned handsprings when you decoded this for them."

Dove was discreetly silent.

I looked over the letter once more. "Kodiak . . . they thought she meant Kodak. I suppose you couldn't make any mistake, it was sure to refer to the Japanese?"

"Well, there Violet was really cute. You spoke of the handwriting."

"Yes, she must have used a very broad pen, a stub."

"She picked up the idea from her Uncle Mycroft. Don't you remember his immortal remark, in the Greek Interpreter — about the letter written with a J-pen, that is a stub pen — by a middle-aged man with a weak constitution."

"I guess that's me," I said feebly. "Still I don't get it."

"J-pen, Japan."

We finished what Dove called our auld lang snort. I was thinking hard. "Whenever you get a letter with a wrong spelling," I said guiltily, "do you suspect a secret meaning? — Gosh, do you suppose when broadcasters mispronounce a word on the radio it's really a code?"

"Get out of here," said Dove. "I want my rest."

THE COMPLEAT CRIMINAL

Your Editor's 1945 anthology is titled ROGUES' GALLERY: THE GREAT CRIMINALS OF MODERN FICTION (*publication date: October 3rd*). *To quote from the Foreword, "the theme of this book is* crime — *not detection. There are thirty-two stories in this new kind of anthology; they trace the course of crookery from its fictional infancy to its modern streamlined maturity. These thirty-two stories take tradition by the tail and twist it with a vengeance. For in these tales the chief characters are not only thieves and swindlers and murderers but a definitive rogues' gallery of* successful *crooks — thieves who got away with the loot, swindlers who made suckers out of John Q. Public, murderers who proved that murder does not always out. . . ."*

The anthology (or to coin a word, the criminthology) is divided into five sections: the Department of Murderers, the Department of Thieves, the Department of Confidence Men, the Department of "Criminal" Lawyers, and the Department of Assorted Crooks (a highwayman, an art faker, two smugglers, a pickpocket, a bushranger, a modern Robin Hood, a swindler, a cardsharper, an embezzler, and a racketeer). The contributors include Dashiell Hammett, Q. Patrick, Howard Spring, John Dickson Carr, and Eric Knight, all of whose stories are appearing in book form for the first time, and among others, Agatha Christie, H. C. Bailey, Ben Hecht, Dorothy L. Sayers, Arnold Bennett, T. S. Stribling, Leslie Charteris, and Sinclair Lewis.

Now a crook, by instinct and the laws of lawlessness, is invariably a specialist. The professional jewel thief, for example, makes no attempt to sell gold bricks: he leaves that kind of knavery to his fellow expert, the confidence man. Bank robbers, counterfeiters, blackmailers — all the rogues, riffraff and royalty alike — usually stick to their last. That is why, when we think of Arsène Lupin and Raffles as crooks, we think of them primarily and exclusively as thieves; when we see in our mind's eye the hunchbacked figure of Flavio Minetti, we think of him only as an inveterate and premeditating murderer; when we remember Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford, we remember him only as a master con man and business buccaneer. No fictional felon is, of himself, by himself, and for himself, the "compleat criminal"; they have all been, to a more or less degree, specialists — until Gerald Kersh created the great Karmesin.

When your Editor first met Karmesin in manuscript, the definitive ROGUES' GALLERY *was already in page proofs — too late for additions or substitutions. But even in literature ill blows the wind that profits nobody: the criminthology's loss proved to be EQMM's gain, for beginning with this issue we inaugurate "The Adventures of Karmesin" — Karmesin who is either the greatest criminal or the greatest liar of our time.*

Only eight Karmesin exploits have been written to date, and all eight will appear in EQMM. We shall schedule them in perfidious pairs, starting now with "Karmesin, Murderer" and "Karmesin, Jewel Thief." In issues to come you will be regaled with a veritable Karmesin Karnival of Krime — "Karmesin, Swindler" and "Karmesin, Criminal Lawyer" — "Karmesin, Bank Robber" and "Karmesin, Confidence Man" — "Karmesin, Racketeer" and "Karmesin, Blackmailer." Truly a one-man Rogue's Gallery, a Falstaffian felon, a titanic transgressor — in a phrase, "the compleat criminal."

Gerald Kersh is the amazingly talented English writer who has had two books published in the United States this year — SERGEANT NELSON OF THE GUARDS *(John C. Winston Co.) and* FACES IN A DUSTY PICTURE *(Whittlesey House). The eminent critic, Sterling North, expressed the opinion that "no one since Kipling has captured the argot and character of the British Tommy with such fidelity." James Agate, the English critic, holds an even higher opinion; he wrote: "Mr. Kersh's guardsmen are truer to life than Kipling's." "The Chicago Tribune" said that "Mr. Kersh's writing well deserves the too freely awarded adjective great."*

For our part, we are proud to bring you Mr. Kersh's first ventures in crime fiction — another distinguished EQMM "first" — the charming, ironic, felonious fables of Karmesin.

THE ADVENTURES OF KARMESIN

by GERALD KERSH

1. Karmesin, Murderer

It was rough on my poor friend Karmesin. Finding a pound note in his possession for the first time in two months, he rushed out and bought a hundred cigarettes, and received a bad half-crown among the change.

"Look," he said, holding the coin in his fat, white fingers. He pressed: the half-crown bent. "Lead!" said Karmesin. "I could make better myself. Swindlers! Tramplers on the faces of the poor!"

"Take it back to the shop," I suggested, "and demand another coin."

"How am I to prove that it was the shopkeeper who gave it to me?" asked Karmesin. Then he laughed, and said: "Bah. It is all in the game. That shopkeeper would probably spit on the name of a pickpocket, a forger, or an utterer of forged notes or coins. Yet let him receive a queer half-crown from a customer, and while that coin remains in his possession he is an enemy of society; his one desire is to pass it off on somebody else. This is

the value of the popular conscience: you can buy it for a counterfeit coin. Bah, I say! Let him keep it. He thinks he is smart, but God will punish him. I tell you, my friend: the great wrongdoer who knows good from evil stands a better chance of paradise than the smug citizen who slinks behind the skirts of the law to do petty misdeeds. I could keep this half-crown and pass it to some other unfortunate person. But how am I to know what misery I might cause by so doing? A widow might ultimately receive it; or an old age pensioner. No."

In spite of his fat and his age, Karmesin must have been as strong as an ox. He grunted, and tore the soft half-crown across, throwing the pieces out of the window.

"I heard a story," he said, "about a coin like that. Some men were playing cards. One of them lost everything, and borrowed a silver dollar for his fare home and his breakfast. On the way he was accosted by an unhappy girl in the last stages of despair. He was a good-hearted man, and was touched by her story. In short, he gave her the silver dollar and told her to go in peace. Next morning she was found drowned, a bad dollar clutched in her hand. That bad dollar, you understand, had been the last straw. If it had been a good one, she would have lived on until the dawn . . . and it is God's mercy, my friend, that the daylight always brings new strength. It is the depression of the small hours that kills men, my friend; the horrible seconds when you hear the clock strike three: then you are lost. You see: the man of whom I told you, he was a good man, but Providence used him for a tragic purpose."

Karmesin became silent. I said: "Have you ever wanted to commit suicide?"

"No," said Karmesin. "Only murder."

"But I thought you disapproved of murder."

"I do. Evildoers should be left in the hands of their destiny, which always destroys them in the end. Nevertheless, I was responsible for the planning of the Perfect Murder."

"How?"

"Come with me," said Karmesin, jingling the remains of his pound. "I have been your guest many times. Now you must be mine."

He took me to Xavier's Bar and with an air of magnificence that sent the waiter skipping, ordered brandy.

"What is money?" said Karmesin. "Dross, rubbish. Thank God I have always spent mine as fast as it came!"

He lumbered over to the slot machine in the corner, inserted a shilling, pulled the handle down. The numbered discs whirred round and thudded to a stop . . . 3, 3, 3. Ten shillings dropped out of the machine with a jingle.

"Observe," said Karmesin. "There is one thing in the world which no man can resist: the jingle of cash. See — every eye in the bar is upon us. Now, come and drink your brandy, and I will tell you about my murder. . . ."

My scheme (said Karmesin) was not unconnected with a slot machine, in a club not unlike this, not many years ago. The victim was a man called Skobeleff, a man who richly deserved to die.

He was a criminal of the worst type, my friend: one who lives upon women. Skobeleff's speciality was blackmail. He had a genius for working his way into the affections of highly respectable women — women with highly placed husbands. You know how it sometimes happens with the wives of great men. Their husbands, preoccupied with affairs, neglect them. They yearn for attention, to be noticed. It is only natural. Then comes an intrigue, possibly an innocent intrigue — a friendship, quite often, with an unworthy man versed in the wiles of the woman-hunter.

Skobeleff was such a man. He moved in good circles; was tolerated, at least, as a friend of people who moved in good circles. Women found it difficult to resist him, for he had a handsome face, a fine Imperial Guardsman's figure, magnificent blue eyes, the flaxen hair of an angel, perfect self-confidence, a boundless experience of women, and a voice more melodious than harp-strings . . . together with a flow of conversation that could make the unhappy laugh, or bring a heart-throb to the bosom of the most nonchalant woman that ever lived.

He struck up friendships with several nice ladies of uncertain age. Then one could see that he was becoming prosperous. He appeared, every day, in a new and elegant suit; marvellous shirts and ties; offered you rare cigars out of a platinum case. He was obviously doing well out of his friendships.

This was his line; he would profess love and the need for spiritual companionship; and then, by devious shifts, manage to get his victim to write him a tender note . . . you know, my friend, "just to read when you are not here": it is an old trick. And it always worked. It always has and always will, for women are fools with their affection, just like men.

Having his note, he would begin to bleed the victim. She was, you understand, always the wife of a very great man; somebody who could not afford a scandal of any kind, even if she were utterly innocent. He had a heart of ice, that Skobeleff, and bled them dry. Apart from the money, he took a sadistic delight in the writhing of the victim. It was a hideous business.

And when he wanted to have a quiet drink, he always sat in the Maecenas Club near Piccadilly — an elegant drinking-den, with several slot machines in it, at which numerous idiots lost money enough to choke a hippopotamus.

Now it came to pass that I was approached one day by a woman for whom I entertained the deepest affection. I had better not tell you her name, but she was the wife of a very famous French politician. I liked her very much, in a quite platonic and brotherly way. Yes, brotherly is the word for it, for she was twenty years younger than me, and I had bought

her an ivory teething-ring with golden bells on it when she was a mere liver-colored handful of babe in long clothes. She approached me now and told me a sad story.

She was in terrible trouble. She had involved herself with Skobeleff, and had written him letters — which was worse. Now, he demanded twenty thousand pounds. Otherwise, he would place the letters in the hands of her husband's political opposition; ruin him, ruin her, ruin everything. Twenty thousand pounds was his price, and she had not got twenty thousand. By selling some jewels she could raise ten thousand, she told me, but Skobeleff would not take ten thousand. He said, "Twenty or nothing. I can sell these letters for twenty thousand anyway. . . ."

Could I help? Could I lend her ten thousand pounds?

I said that I could do better than that: I could get back the letters.

I did so. It is a story of common burglary. I induced my friend to make up a bundle of money, meet Skobeleff at his apartment, and demand the letters in exchange. At a given moment I appeared, heavily disguised, with a large revolver, made him open his safe, took the entire contents of it, together with the letters my friend had written, and having knocked Skobeleff unconscious with the barrel of the gun, quietly made my departure. That was easy.

But when I came to examine the other papers I had taken, I was horrified. I, Karmesin, was disgusted! The man had made indexes and ledgers of dirty crime. He had a whole career of vile blackmail laid out. God knows what a trail of misery he was planning to leave in his wake. I only knew one thing: by stealing his papers, I had held him up only for a little while. Sooner or later he was certain to operate again.

The law could not touch him. If he left this country, he would operate elsewhere. I decided to take the law into my own hands; play God; kill him.

I approached him with a proposition.

I told him who I was, and he was impressed; he knew of the things Karmesin had done. Then I said:

"Do you know who lives in the flat above the Maecenas Club?"

"Yes," said Skobeleff, "old Lord Westerby."

"Do you know what he keeps in his safe?" I asked.

"No, what?"

"The Westerby Collar."

"The Westerby Collar!" said Skobeleff. "A hundred and eighty priceless emeralds, and the Green Devil Emerald in the centre!"

"Yes. Well?"

"Well, what do you say?" he asked.

"You could help me get them. I have an immediate market. We can get at least two hundred thousand. Help me, and I'll split with you fifty-fifty."

"But how?"

"Now, listen," I said. "I will do the work. I will get the emeralds. As for

Westerby, leave him to me; I'll handle him." I grinned ferociously. "What I am going to suggest is this: I slip upstairs and get the jewels. A diversion is created that draws everybody in the Club into the slot machine room. You slip out onto the balcony in the room behind. That balcony stands directly underneath the servant's bedroom in the Westerby flat. We synchronise our watches. At midnight precisely, you step onto the balcony and I drop the jewels down into your hands. Then you rejoin the crowd in the next room, and nobody will ever know that you have not been there all the time. Next morning you meet me and give me the jewels."

Even as I spoke to him I could see the idea of a doublecross entering his treacherous mind. I could see it in his eyes. What had he to lose? He had only to stand on a balcony. I was to do all the dirty work, take all the risks.

"But how will you get everybody into the slot machine room?" he asked.

"At ten minutes to twelve," I said, "a man will win the jackpot on every machine in the place."

"If you can arrange that," he said, "you must be a wizard."

"I am a wizard," I said.

When I left him I looked up a man called Martin, a good little rogue who had had occasions to be thankful to me many a time, especially once when I supported his wife and three children while he spent a year in jail. He was something of a genius in engineering: I mean, very clever with wheels and springs. Would he help me? He would have gone through hell and high water for me. I promised him fifty pounds. His act was simple. At about eleven o'clock he had to come to the Club with a bag, showing the official card of the firm that manufactured the slot machines. Then he was to unlock each machine, and adjust it so that the next revolution of the wheels would bring the total to Three Bars, which wins the jackpot. That is a very simple matter for a man who knows how to handle machinery. Normally, of course, your slot machine engineer sends the wheels flying round six or seven times before leaving the thing, just to see that all is well. But Martin would not do this, of course, and nobody would notice.

I told you: nothing attracts people like the jingle of money. There must have been a dozen machines in the Club. The crash of a dozen jackpots at midnight would bring every member running from the next room: the floor would be knee-deep in silver. Everybody would be pulling handles, or stooping for fallen coins.

Then Skobeleff would come out on the balcony. He thought he ran no risk, for the secretary and commissionaire whom one had to pass before entering or leaving the Club could both swear that he had been in there all the time.

Only I was not going to be on the floor above with a priceless emerald collar. I was to be at the darkened window of the flat across the road. In my hands there was to be a rifle. I was a perfect shot, and still am. From that

distance I could not miss. I should put a bullet in the centre of Skobeleff's forehead, and wipe his evil presence from the face of the earth. Martin was waiting in the street with a car. At ten seconds before twelve, as the theatre crowds filled the streets, he would jam the traffic; there would be a chaos of horns. He would make his engine backfire furiously. The sound of my shot would be unheard. It was perfect. And so it turned out.

A young fool called Poppins put a shilling in the slot machine and let out a deluge of coins. Others followed suit. The proprietor of the place came running, white in the face. The machines had gone mad! They were all paying out jackpots! The whole Club poured into the room, eager to put a shilling in, or to see money coming out. Simultaneously, a fearful uproar broke out in the street below. Cars jammed in a black mass, honking like fury. Martin's big automobile banged and thundered, giving out clouds of smoke.

I got Skobeleff's head in line, took a careful aim. He was outlined against the light. I could not miss — I who have knocked the head off a running antelope at five hundred yards. I pressed the trigger.

Skobeleff shrugged his shoulders and walked back into the club. Remembering everything, planning everything, organizing everything so perfectly, *I had forgotten to load my rifle!*

Karmesin laughed. "Yet he deserved to die," he said.

"Well?" I asked.

"Yes," said Karmesin. "It proves my point. Such men are always punished in the end. Nemesis is always upon them. They are never more than one jump ahead of vengeance."

"But *Skobeleff?*"

"Skobeleff," said Karmesin. "He stayed in the Club until one o'clock in the morning, then went home. Do you remember the big fire in the hosier's shop in Dublin Street, Piccadilly? Skobeleff lived above. He perished that very night. You see, in leaving that blank spot of forgetfulness in my brain, Fate was preserving Skobeleff for something even more terrible. A man cannot run away from his destiny."

"But one thing more. How did you get into the flat exactly opposite the Club, when you meant to kill Skobeleff?"

"Ha!" said Karmesin. "I got into it the same way as I got into it before: with a duplicate key. And I knew that the occupant would be on the balcony opposite. *It was Skobeleff's flat!*"

"And the fire?"

"Inscrutable Providence," said Karmesin dryly. "Later that night I returned to Skobeleff's flat after he had gone to sleep. I took my cigar out of my mouth, and casually flipped it over my shoulder. Let Providence proceed with the matter," I said. "Providence! Fate! Skobeleff perished. It is right and proper that rubbish should be incinerated. So perish all rubbish! Another brandy?"

2. Karmesin, Jewel Thief

JEWELS? Haha!" said Karmesin, pushing his nose against the jeweller's window. "I know all about jewels. Look there. What kind of diamond is that? Three hundred and twenty-five pounds for that yellow rubbish? Hoo! It is worth exactly one hundred and seventy-five. Only, people like big stones. Women, particularly. They would rather have a miserable discolored diamond as big as a hazel-nut, than a small, perfect, white stone. I like diamonds. I have collected them."

"What, bought them?" I asked.

"Only a fool buys diamonds," said Karmesin, eyeing an emerald as a hungry boy looks at a pie. "The proper thing to do is steal them. As a jewel thief, I was probably the greatest of all time. Listen. Did you ever hear of the Betzendorfer affair? A diamond bracelet worth twenty thousand pounds and an emerald valued at five thousand were spirited away."

"I seem to have read something about it, somewhere," I said.

"I did the spiriting," said Karmesin.

"It is one of those unsolved mysteries, isn't it?" I asked.

"*Ptah!*" said Karmesin, "There is no such thing as an unsolved mystery. Always, there is somebody, somewhere, who has a solution. What the police cannot put their great red hands on is an unsolved mystery, eh? *Pfui* on such claptrap! Most people are dumbheads, my friend — fools and nincompoops."

"Come away from this window," I said, anxiously.

"Bah. What is there in that window? Rubbish. Chicken feed. Twenty thousand pounds would buy the whole shop. Am I to be interested in such small change? All right, let us walk on. Have you the price of a cup of tea?"

"I have threepence."

"I have threepence also."

We found a teashop. "Tea!" said Karmesin to the waitress, with the air of a man calling for Pol Roger.

"You were talking of a bracelet."

"The Betzendorfer affair? Aha. Listen. . . ."

It happened in Vienna (said Karmesin) a number of years ago. I was living there. Vienna is a nice city. It was full of money. I was prosperous. Women turned to look at me on the street. Men gnashed their teeth when they saw me. What a figure of a man I was! A joy! A dream!

But I will not weary you with all this. One day I was out walking, when I saw something which made me stop. It looked like a little firmament of stars, collected by a god, and imprisoned in a barred window. It was the diamond bracelet. Ah, my young friend, what a diamond bracelet! Who could believe that crystallized carbon could contain so much pure light! They sparkled, they flashed, they drew me as a magnet draws a needle. I stared at them. They stared back at me. They twinkled and winked, as if

trying to say: "Come and get me."

The bracelet was not priced, needless to say. One does not stick a ticket on the moon! But I calculated that it would be a good twenty thousand pounds worth of anybody's money. I decided that Fate had sent me to Vienna simply to get that bracelet. I determined in that moment to steal it.

I went away and thought.

When I think, something happens. I mean to say, I do not think in vain. I am, you understand, a man of genius.

In those days, Vienna was the home of psychiatry. Every lunatic in the world went to Vienna, either to start a new science, or to be cured of a non-existent state of mind. Psychiatry was the new fad. I do not deny that some people are psychiatric cases. Indeed, most people are. But not the ones who rush to psychiatrists to be cured. They need only to be cured of their desire to be cured. There was Freud, of course. That man of genius was the master of them all. He did not toy with society cranks. No. He simply worked. But Freud was Freud: a giant. Next to him, the most fashionable psychiatrist was a certain Professor Trotz.

Trotz was a clever fellow. He was, I believe, a good psychiatrist. But he also liked luxury and money, and played the prevalent crazes for all they were worth. Society women flocked to his sanatorium from everywhere. He had a huge house, full of impressive attendants.

As soon as I thought of him, I knew that the diamonds were mine. You see, he was well-known, but not much photographed. Sometimes a picture of him would appear in a society magazine: he was a very big, impressive man, with a mustache like that of the philosopher Nietzsche.

It was very nice.

I went to see him one morning, presenting the card of one of the noblest French families. "I am the Duc de Bourgogne," I said.

He purred like a pussy-cat, for the Duc de Bourgogne was one of the wealthiest men in Europe.

"I wish to consult you," I said. "But this is a matter of the utmost delicacy. It concerns my unhappy brother."

"Yes?"

"In every way but one my brother is sound," I said, "but he has one peculiar aberration."

"And what is that, Monsieur le Duc?"

"He has some fixation which distresses us very greatly."

"Tut, tut."

"Any mention of jewels drives him mad."

"But exactly how, Monsieur le Duc?"

"If, for example, you showed him a diamond bracelet, he would become violent."

"But how interesting."

"Indeed, the very mention of the word 'jewel' drives him into a meaningless frenzy. At first we thought that it would pass. But instead it grows worse. Sometimes he raves and shouts simply at the thought of jewels.

It is very disconcerting."

"You have my sincerest sympathy," said Trotz.

"If you can cure him," I said, "you may name your own fee. I would pay anything to cure my dear brother."

"I shall be happy to help."

"But," I said, "you understand: he must not know that he is being brought to a psychiatric sanatorium."

"Certainly not."

"What I propose to do is, to bring him here on some pretext, and leave him with you."

"A good idea. When will you bring your brother?"

"Tomorrow," I said.

"Good. And at what time?"

"Shall we say four?"

"Perfect." He made a note.

"Now," I said, "I wish you to accept at least part of your fee in advance."

"No, no."

"But yes."

"I couldn't think of it."

"But I insist, Professor!"

"Ah, well, if you *insist*, Monsieur le Duc. . . ."

From a wallet as fat as a pig, I took ten thousand schillings, and flicked them down.

"A receipt?" he said, taking up a pen.

"Pooh!" I replied. "And now be so good as to inform your servants that when I arrive tomorrow at four, they must show me to your waiting room without inquiry or hesitation."

"But certainly, most certainly, with the very greatest pleasure in the world, my honored Monsieur le Duc!"

Bon. It was all running as smoothly as oiled steel.

My next step was to visit the jeweller. I asked for the proprietor of the shop and presented a card. What card? Why, the card of Professor Trotz, of the Trotz Sanatorium.

"I am Professor Trotz," I said.

"Ah, yes," said the jeweller.

"I am about to become engaged."

"A thousand congratulations!"

"But it is not yet officially announced. I wish to purchase a present for my fiancée."

Ah, how that jeweller smiled. "But of course!"

"Something really fine. That bracelet, for instance. . . ."

He showed it to me. Ah, what a bracelet that was! It took all my self-control to prevent myself from trembling. Its price was colossal. No matter. Nothing could be too good for my fiancée, for the bride of the rich Professor Trotz, for the stupendously wealthy Madame Vanderkook, the widow of the fabulously wealthy Mynheer Vanderkook who owned most of the Dutch East Indies.

"Naturally," said the jeweller. "One cannot give a small present to a lady like that."

"She is at present indisposed," I said.

"Ah?"

"She is in fact a patient at my sanatorium."

"Ah! . . ." The damned jeweller had the insolence to wink at me. The psychiatrist had caught a wealthy

client, he thought. I gave him a terrible look.

"I should want you, therefore," I said, "to come and show the bracelet to the lady herself, at the Trotz Sanatorium. You may come with me. Let her choose for herself. I shall also want an engagement ring, an emerald, not too dear. Something about five thousand pounds."

Ha! . . . It was as good as done.

He put the bracelet and the ring into a leather case which he chained to his wrist and showed me an automatic pistol in a holster under his jacket. "We must take no chances," he said.

"No," I said, "there are so many thieves about."

"Exactly, Professor Trotz."

We took a taxi and arrived at the sanatorium at four o'clock.

The doorman let me in, touching his hat. The butler bowed, the nurses prostrated themselves to the ground. The burly attendants practically kissed my feet. There could have been no doubt in the mind of the jeweller that I was the Professor, the owner of the sanatorium.

I took him to the Professor's anteroom, and said:

"Now, if you will please let me take the bracelet and ring into my fiancée, and wait here, I shall be with you in one minute."

"Pleasure, *Herr* Professor Trotz, infinite pleasure!"

He unbuckled the bag and gave me the jewels. I walked casually into the Professor's room, and whispered:

"Sssh! Not a word. He's waiting out there. Let me out through the other door. I can't bear to be here when he finds out. . . ."

"I understand," said the Professor.

He let me out through the opposite door, and away I went, with the beautiful bracelet in my pocket.

Karmesin laughed until tea got into his bronchial tubes; after which he coughed and beat the table with his huge fists until I slapped his back. Then, subsiding he said:

"It was a joke. It was a scream. The Professor went out. The jeweller said: 'Are the jewels satisfactory?' 'There, there,' said the Professor. 'But my diamonds?' 'Hush, hush, and let us talk it over.' 'My diamond bracelet! My emerald!' screamed the jeweller, and pulled out his pistol. Trotz disarmed him with a kick on the wrist and called for the attendants who, in ten seconds, had the unhappy man trapped in a strait-jacket. Twelve hours passed before anybody realized that he was not a Duke's brother, but a swindled jeweller. And then it was much too late. I was on my way to Warsaw, disguised as an Indian Maharajah. It was good fun. It was a lovely bracelet. The emerald, also was magnificent. I like emeralds. They bring me luck. They were jewels, I tell you. But now, what do you get? Rubbish, glass, valueless dirt! I would not take such diamonds as we were looking at for a gift. No, not if you paid me, I wouldn't take them. Have you the price of five cigarettes? No? Bah! Let us walk. . . ."

Nearly a year and a half ago your Editor received a letter from Bertram Atkey, creator of Smiler Bunn and those other engaging Easy Street Experts. Here are some excerpts from Mr. Atkey's letter:

"My son-in-law, Phil Atkey, who writes chiefly under the name of Barry Perowne, has just been here [Highcliffe, Hants, England] on leave. He pounced on the two copies [of EQMM] like a hawk and was tremendously enthusiastic about [your magazine]. He asked if I would send on to you the enclosed story . . . which seems to develop a new slant . . . Barry Perowne has been writing those modern Raffles books and stories, many of which have appeared in the U.S.A. This, of course, by special arrangement with the Executors of the late E. W. Hornung."

A later communiqué informed us that Mr. Perowne had given the story to his father-in-law just as he (Perowne) was leaving for Normandy on "a very hush-hush war job." Thus, even in the midst of blood, sweat and tears, the detective story survives; and it is both fitting and proper that Mr. Perowne's story should now make its way back to Normandy and to all the fighting fronts as part of EQMM's overseas edition, issued simultaneously with the home-front edition — to provide entertainment and relaxation for Mr. Perowne's brothers-in-arms in all theatres of war.

With this introduction of the author, the story, and the circumstances under which the story was sent to EQMM, we now ask you to read one of the most unusual riddle stories ever written. Further comments at the end of "The Blind Spot" — but please read the story first!

THE BLIND SPOT

by BARRY PEROWNE

ANNIXTER loved the little man like a brother. He put an arm around the little man's shoulders, partly from affection and partly to prevent himself from falling.

He had been drinking earnestly since seven o'clock the previous evening. It was now nudging midnight, and things were a bit hazy. The lobby was full of the thump of hot music; down two steps, there were a lot of tables, a lot of people, a lot of noise. Annixter had no idea what this place was called, or how he had got here, or when. He had been in so many places since seven o'clock the previous evening.

"In a nutshell," confided Annixter, leaning heavily on the little man, "a woman fetches you a kick in the face, or fate fetches you a kick in the face. Same thing, really — a woman and fate. So what? So you think it's the finish, an' you go out and get plas-

tered. You get good an' plastered," said Annixter, "an' you brood.

"You sit there an' you drink an' you brood — an' in the end you find you've brooded up just about the best idea you ever had in your life! 'At's the way it goes," said Annixter, "an' 'at's my philosophy — the harder you kick a playwright, the better he works!"

He gestured with such vehemence that he would have collapsed if the little man hadn't steadied him. The little man was poker-backed, his grip was firm. His mouth was firm, too — a straight line, almost colorless. He wore hexagonal rimless spectacles, a black hard-felt hat, a neat pepper-and-salt suit. He looked pale and prim beside the flushed, rumpled Annixter.

From her counter, the hat-check girl watched them indifferently.

"Don't you think," the little man said to Annixter, "you ought to go home now? I've been honored you should tell me the scenario of your play, but —"

"I had to tell someone," said Annixter, "or blow my top! Oh, boy, what a play, what a play! What a murder, eh? That climax —"

The full, dazzling perfection of it struck him again. He stood frowning, considering, swaying a little — then nodded abruptly, groped for the little man's hand, warmly pumphandled it.

"Sorry I can't stick around," said Annixter. "I got work to do."

He crammed his hat on shapelessly, headed on a slightly elliptical course across the lobby, thrust the double doors open with both hands, lurched out into the night.

It was, to his inflamed imagination, full of lights, winking and tilting across the dark. *Sealed Room* by James Annixter. No. *Room Reserved* by James — No, no. *Blue Room. Room Blue. Room Blue* by James Annixter —

He stepped, oblivious, off the curb, and a taxi, swinging in toward the place he had just left, skidded with suddenly locked, squealing wheels on the wet road.

Something hit Annixter violently in the chest, and all the lights he had been seeing exploded in his face.

Then there weren't any lights.

Mr. James Annixter, the playwright, was knocked down by a taxi late last night when leaving the Casa Havana. After hospital treatment for shock and superficial injuries, he returned to his home.

The lobby of the Casa Havana was full of the thump of music; down two steps there were a lot of tables, a lot of people, a lot of noise. The hat-check girl looked wonderingly at Annixter — at the plaster on his forehead, the black sling which supported his left arm.

"My," said the hat-check girl, "I certainly didn't expect to see *you* again so soon!"

"You remember me, then?" said Annixter, smiling.

"I ought to," said the hat-check girl. "You cost me a night's sleep! I heard those brakes squeal right after

you went out the door that night — and there was a sort of a thud!" She shuddered. "I kept hearing it all night long. I can still hear it now — a week after! Horrible!"

"You're sensitive," said Annixter.

"I got too much imagination," the hat-check girl admitted. "F'rinstance, I just *knew* it was you even before I run to the door and see you lying there. That man you was with was standing just outside. 'My heavens', I says to him, 'it's your friend'!"

"What did he say?" Annixter asked.

"He says, 'He's not my friend. He's just someone I met.' Funny, eh?"

Annixter moistened his lips.

"How d'you mean," he said carefully, "funny? I *was* just someone he'd met."

"Yes, but — man you been drinking with," said the hat-check girl, "killed before your eyes. Because he must have seen it; he went out right after you. You'd think he'd 'a' been interested, at least. But when the taxi driver starts shouting for witnesses it wasn't his fault, I looks around for that man — an' he's gone!"

Annixter exchanged a glance with Ransome, his producer, who was with him. It was a slightly puzzled, slightly anxious glance. But he smiled, then, at the hat-check girl.

"Not quite 'killed before his eyes'," said Annixter. "Just shaken up a bit, that's all."

There was no need to explain to her how curious, how eccentric, had been the effect of that "shaking up" upon his mind.

"If you could 'a' seen yourself lying there with the taxi's lights shining on you —"

"Ah, there's that imagination of yours!" said Annixter.

He hesitated for just an instant, then asked the question he had come to ask — the question which had assumed so profound an importance for him.

He asked, "That man I was with — who was he?"

The hat-check girl looked from one to the other. She shook her head.

"I never saw him before," she said, "and I haven't seen him since."

Annixter felt as though she had struck him in the face. He had hoped, hoped desperately, for a different answer; he had counted on it.

Ransome put a hand on his arm, restrainingly.

"Anyway," said Ransome, "as we're here, let's have a drink."

They went down the two steps into the room where the band thumped. A waiter led them to a table, and Ransome gave him an order.

"There was no point in pressing that girl," Ransome said to Annixter. "She doesn't know the man, and that's that. My advice to you, James, is: Don't worry. Get your mind on to something else. Give yourself a chance. After all, it's barely a week since —"

"A week!" Annixter said. "Hell, look what I've done in that week! The whole of the first two acts, and the third act right up to that crucial point — the climax of the whole

thing: the solution: the scene that the play stands or falls on! It would have been done, Bill — the whole play, the best thing I ever did in my life — it would have been finished two days ago if it hadn't been for this —" he knuckled his forehead — "this extraordinary blind spot, this damnable little trick of memory!"

"You had a very rough shaking-up —"

"That?" Annixter said contemptuously. He glanced down at the sling on his arm. "I never even felt it; it didn't bother me. I woke up in the ambulance with my play as vivid in my mind as the moment the taxi hit me — more so, maybe, because I was stone cold sober then, and knew what I had. A winner — a thing that just couldn't miss!"

"If you'd rested," Ransome said, "as the doc told you, instead of sitting up in bed there scribbling night and day —"

"I had to get it on paper. Rest?" said Annixter, and laughed harshly. "You don't rest when you've got a thing like that. That's what you live for — if you're a playwright. That *is* living! I've lived eight whole lifetimes, in those eight characters, during the past five days. I've lived so utterly in them, Bill, that it wasn't till I actually came to write that last scene that I realized what I'd lost! Only my whole play, that's all! How was Cynthia stabbed in that windowless room into which she had locked and bolted herself? How did the killer get to her? *How was it done?*

"Hell," Annixter said, "scores of writers, better men than I am, have tried to put that sealed room murder over — and never quite done it convincingly: never quite got away with it: been overelaborate, phony! I had it — heaven help me, *I* had it! Simple, perfect, glaringly obvious when you've once seen it! And it's my whole play — the curtain rises on that sealed room and falls on it! That was my revelation — *how it was done!* That was what I got, by way of playwright's compensation, because a woman I thought I loved kicked me in the face — I brooded up the answer to the sealed room! And a taxi knocked it out of my head!"

He drew a long breath.

"I've spent two days and two nights, Bill, trying to get that idea back — *how it was done!* It won't come. I'm a competent playwright; I know my job; I could finish my play, but it'd be like all those others — not quite right, phony! It wouldn't be *my play!* But there's a little man walking around this city somewhere — a little man with hexagonal glasses — who's got my idea in his head! He's got it because I told it to him. I'm going to find that little man, and get back what belongs to me! I've got to! Don't you see that, Bill? I've *got* to!"

If the gentleman who, at the Casa Havana on the night of January 27th so patiently listened to a playwright's outlining of an idea for a drama will communicate with the Box No. below, he will hear of something to his advantage.

A little man who had said, "He's not my friend. He's just someone I met —"

A little man who'd seen an accident but hadn't waited to give evidence —

The hat-check girl had been right. There *was* something a little queer about that.

A little queer?

During the next few days, when the advertisements he'd inserted failed to bring any reply, it began to seem to Annixter very queer indeed.

His arm was out of its sling now, but he couldn't work. Time and again, he sat down before his almost completed manuscript, read it through with close, grim attention, thinking, "It's *bound* to come back this time!" — only to find himself up against that blind spot again, that blank wall, that maddening hiatus in his memory.

He left his work and prowled the streets; he haunted bars and saloons; he rode for miles on 'buses and subway, especially at the rush hours. He saw a million faces, but the face of the little man with hexagonal glasses he did not see.

The thought of him obsessed Annixter. It was infuriating, it was unjust, it was torture to think that a little, ordinary, chance-met citizen was walking blandly around somewhere with the last link of his, the celebrated James Annixter's play — the best thing he'd ever done — locked away in his head. And with no idea of what he had: without the imagination, probably, to appreciate what he had! And certainly with no idea of what it meant to Annixter!

Or *had* he some idea? Was he, perhaps, not quite so ordinary as he'd seemed? Had he seen those advertisements, drawn from them tortuous inferences of his own? Was he holding back with some scheme for shaking Annixter down for a packet?

The more Annixter thought about it, the more he felt that the hat-check girl had been right, that there was something very queer indeed about the way the little man had behaved after the accident.

Annixter's imagination played around the man he was seeking, tried to probe into his mind, conceived reasons for his fading away after the accident, for his failure to reply to the advertisements.

Annixter's was an active and dramatic imagination. The little man who had seemed so ordinary began to take on a sinister shape in Annixter's mind —

But the moment he actually saw the little man again, he realized how absurd that was. It was so absurd that it was laughable. The little man was so respectable; his shoulders were so straight; his pepper-and-salt suit was so neat; his black hard-felt hat was set so squarely on his head —

The doors of the subway train were just closing when Annixter saw him, standing on the platform with a briefcase in one hand, a folded evening paper under his other arm. Light from the train shone on his prim, pale face; his hexagonal spectacles flashed. He turned toward the exit as Annixter

lunged for the closing doors of the train, squeezed between them on to the platform.

Craning his head to see above the crowd, Annixter elbowed his way through, ran up the stairs two at a time, put a hand on the little man's shoulder.

"Just a minute," Annixter said. "I've been looking for you."

The little man checked instantly, at the touch of Annixter's hand. Then he turned his head and looked at Annixter. His eyes were pale behind the hexagonal, rimless glasses — a pale grey. His mouth was a straight line, almost colorless.

Annixter loved the little man like a brother. Merely finding the little man was a relief so great that it was like the lifting of a black cloud from his spirits. He patted the little man's shoulder affectionately.

"I've got to talk to you," said Annixter. "It won't take a minute. Let's go somewhere."

The little man said, "I can't imagine what you want to talk to me about."

He moved slightly to one side, to let a woman pass. The crowd from the train had thinned, but there were still people going up and down the stairs. The little man looked, politely inquiring, at Annixter.

Annixter said, "Of course you can't, it's so damned silly! But it's about that play —"

"Play?"

Annixter felt a faint anxiety.

"Look," he said, "I was drunk that night — I was very, very drunk! But looking back, my impression is that you were dead sober. You were, weren't you?"

"I've never been drunk in my life."

"Thank heaven for that!" said Annixter. "Then you won't have any difficulty in remembering the little point I want you to remember." He grinned, shook his head. "You had me going there, for a minute. I thought —"

"I don't know what you thought," the little man said. "But I'm quite sure you're mistaking me for somebody else. I haven't any idea what you're talking about. I never saw you before in my life. I'm sorry. Good night."

He turned and started up the stairs. Annixter stared after him. He couldn't believe his ears. He stared blankly after the little man for an instant, then a rush of anger and suspicion swept away his bewilderment. He raced up the stairs, caught the little man by the arm.

"Just a minute," said Annixter. "I may have been drunk, but —"

"That," the little man said, "seems evident. Do you mind taking your hand off me?"

Annixter controlled himself. "I'm sorry," he said. "Let me get this right, though. You say you've never seen me before. Then you weren't at the Casa Havana on the 27th — somewhere between ten o'clock and midnight? You didn't have a drink or two with me, and listen to an idea for a play that had just come into my mind?"

The little man looked steadily at Annixter.

"I've told you," the little man said. "I've never set eyes on you before."

"You didn't see me get hit by a taxi?" Annixter pursued, tensely. "You didn't say to the hat-check girl, 'He's not my friend. He's just someone I met'?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," the little man said sharply.

He made to turn away, but Annixter gripped his arm again.

"I don't know," Annixter said, between his teeth, "anything about your private affairs, and I don't want to. You may have had some good reason for wanting to duck giving evidence as a witness of that taxi accident. You may have some good reason for this act you're pulling on me, now. I don't know and I don't care. But it is an act! You *are* the man I told my play to!

"I want you to tell that story back to me as I told it to you; I have my reasons — personal reasons, of concern to me and me only. I want you to tell the story back to me — that's all I want! I don't want to know who you are, or anything about you. *I just want you to tell me that story!*"

"You ask," the little man said, "an impossibility, since I never heard it."

Annixter kept an iron hold on himself.

He said, "Is it money? Is this some sort of a hold-up? Tell me what you want; I'll give it to you. Lord help me, I'd go so far as to give you a share in the play! That'll mean real money. I know, because I know my business. And maybe — maybe," said Annixter, struck by a sudden thought, "*you* know it, too! Eh?"

"You're insane or drunk!" the little man said.

With a sudden movement, he jerked his arm free, raced up the stairs. A train was rumbling in, below. People were hurrying down. He weaved and dodged among them with extraordinary celerity.

He was a small man, light, and Annixter was heavy. By the time he reached the street, there was no sign of the little man. He was gone.

Was the idea, Annixter wondered, to steal his play? By some wild chance did the little man nurture a fantastic ambition to be a dramatist? Had he, perhaps, peddled his precious manuscripts in vain, for years, around the managements? Had Annixter's play appeared to him as a blinding flash of hope in the gathering darkness of frustration and failure: something he had imagined he could safely steal because it had seemed to him the random inspiration of a drunkard who by morning would have forgotten he had ever given birth to anything but a hangover?

That, Annixter thought, would be a laugh! That would be irony —

He took another drink. It was his fifteenth since the little man with the hexagonal glasses had given him the slip, and Annixter was beginning to reach the stage where he lost count of

how many places he had had drinks in tonight. It was also the stage, though, where he was beginning to feel better, where his mind was beginning to work.

He could imagine just how the little man must have felt as the quality of the play he was being told, with hiccups, gradually had dawned upon him.

"This is mine!" the little man would have thought. "I've got to have this. He's drunk, he's soused, he's bottled — he'll have forgotten every word of it by the morning! Go on! Go on, mister! Keep talking!"

That was a laugh, too — the idea that Annixter would have forgotten his play by the morning. Other things Annixter forgot, unimportant things; but never in his life had he forgotten the minutest detail that was to his purpose as a playwright. Never!

Except once, because a taxi had knocked him down.

Annixter took another drink. He needed it. He was on his own now. There wasn't any little man with hexagonal glasses to fill in that blind spot for him. The little man was gone. He was gone as though he'd never been. To hell with him! Annixter had to fill in that blind spot himself. He *had* to do it — somehow!

He had another drink. He had quite a lot more drinks. The bar was crowded and noisy, but he didn't notice the noise — till someone came up and slapped him on the shoulder. It was Ransome.

Annixter stood up, leaning with his knuckles on the table.

"Look, Bill," Annixter said, "how about this? Man forgets an idea, see? He wants to get it back — gotta get it back! Idea comes from inside, works outwards — right? So he starts on the outside, works back inward. How's that?"

He swayed, peering at Ransome.

"Better have a little drink," said Ransome. "I'd need to think that out."

"I," said Annixter, "*have* thought it out!" He crammed his hat shapelessly on to his head. "Be seeing you, Bill. I got work to do!"

He started, on a slightly tacking course, for the door — and his apartment.

It was Joseph, his "man," who opened the door of his apartment to him, some twenty minutes later. Joseph opened the door while Annixter's latchkey was still describing vexed circles around the lock.

"Good evening, sir," said Joseph.

Annixter stared at him. "I didn't tell you to stay in tonight."

"I hadn't any real reason for going out, sir," Joseph explained. He helped Annixter off with his coat. "I rather enjoy a quiet evening in, once in a while."

"You got to get out of here," said Annixter.

"Thank you, sir," said Joseph. "I'll go and throw a few things into a bag."

Annixter went into his big living-room-study, poured himself a drink.

The manuscript of his play lay on the desk. Annixter, swaying a little,

glass in hand, stood frowning down at the untidy stack of yellow paper, but he didn't begin to read. He waited until he heard the outer door click shut behind Joseph, then he gathered up his manuscript, the decanter and a glass, and the cigarette box. Thus laden, he went into the hall, walked across it to the door of Joseph's room.

There was a bolt on the inside of this door, and the room was the only one in the apartment which had no window — both facts which made the room the only one suitable to Annixter's purpose.

With his free hand, he switched on the light.

It was a plain little room, but Annixter noticed, with a faint grin, that the bedspread and the cushion in the worn basket-chair were both blue. Appropriate, he thought — a good omen. *Room Blue* by James Annixter —

Joseph had evidently been lying on the bed, reading the evening paper; the paper lay on the rumpled quilt, and the pillow was dented. Beside the head of the bed, opposite the door, was a small table littered with shoe-brushes and dusters.

Annixter swept this paraphernalia on to the floor. He put his stack of manuscript, the decanter and glass and cigarette box on the table, and went across and bolted the door. He pulled the basket-chair up to the table, sat down, lighted a cigarette.

He leaned back in the chair, smoking, letting his mind ease into the atmosphere he wanted — the mental atmosphere of Cynthia, the woman in his play, the woman who was afraid, so afraid that she had locked and bolted herself into a windowless room, a sealed room.

"This is how she sat," Annixter told himself, "just as I'm sitting now: in a room with no windows, the door locked and bolted. Yet he got at her. He got at her with a knife — in a room with no windows, the door remaining locked and bolted on the inside. *How was it done?*"

There was a way in which it could be done. He, Annixter, had thought of that way; he had conceived it, invented it — and forgotten it. His idea had produced the circumstances. Now, deliberately, he had reproduced the circumstances, that he might think back to the idea. He had put his person in the position of the victim, that his mind might grapple with the problem of the murderer.

It was very quiet: not a sound in the room, the whole apartment.

For a long time, Annixter sat unmoving. He sat unmoving until the intensity of his concentration began to waver. Then he relaxed. He pressed the palms of his hands to his forehead for a moment, then reached for the decanter. He splashed himself a strong drink. He had almost recovered what he sought; he had felt it close, had been on the very verge of it.

"Easy," he warned himself, "take it easy. Rest. Relax. Try again in a minute."

He looked around for something to divert his mind, picked up the paper

from Joseph's bed.

At the first words that caught his eye, his heart stopped.

The woman, in whose body were found three knife wounds, any of which might have been fatal, was in a windowless room, the only door to which was locked and bolted on the inside. These elaborate precautions appear to have been habitual with her, and no doubt she went in continual fear of her life, as the police know her to have been a persistent and pitiless blackmailer.

Apart from the unique problem set by the circumstance of the sealed room is the problem of how the crime could have gone undiscovered for so long a period, the doctor's estimate from the condition of the body as some twelve to fourteen days.

Twelve to fourteen days —

Annixter read back over the remainder of the story; then let the paper fall to the floor. The pulse was heavy in his head. His face was grey. Twelve to fourteen days? He could put it closer than that. *It was exactly thirteen nights ago that he had sat in the Casa Havana and told a little man with hexagonal glasses how to kill a woman in a sealed room!*

Annixter sat very still for a minute. Then he poured himself a drink. It was a big one, and he needed it. He felt a strange sense of wonder, of awe.

They had been in the same boat, he and the little man — thirteen nights ago. They had both been kicked in the face by a woman. One, as a result, had conceived a murder play. The other had made the play reality!

"And I actually, tonight, offered him a share!" Annixter thought. "I talked about 'real' money!"

That was a laugh. All the money in the universe wouldn't have made that little man admit that he had seen Annixter before — that Annixter had told him the plot of a play about how to kill a woman in a sealed room! Why, he, Annixter, was the one person in the world who could denounce that little man! Even if he couldn't tell them, because he had forgotten, just *how* he had told the little man the murder was to be committed, he could still put the police on the little man's track. He could describe him, so that they could trace him. And once on his track, the police would ferret out links, almost inevitably, with the dead woman.

A queer thought — that he, Annixter, was probably the only menace, the only danger, to the little prim, pale man with the hexagonal spectacles. The only menace — as, of course, the little man must know very well.

He must have been very frightened when he had read that the playwright who had been knocked down outside the Casa Havana had only received "superficial injuries." He must have been still more frightened when Annixter's advertisements had begun to appear. *What must he have felt tonight, when Annixter's hand had fallen on his shoulder?*

A curious idea occurred, now, to Annixter. It was from tonight, precisely from tonight, that he was a danger to that little man. He was,

because of the inferences the little man must infallibly draw, a deadly danger as from the moment the discovery of the murder in the sealed room was published. That discovery had been published tonight and the little man had had a paper under his arm —

Annixter's was a lively and resourceful imagination.

It was, of course, just in the cards that, when he'd lost the little man's trail at the subway station, the little man might have turned back, picked up *his*, Annixter's trail.

And Annixter had sent Joseph out. He was, it dawned slowly upon Annixter, alone in the apartment — alone in a windowless room, with the door locked and bolted on the inside, at his back.

Annixter felt a sudden, icy and wild panic.

He half rose, but it was too late.

It was too late, because at that moment the knife slid, thin and keen and delicate, into his back, fatally, between the ribs.

Annixter's head bowed slowly forward until his cheek rested on the manuscript of his play. He made only one sound — a queer sound, indistinct, yet identifiable as a kind of laughter.

The fact was, Annixter had just remembered.

Chronologically and creatively, the mystery story came first. Then came the riddle story, and finally the detective story. Didn't Julian Hawthorne say that "in the riddle story, the detective was an afterthought, or, more accurately, a deus ex machina to make the story go"?

We date the legitimate detective story as of 1841 — Edgar Allan Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," the world's first detective story, born April 1841 in "Graham's Magazine," Philadelphia, Pa., U.S.A. Who would be so hardy as to date the first riddle story, or the first mystery story? Both, we know, are to be found in the Bible, in the ancient Greek of Herodotus, in the Latin of Cicero and Virgil. In all likelihood the very first story ever told, by the first story-teller in the history of articulate man, contained elements of mystery!

Now that you have finished "The Blind Spot," you realize that Mr. Perowne's story is pure riddle — the type of which Julian Hawthorne also said: "once in a while some venturesome genius has the courage to leave his enigma unexplained." For riddle stories can be divided roughly into two categories: those in which the answer to the riddle is revealed by the author, and those in which the riddle is left unanswered.

Of the first group the most famous story is probably Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe," first published in book form

in TWICE-TOLD TALES, *1837. This is a classic tale and one of these issues we shall bring it to you.*

In the second group — riddles that remain unsolved — there are three outstanding examples: Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" (1884) — probably the most famous literary puzzle ever written. (How many of you know that Stockton wrote a sequel called "The Discourager of Hesitancy: A Continuation of 'The Lady, or the Tiger?' ", included in THE CHRISTMAS WRECK AND OTHER STORIES, *1886?)*

Next most popular among riddle stories left unriddled is probably Cleveland Moffett's "The Mysterious Card," first published in the February 1896 issue of "The Black Cat" magazine. (Moffett also wrote a sequel — "The Mysterious Card Unveiled" — but neither the story nor the solution it offered ever won the favor of readers; indeed, Moffett's answer to his own riddle has been studiously ignored, and the identical problem first posed by Moffett has been re-written, with different details, by many writers, until it has become virtually a legend.

There is one version of the story that has eluded your Editor's most persistent efforts. It tells how a sailor on shore leave finds a piece of paper with mysterious words on it in an unfamiliar language. The sailor takes it to various people for translation, but in each instance the person consulted refuses to explain the meaning of the words and instead beats up, kicks, and otherwise abuses the poor sailor. Finally the sailor returns to his ship, the riddle unsolved. On shipboard he meets an archeologist who, the sailor thinks, might be able to satisfy his now uncontrollable curiosity. The sailor approaches the man at the rail of the ship, relates the whole back history, emphasizing his complete innocence. The archeologist agrees to translate the words on the paper and no matter what they may mean, not hold the sailor responsible. The sailor takes the slip of paper from his pocket and is about to hand it to the archeologist when a sudden gust of wind lifts the scrap out of his hand and tosses it on the sea, where it immediately disappears from sight. And thus the mystery remains unanswered forever.

This version is attributed to W. W. Jacobs, but your Editor has never been able to locate the story among Mr. Jacobs's books. If any reader can identify the sailor-version of the mysterious card, by title, author's name, and book title, please communicate with your Editor posthaste — for this variation is worthy of reprint.)

The third example of unsolved (and unsolvable) literary conundrums is Mark Twain's "A Medieval Romance," written about 1868, and because it is the least known of the three, we are bringing it to you now, as a double-entry with Perowne's "The Blind Spot."

The Mark Twain and Stockton and Moffett riddlers deal with pure

mystery, in the romantic sense. While there is crime in each story, openly or by implication, there is no detection (except in the sense that each reader is transformed into an armchair detective). The Barry Perowne story, on the other hand, is, as Mr. Atkey said, a new slant on the old riddle formula: it doesn't deal with pure mystery alone. For the first time, a riddle story approaches the detective story as a limit; in the mathematical meaning of that phrase "The Blind Spot" can never be *a detective story, but it uses, as its main theme, one of the most time-honored of detective-story devices — the sealed-room murder. In fact, "The Blind Spot" could justly be called the sealed-room murder to end all sealed-room murders.*

We cannot resist quoting once more from Julian Hawthorne, that early and scholarly investigator of the riddle story; he wrote that "no one can thoroughly enjoy riddle stories unless he is old enough, or young enough, or, at any rate, wise enough to appreciate the value of the faculty of being surprised." So, if you qualify — if you are old enough, young enough, or wise enough — read Mark Twain's deliciously old-fashioned riddle — and see if you *can find an answer!*

A MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

by MARK TWAIN

I: THE SECRET REVEALED

It was night. Stillness reigned in the grand old feudal castle of Klugenstein. The year 1222 was drawing to a close. Far away up in the tallest of the castle's towers a single light glimmered. A secret council was being held there. The stern old lord of Klugenstein sat in a chair of state meditating. Presently he said, with a tender accent: "My daughter!"

A young man of noble presence, clad from head to heel in knightly mail, answered: "Speak, father!"

"My daughter, the time is come for the revealing of the mystery that hath puzzled all your young life. Know, then, that it had its birth in the matters which I shall now unfold. My brother Ulrich is the great Duke of Brandenburgh. Our father, on his deathbed, decreed that if no son were born to Ulrich the succession should pass to my house, provided a *son* were born to me. And further, in case no son were born to either, but only daughters, then the succession should pass to Ulrich's daughter if she proved stainless; if she did not, my daughter should succeed if she retained a blameless name. And so I and my old wife here prayed fervently for the good boon of a son, but the prayer was vain. You were born to us. I was in despair.

I saw the mighty prize slipping from my grasp — the splendid dream vanishing away! And I had been so hopeful! Five years had Ulrich lived in wedlock, and yet his wife had borne no heir of either sex.

" 'But hold,' I said, 'all is not lost.' A saving scheme had shot athwart my brain. You were born at midnight. Only the leech, the nurse, and six waiting-women knew your sex. I hanged them every one before an hour sped. Next morning all the barony went mad with rejoicing over the proclamation that a *son* was born to Klugenstein — an heir to mighty Brandenburgh! And well the secret has been kept. Your mother's own sister nursed your infancy, and from that time forward we feared nothing.

"When you were ten years old a daughter was born to Ulrich. We grieved, but hoped for good results from measles, or physicians, or other natural enemies of infancy, but were always disappointed. She lived, she throve — Heaven's malison upon her! But it is nothing. We are safe. For, ha! ha! have we not a son? And is not our son the future duke? Our well-beloved Conrad, is it not so? — for woman of eight-and-twenty years as you are, my child, none other name than that hath ever fallen to *you!*

"Now it hath come to pass that age hath laid its hand upon my brother, and he waxes feeble. The cares of state do tax him sore, therefore he wills that you shall come to him and be already duke in act, though not yet in name. Your servitors are ready — you journey forth tonight.

"Now listen well. Remember every word I say. There is a law as old as Germany, that if any woman sit for a single instant in the great ducal chair before she hath been absolutely crowned in presence of the people — SHE SHALL DIE! So heed my words. Pretend humility. Pronounce your judgments from the Premier's chair, which stands at the *foot* of the throne. Do this until you are crowned and safe. It is not likely that your sex will ever be discovered, but still it is the part of wisdom to make all things as safe as may be in this treacherous earthly life."

"Oh, my father! is it for this my life hath been a lie? Was it that I might cheat my unoffending cousin of her rights? Spare me, father, spare your child!"

"What, hussy! Is this my reward for the august fortune my brain has wrought for thee? By the bones of my father, this puling sentiment of thine but ill accords with my humor. Betake thee to the duke instantly, and beware how thou meddlest with my purpose!"

Let this suffice of the conversation. It is enough for us to know that the prayers, the entreaties, and the tears of the gentle-natured girl availed nothing. Neither they nor anything could move the stout old lord of Klugenstein. And so, at last, with a heavy heart, the daughter saw the castle gates close behind her, and found herself riding away in the darkness surrounded by a knightly array of armed vassals and a brave following

of servants.

The old baron sat silent for many minutes after his daughter's departure, and then he turned to his sad wife, and said:

"Dame, our matters seem speeding fairly. It is full three months since I sent the shrewd and handsome Count Detzin on his devilish mission to my brother's daughter Constance. If he fail we are not wholly safe, but if he do succeed no power can bar our girl from being duchess, e'en though ill fortune should decree she never should be duke!"

"My heart is full of bodings; yet all may still be well."

"Tush, woman! leave the owls to croak. To bed with ye, and dream of Brandenburgh and grandeur!"

II: FESTIVITY AND TEARS

Six days after the occurrences related above, the brilliant capital of the Duchy of Brandenburgh was resplendent with military pageantry and noisy with the rejoicings of loyal multitudes, for Conrad, the young heir to the crown, was come. The old duke's heart was full of happiness, for Conrad's handsome person and graceful bearing had won his love at once. The great halls of the palace were thronged with nobles, who welcomed Conrad bravely; and so bright and happy did all things seem that he felt his fears and sorrows passing away and giving place to a comforting contentment.

But in a remote apartment of the palace a scene of a different nature was transpiring. By a window stood the duke's only child, the Lady Constance. Her eyes were red and swollen and full of tears. She was alone. Presently she fell to weeping anew, and said aloud:

"The villian Detzin is gone — has fled the dukedom! I could not believe it at first, but, alas! it is too true. And I loved him so. I dared to love him though I knew the duke, my father, would never let me wed him. I loved him — but now I hate him! With all my soul I hate him! Oh, what is to become of me? I am lost, lost, lost! I shall go mad!"

III: THE PLOT THICKENS

A few months drifted by. All men published the praises of the young Conrad's government, and extolled the wisdom of his judgments, the mercifulness of his sentences, and the modesty with which he bore himself in his great office. The old duke soon gave everything into his hands, and sat apart and listened with proud satisfaction while his heir delivered the decrees of the crown from the seat of the Premier. It seemed plain that one so loved and praised and honored of all men as Conrad was could not be otherwise than happy. But, strangely enough, he was not. For he saw with dismay that the Princess Constance had begun to love him! The love of the rest of the world was happy fortune for him, but this was freighted with danger! And he saw, moreover, that the delighted duke had discovered his daughter's passion likewise, and was already dreaming of a mar-

riage. Every day somewhat of the deep sadness that had been in the princess's face faded away; every day hope and animation beamed brighter from her eye; and by and by even vagrant smiles visited the face that had been so troubled.

Conrad was appalled. He bitterly cursed himself for having yielded to the instinct that had made him seek the companionship of one of his own sex when he was new and a stranger in the palace — when he was sorrowful and yearned for a sympathy such as only women can give or feel. He now began to avoid his cousin. But this only made matters worse, for, naturally enough, the more he avoided her the more she cast herself in his way. He marveled at this at first, and next it startled him. The girl haunted him; she hunted him; she happened upon him at all times and in all places, in the night as well as in the day. She seemed singularly anxious. There was surely a mystery somewhere.

This could not go on forever. All the world was talking about it. The duke was beginning to look perplexed. Poor Conrad was becoming a very ghost through dread and dire distress. One day as he was emerging from a private anteroom attached to the picture-gallery Constance confronted him, and seizing both his hands in hers, exclaimed:

"Oh, why do you avoid me? What have I done — what have I said, to lose your kind opinion of me — for surely I had it once? Conrad, do not despise me, but pity a tortured heart! I cannot, cannot hold the words unspoken longer, lest they kill me — I LOVE YOU, CONRAD! There, despise me if you must, but they *would* be uttered!"

Conrad was speechless. Constance hesitated a moment, and then, misinterpreting his silence, a wild gladness flamed in her eyes, and she flung her arms about his neck and said:

"You relent! you relent! You *can* love me — you *will* love me! Oh, say you will, my own, my worshiped Conrad!"

Conrad groaned aloud. A sickly pallor overspread his countenance, and he trembled like an aspen. Presently, in desperation, he thrust the poor girl from him, and cried:

"You know not what you ask! It is forever and ever impossible!" And then he fled like a criminal, and left the princess stupefied with amazement. A minute afterward she was crying and sobbing there, and Conrad was crying and sobbing in his chamber. Both were in despair. Both saw ruin staring them in the face.

By and by Constance rose slowly to her feet and moved away, saying:

"To think that he was despising my love at the very moment that I thought it was melting his cruel heart! I hate him! He spurned me — did this man — he spurned me from him like a dog!"

IV: THE AWFUL REVELATION

Time passed on. A settled sadness rested once more upon the countenance of the good duke's daughter.

She and Conrad were seen together no more now. The duke grieved at this. But as the weeks wore away Conrad's color came back to his cheeks, and his old-time vivacity to his eye, and he administered the government with a clear and steadily ripening wisdom.

Presently a strange whisper began to be heard about the palace. It grew louder; it spread farther. The gossips of the city got hold of it. It swept the dukedom. And this is what the whisper said:

"The Lady Constance hath given birth to a child!"

When the lord of Klugenstein heard it he swung his plumed helmet thrice around his head and shouted:

"Long live Duke Conrad! — for lo, his crown is sure from this day forward! Detzin has done his errand well, and the good scoundrel shall be rewarded!"

And he spread the tidings far and wide, and for eight-and-forty hours no soul in all the barony but did dance and sing, carouse and illuminate, to celebrate the great event, and all proud and happy at old Klugenstein's expense.

V: THE FRIGHTFUL CATASTROPHE

The trial was at hand. All the great lords and barons of Brandenburgh were assembled in the Hall of Justice in the ducal palace. No space was left unoccupied where there was room for a spectator to stand or sit. Conrad, clad in purple and ermine, sat in the Premier's chair, and on either side sat the great judges of the realm. The old duke had sternly commanded that the trial of his daughter should proceed without favor, and then had taken to his bed broken-hearted. His days were numbered. Poor Conrad had begged, as for his very life, that he might be spared the misery of sitting in judgment upon his cousin's crime, but it did not avail.

The saddest heart in all that great assemblage was in Conrad's breast.

The gladdest was in his father's, for, unknown to his daughter "Conrad," the old Baron Klugenstein was come, and was among the crowd of nobles triumphant in the swelling fortunes of his house.

After the heralds had made due proclamation and the other preliminaries had followed, the venerable Lord Chief Justice said: "Prisoner, stand forth!"

The unhappy princess rose, and stood unveiled before the vast multitude. The Lord Chief Justice continued:

"Most noble lady, before the great judges of this realm it hath been charged and proved that out of holy wedlock your Grace hath given birth unto a child, and by our ancient law the penalty is death excepting in one sole contingency, whereof his Grace the acting duke, our good Lord Conrad, will advertise you in his solemn sentence now; wherefore give heed."

Conrad stretched forth his reluctant scepter, and in the selfsame moment the womanly heart beneath his robe yearned pityingly toward the

doomed prisoner, and the tears came into his eyes. He opened his lips to speak, but the Lord Chief Justice said quickly:

"Not there, your Grace, not there! It is not lawful to pronounce judgment upon any of the ducal line SAVE FROM THE DUCAL THRONE!"

A shudder went to the heart of poor Conrad, and a tremor shook the iron frame of his old father likewise. CONRAD HAD NOT BEEN CROWNED — dared he profane the throne? He hesitated and turned pale with fear. But it must be done. Wondering eyes were already upon him. They would be suspicious eyes if he hesitated longer. He ascended the throne. Presently he stretched forth the scepter again, and said:

"Prisoner, in the name of our sovereign Lord Ulrich, Duke of Brandenburgh, I proceed to the solemn duty that hath devolved upon me. Give heed to my words. By the ancient law of the land, except you produce the partner of your guilt and deliver him up to the executioner you must surely die. Embrace this opportunity — save yourself while yet you may. Name the father of your child!"

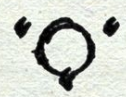
A solemn hush fell upon the great court — a silence so profound that men could hear their own hearts beat. Then the princess slowly turned, with eyes gleaming with hate, and, pointing her finger straight at Conrad, said:

"Thou art the man!"

An appalling conviction of his helpless, hopeless peril struck a chill to Conrad's heart like the chill of death itself. What power on earth could save him! To disprove the charge he must reveal that he was a woman, and for an uncrowned woman to sit in the ducal chair was death! At one and the same moment he and his grim old father swooned and fell to the ground.

The remainder of this thrilling and eventful story will NOT be found in this or any other publication, either now or at any future time.

The truth is, I have got my hero (or heroine) into such a particularly close place that I do not see how I am ever going to get him (or her) out of it again, and therefore I will wash my hands of the whole business, and leave that person to get out the best way that offers — or else stay there. I thought it was going to be easy enough to straighten out that little difficulty, but it looks different now.



Here is a curious commentary on the enormous difference of opinion that can exist among critics of the detective short story. Dorothy L. Sayers's LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY *(1928) contains twelve stories about Lord Peter Wimsey. Of this dozen tales, six have been selected for reprint by anthologists — as of the time of this writing. Will Cuppy chose "The Man With the Copper Fingers." Kenneth Macgowan and Rowland Walter Jepson cast their votes for "The Article in Question." The anonymous editor of Oxford's* CRIME AND DETECTION *(Second Series) showed a preference for "A Matter of Taste." The editor of Odhams's* FIFTY MASTERPIECES OF MYSTERY *went all out for "The Dragon's Head." E. C. Bentley elected "The Man With No Face." And no less than five critic-editor-anthologists — Howard Haycraft, H. Douglas Thomson, Lee Wright, Howard Spring, and Dorothy L. Sayers herself — agreed on "The Cave of Ali Baba."*

Note the conspicuous absence of a story called "The Footsteps that Ran." Not one of the eleven editors mentioned above considered "The Footsteps that Ran" worthy of first choice. In fact, in the 137 separate volumes of detective-crime anthologies in your Editor's collection, "The Footsteps that Ran" boasts not a single appearance — and yet a powerfully convincing case can be made out to prove that "The Footsteps that Ran" is the finest story in LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY*!*

Here, then, is a story which anthologists have ignored, forgotten, or neglected — a story covered with editorial dust, a story made mute by critical coventry, a story that literally has been buried alive for 17 years!

THE FOOTSTEPS THAT RAN

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

MR. BUNTER withdrew his head from beneath the focusing cloth.

"I fancy that will be quite adequate, sir," he said deferentially, "unless there are any further patients, if I may call them so, which you would wish put on record."

"Not today," replied the doctor. He took the last stricken rat gently from the table, and replaced it in its cage with an air of satisfaction. "Perhaps on Wednesday, if Lord Peter can kindly spare your services once again ——"

"What's that?" murmured his lordship, withdrawing his long nose from the investigation of a number of unattractive-looking glass jars. "Nice old dog," he added vaguely. "Wags

his tail when you mention his name, what? Are these monkey-glands, Hartman, or a southwest elevation of Cleopatra's duodenum?"

"You don't know anything, do you?" said the young physician, laughing. "No use playing your bally-fool-with-an-eyeglass tricks on me, Wimsey. I'm up to them. I was saying to Bunter that I'd be no end grateful if you'd let him turn up again three days hence to register the progress of the specimens — always supposing they do progress, that is."

"Why ask, dear old thing?" said his lordship. "Always a pleasure to assist a fellow-sleuth, don't you know. Trackin' down murderers — all in the same way of business and all that. All finished? Good egg! By the way, if you don't have that cage mended you'll lose one of your patients — Number 5. The last wire but one is workin' loose — assisted by the intelligent occupant. Jolly little beasts, ain't they? No need of dentists — wish I was a rat — wire much better for the nerves than that fizzlin' drill."

Dr. Hartman uttered a little exclamation.

"How in the world did you notice that, Wimsey? I didn't think you'd even looked at the cage."

"Built noticin' — improved by practice," said Lord Peter quietly. "Anythin' wrong leaves a kind of impression on the eye; brain trots along afterwards with the warnin'. I saw that when we came in. Only just grasped it. Can't say my mind was glued on the matter. Shows the victim's improvin', anyhow. All serene, Bunter?"

"Everything perfectly satisfactory, I trust, my lord," replied the man-servant. He had packed up his camera and plates, and was quietly restoring order in the little laboratory, whose fittings — compact as those of an ocean liner — had been disarranged for the experiment.

"Well," said the doctor, "I am enormously obliged to you, Lord Peter, and to Bunter too. I am hoping for a great result from these experiments, and you cannot imagine how valuable an assistance it will be to me to have a really good series of photographs. I can't afford this sort of thing — yet," he added, his rather haggard young face wistful as he looked at the great camera, "and I can't do the work at the hospital. There's no time; I've got to be here. A struggling G.P. can't afford to let his practice go, even in Bloomsbury. There are times when even a half-crown visit makes all the difference between making both ends meet and having an ugly hiatus."

"As Mr. Micawber said," replied Wimsey, " 'Income twenty pounds, expenditure nineteen, nineteen, six — result: happiness; expenditure twenty pounds, ought, six — result: misery.' Don't prostrate yourself in gratitude, old bean; nothin' Bunter loves like messin' round with pyro and hyposulphite. Keeps his hand in. All kinds of practice welcome. Fingerprints and process plates spell seventh what-you-

may-call-it of bliss, but focal-plane work on scurvy-ridden rodents (good phrase!) acceptable if no crime forthcoming. Crimes have been rather short lately. Been eatin' our heads off, haven't we, Bunter? Don't know what's come over London. I've taken to prying into my neighbor's affairs to keep from goin' stale. Frightened the postman into a fit the other day by askin' him how his young lady at Croydon was. He's a married man, livin' in Great Ormond Street."

"How did you know?"

"Well, I didn't really. But he lives just opposite to a friend of mine — Inspector Parker; and his wife — not Parker's; he's unmarried; the postman's, I mean — asked Parker the other day whether the flyin' shows at Croydon went on all night. Parker, bein' flummoxed, said 'No,' without thinkin'. Bit of a give-away, what? Thought I'd give the poor devil a word in season, don't you know. Uncommonly thoughtless of Parker."

The doctor laughed. "You'll stay to lunch, won't you?" he said. "Only cold meat and salad, I'm afraid. My woman won't come Sundays. Have to answer my own door. Deuced unprofessional, I'm afraid, but it can't be helped."

"Pleasure," said Wimsey, as they emerged from the laboratory and entered the dark little flat by the back door. "Did you build this place on?"

"No," said Hartman; "the last tenant did that. He was an artist. That's why I took the place. It comes in very useful, ramshackle as it is, though this glass roof is a bit sweltering on a hot day like this. Still, I had to have something on the ground floor, cheap, and it'll do till times get better."

"Till your vitamin experiments make you famous, eh?" said Peter cheerfully. "You're goin' to be the comin' man, you know. Feel it in my bones. Uncommonly neat little kitchen you've got, anyhow."

"It does," said the doctor. "The lab makes it a bit gloomy, but the woman's only here in the daytime."

He led the way into a narrow little dining-room, where the table was laid for a cold lunch. The one window at the end farthest from the kitchen looked out into Great James Street. The room was little more than a passage, and full of doors — the kitchen door, a door in the adjacent wall leading into the entrance-hall, and a third on the opposite side, through which his visitor caught a glimpse of a moderate-sized consulting-room.

Lord Peter Wimsey and his host sat down to table, and the doctor expressed a hope that Mr. Bunter would sit down with them. That correct person, however, deprecated any such suggestion.

"If I might venture to indicate my own preference, Sir," he said, "it would be to wait upon you and his lordship in the usual manner."

"It's no use," said Wimsey. "Bunter likes me to know my place. Terrorizin' sort of man, Bunter. Can't call my soul my own. Carry on, Bunter; we wouldn't presume for the world."

Mr. Bunter handed the salad, and poured out the water with a grave decency appropriate to a crusted old tawny port.

It was a Sunday afternoon in that halcyon summer of 1921. The sordid little street was almost empty. The ice-cream man alone seemed thriving and active. He leaned luxuriously on the green post at the corner, in the intervals of driving a busy trade. Bloomsbury's swarm of able-bodied and able-voiced infants was still; presumably within-doors, eating steamy Sunday dinners inappropriate to the tropical weather. The only disturbing sounds came from the flat above, where heavy footsteps passed rapidly to and fro.

"Who's the merry-and-bright bloke above?" enquired Lord Peter presently. "Not an early riser, I take it. Not that anybody is on a Sunday mornin'. Why an inscrutable Providence ever inflicted such a ghastly day on people livin' in town I can't imagine. I ought to be in the country, but I've got to meet a friend at Victoria this afternoon. Such a day to choose. . . . Who's the lady? Wife or accomplished friend? Gather she takes a properly submissive view of woman's duties in the home, either way. That's the bedroom overhead, I take it."

Hartman looked at Lord Peter in some surprise.

" 'Scuse my beastly inquisitiveness, old thing," said Wimsey. "Bad habit. Not my business."

"How did you ——?"

"Guesswork," said Lord Peter, with disarming frankness. "I heard the squawk of an iron bedstead on the ceiling and a heavy fellow get out with a bump, but it may quite well be a couch or something. Anyway, he's been potterin' about in his stocking feet over these few feet of floor for the last half-hour, while the woman has been clatterin' to and fro, in and out of the kitchen and away into the sittin'-room, with her high heels on, ever since we've been here. Hence deduction as to domestic habits of the first-floor tenants."

"I thought," said the doctor, with an aggrieved expression, "you'd been listening to my valuable exposition of the beneficial effects of Vitamin B, and Lind's treatment of scurvy with fresh lemons in 1755."

"I was listenin'," agreed Lord Peter hastily, "but I heard the footsteps as well. Fellow's toddled into the kitchen — only wanted the matches, though; he's gone off into the sittin'-room and left her to carry on the good work. What was I sayin'? Oh, yes! You see, as I was sayin' before, one hears a thing or sees it without knowin' or thinkin' about it. Then afterwards one starts meditatin', and it all comes back, and one sorts out one's impressions. Like those plates of Bunter's. Picture's all there, l — la — what's the word I want, Bunter?"

"Latent, my lord."

"That's it. My right-hand man, Bunter; couldn't do a thing without him. The picture's latent till you put the developer on. Same with the brain. No mystery. Little grey mat-

ter's all you want to remember things with. As a matter of curiosity, was I right about those people above?"

"Perfectly. The man's a gas-company's inspector. A bit surly, but devoted (after his own fashion) to his wife. I mean, he doesn't mind hulking in bed on a Sunday morning and letting her do the chores, but he spends all the money he can spare on giving her pretty hats and fur coats and what not. They've only been married about six months. I was called in to her when she had a touch of 'flu in the spring, and he was almost off his head with anxiety. She's a lovely little woman, I must say — Italian. He picked her up in some eating-place in Soho, I believe. Glorious dark hair and eyes: Venus sort of figure; proper contours in all the right places; good skin — all that sort of thing. She was a bit of a draw to that restaurant while she was there, I fancy. Lively. She had an old admirer round here one day — awkward little Italian fellow, with a knife — active as a monkey. Might have been unpleasant, but I happened to be on the spot, and her husband came along. People are always laying one another out in these streets. Good for business, of course, but one gets tired of tying up broken heads and slits in the jugular. Still, I suppose the girl can't help being attractive, though I don't say she's what you might call stand-offish in her manner. She's sincerely fond of Brotherton, I think, though — that's his name."

Wimsey nodded inattentively. "I suppose life is a bit monotonous here," he said.

"Professionally, yes. Births and drunks and wife-beatings are pretty common. And all the usual ailments, of course. God!" cried the doctor explosively, "if only I could get away, and do my experiments!"

"Ah!" said Peter, "where's that eccentric old millionaire with a mysterious disease, who always figures in the novels? A lightning diagnosis — a miraculous cure — 'God bless you, doctor; here are five thousand pounds' — Harley Street ——"

"That sort doesn't live in Bloomsbury," said the doctor.

"It must be fascinatin', diagnosin' things," said Peter thoughtfully. "How d'you do it? I mean, is there a regular set of symptoms for each disease, like callin' a club to show you want your partner to go no trumps? You don't just say: 'This fellow's got a pimple on his nose, therefore he has fatty degeneration of the heart ——'"

"I hope not," said the doctor drily.

"Or is it more like gettin' a clue to a crime?" went on Peter. "You see somethin' — a room, or a body, say, all knocked about anyhow, and there's a damn sight of symptoms of somethin' wrong, and you've got just to pick out the ones which tell the story?"

"That's more like it," said Dr. Hartman. "Some symptoms are significant in themselves — like the condition of the gums in scurvy, let us say — others in conjunction with ——"

He broke off, and both sprang to

their feet as a shrill scream sounded suddenly from the flat above, followed by a heavy thud. A man's voice cried out lamentably; feet ran violently to and fro; then, as the doctor and his guests stood frozen in consternation, came the man himself — falling down the stairs in his haste, hammering at Hartman's door.

"Help! Help! Let me in! My wife! He's murdered her!"

They ran hastily to the door and let him in. He was a big, fair man, in his shirt-sleeves and stockings. His hair stood up, and his face was set in bewildered misery.

"She is dead — dead. He was her lover," he groaned. "Doctor! I have lost my wife! My Maddalena ——" He paused, looked wildly for a moment, and then said hoarsely, "Someone's been in — somehow — stabbed her — murdered her. I'll have the law on him, doctor. Come quickly — she was cooking the chicken for my dinner — Ah-h-h!"

He gave a long, hysterical shriek, which ended in a hiccupping laugh. The doctor took him roughly by the arm and shook him. "Pull yourself together, Mr. Brotherton," he said sharply. "Perhaps she is only hurt. Stand out of the way!"

"Only hurt?" said the man, sitting heavily down on the nearest chair. "No — no — she is dead — little Maddalena —— Oh, my God!"

Dr. Hartman had snatched a roll of bandages and a few surgical appliances from the consulting-room, and he ran upstairs, followed closely by Lord Peter. Bunter remained for a few moments to combat hysterics with cold water. Then he stepped across to the dining-room window and shouted.

"Well, wot is it?" cried a voice from the street.

"Would you be so kind as to step in here a minute, officer?" said Mr. Bunter. "There's been murder done."

When Brotherton and Bunter arrived upstairs with the constable, they found Dr. Hartman and Lord Peter in the little kitchen. The doctor was kneeling beside the woman's body. At their entrance he looked up, and shook his head.

"Death instantaneous," he said. "Clean through the heart. Poor child. She cannot have suffered at all. Oh, constable, it is very fortunate you are here. Murder appears to have been done — though I'm afraid the man has escaped. Probably Mr. Brotherton can give us some help. He was in the flat at the time."

The man had sunk down on a chair, and was gazing at the body with a face from which all meaning seemed to have been struck out. The policeman produced a notebook.

"Now, sir," he said, "don't let's waste any time. Sooner we can get to work the more likely we are to catch our man. Now, you was 'ere at the time, was you?"

Brotherton stared a moment, then, making a violent effort, he answered steadily:

"I was in the sitting-room, smoking

and reading the paper. My — *she* — was getting the dinner ready in here. I heard her give a scream, and I rushed in and found her lying on the floor. She didn't have time to say anything. When I found she was dead, I rushed to the window, and saw the fellow scrambling away over the glass roof there. I yelled at him, but he disappeared. Then I ran down ——"

" 'Arf a mo'," said the policeman. "Now, see 'ere, sir, didn't you think to go after 'im at once?"

"My first thought was for her," said the man. "I thought maybe she wasn't dead. I tried to bring her round ——" His speech ended in a groan.

"You say he came in through the window," said the policeman.

"I beg your pardon, officer," interrupted Lord Peter, who had been apparently making a mental inventory of the contents of the kitchen. "Mr. Brotherton suggested that the man went *out* through the window. It's better to be accurate."

"It's the same thing," said the doctor. "It's the only way he could have come in. These flats are all alike. The staircase door leads into the sitting-room, and Mr. Brotherton was there, so the man couldn't have come that way."

"And," said Peter, "he didn't get in through the bedroom window, or we should have seen him. We were in the room below. Unless, indeed, he let himself down from the roof. Was the door between the bedroom and the sitting-room open?" he asked suddenly, turning to Brotherton.

The man hesitated a moment. "Yes," he said finally. "Yes, I'm sure it was."

"Could you have seen the man if he had come through the bedroom window?"

"I couldn't have helped seeing him."

"Come, come, sir," said the policeman, with some irritation, "better let *me* ask the questions. Stands to reason the fellow wouldn't get in through the bedroom window in full view of the street."

"How clever of you to think of that," said Wimsey. "Of course not. Never occurred to me. Then it must have been this window, as you say."

"And, what's more, here's his marks on the window-sill," said the constable triumphantly, pointing to some blurred traces among the London soot. "That's right. Down he goes by that drain-pipe, over the glass roof down there — what's that the roof of?"

"My laboratory," said the doctor. "Heavens! to think that while we were at dinner this murdering villain ——"

"Quite so, sir," agreed the constable. "Well, he'd get away over the wall into the court be'ind. 'E'll 'ave been seen there, no fear; you needn't anticipate much trouble in layin' 'ands on 'im, sir. I'll go round there in 'arf a tick. Now then, sir" — turning to Brotherton — " 'ave you any idea wot this party might have looked like?"

Brotherton lifted a wild face, and the doctor interposed.

"I think you ought to know, constable," he said, "that there was — well, not a murderous attack, but what might have been one, made on this woman before — about eight weeks ago — by a man named Marincetti — an Italian waiter — with a knife."

"Ah!" The policeman licked his pencil eagerly. "Do you know this party as 'as been mentioned?" he enquired of Brotherton.

"That's the man," said Brotherton, with concentrated fury. "Coming here after my wife — God curse him! I wish to God I had him dead here beside her!"

"Quite so," said the policeman. "Now, sir" — to the doctor — " 'ave you got the weapon wot the crime was committed with?"

"No," said Hartman, "there was no weapon in the body when I arrived."

"Did *you* take it out?" pursued the constable, to Brotherton.

"No," said Brotherton, "he took it with him."

"Took it with 'im," the constable entered the fact in his notes. "Phew! Wonderful 'ot it is in 'ere, ain't it, sir?" he added, mopping his brow.

"It's the gas-oven, I think," said Peter mildly. "Uncommon hot thing, a gas-oven, in the middle of July. D'you mind if I turn it out? There's the chicken inside, but I don't suppose you want ——"

Brotherton groaned, and the constable said: "Quite right, sir. A man wouldn't 'ardly fancy 'is dinner after a thing like this. Thank you, sir. Well now, doctor, wot kind of weapon do you take this to 'ave been?"

"It was a long, narrow weapon — something like an Italian stiletto, I imagine," said the doctor, "about six inches long. It was thrust in with great force under the fifth rib, and I should say it had pierced the heart centrally. As you see, there has been practically no bleeding. Such a wound would cause instant death. Was she lying just as she is now when you first saw her, Mr. Brotherton?"

"On her back, just as she is," replied the husband.

"Well, that seems clear enough," said the policeman. "This 'ere Marinetti, or wotever 'is name is, 'as a grudge against the poor young lady ——"

"I believe he was an admirer," put in the doctor.

"Quite so," agreed the constable. "Of course, these foreigners are like that — even the decentest of 'em. Stabbin' and such-like seems to come nateral to them, as you might say. Well, this 'ere Marinetti climbs in 'ere, sees the poor young lady standin' 'ere by the table all alone, gettin' the dinner ready; 'e comes in be'ind, catches 'er round the waist, stabs 'er — easy job, you see; no corsets nor nothink — she shrieks out, 'e pulls 'is stiletty out of 'er an' makes tracks. Well, now we've got to find 'im, and by your leave, sir, I'll be gettin' along. We'll 'ave 'im by the 'eels before long, sir, don't you worry. I'll 'ave to put a man in charge 'ere, sir, to keep folks out, but that needn't worry you.

Good mornin', gentlemen."

"May we move the poor girl now?" asked the doctor.

"Certainly. Like me to 'elp you, sir?"

"No. Don't lose any time. We can manage." Dr. Hartman turned to Peter as the constable clattered downstairs. "Will you help me, Lord Peter?"

"Bunter's better at that sort of thing," said Wimsey, with a hard mouth.

The doctor looked at him in some surprise, but said nothing, and he and Bunter carried the still form away. Brotherton did not follow them. He sat in a grief-stricken heap, with his head buried in his hands. Lord Peter walked about the little kitchen, turning over the various knives and kitchen utensils, peering into the sink bucket, and apparently taking an inventory of the bread, butter, condiments, vegetables, and so forth which lay about in preparation for the Sunday meal. There were potatoes in the sink, half peeled, a pathetic witness to the quiet domestic life which had been so horribly interrupted. The colander was filled with green peas. Lord Peter turned these things over with an inquisitive finger, gazed into the smooth surface of a bowl of dripping as though it were a divining-crystal, ran his hands several times right through a bowl of flour — then drew his pipe from his pocket and filled it slowly.

The doctor returned, and put his hand on Brotherton's shoulder.

"Come," he said gently, "we have laid her in the other bedroom. She looks very peaceful. You must remember that, except for that moment of terror when she saw the knife, she suffered nothing. It is terrible for you, but you must try not to give way. The police ——"

"The police can't bring her back to life," said the man savagely. "She's dead. Leave me alone, curse you! Leave me alone, I say!"

He stood up, with a violent gesture.

"You must not sit here," said Hartman firmly. "I will give you something to take, and you must try to keep calm. Then we will leave you, but if you don't control yourself ——"

After some further persuasion, Brotherton allowed himself to be led away.

"Bunter," said Lord Peter, as the kitchen door closed behind them, "do you know why I am doubtful about the success of those rat experiments?"

"Meaning Dr. Hartman's, my lord?"

"Yes. Dr. Hartman has a theory. In any investigation, my Bunter, it is most damnably dangerous to have a theory."

"I have heard you say so, my lord."

"Confound you — you know it as well as I do! What is wrong with the doctor's theories, Bunter?"

"You wish me to reply, my lord, that he only sees the facts which fit in with the theory."

"Thought-reader!" exclaimed Lord Peter bitterly.

"And that he supplies them to the police, my lord."

"Hush!" said Peter, as the doctor returned.

"I have got him to lie down," said Dr. Hartman, "and I think the best thing we can do is to leave him to himself."

"D'you know," said Wimsey, "I don't cotton to that idea, somehow."

"Why? Do you think he's likely to destroy himself?"

"That's as good a reason to give as any other, I suppose," said Wimsey, "when you haven't got any reason which can be put into words. But my advice is, don't leave him for a moment."

"But why? Frequently, with a deep grief like this, the presence of other people is merely an irritant. He begged me to leave him."

"Then for God's sake go back to him," said Peter.

"Really, Lord Peter," said the doctor, "I think I ought to know what is best for my patient."

"Doctor," said Wimsey, "this is not a question of your patient. A crime has been committed."

"But there is no mystery."

"There are twenty mysteries. For one thing, when was the window-cleaner here last?"

"The window-cleaner?"

"Who shall fathom the ebony-black enigma of the window-cleaner?" pursued Peter lightly, putting a match to his pipe. "You are quietly in your bath, in a state of more or less innocent nature, when an intrusive head appears at the window, like the ghost of Hamilton Tighe, and a gruff voice, suspended between earth and heaven, says, 'Good morning sir.' Where do window-cleaners go between visits? Do they hibernate, like busy bees? Do they ——"

"Really, Lord Peter," said the doctor, "don't you think you're going a bit beyond the limit?"

"Sorry you feel like that," said Peter, "but I really want to know about the window-cleaner. Look how clear these panes are."

"He came yesterday, if you want to know," said Dr. Hartman, rather stiffly.

"You are sure?"

"He did mine at the same time."

"I thought as much," said Lord Peter. "In that case, it is absolutely imperative that Brotherton should not be left alone for a moment. Bunter! Confound it all, where's that fellow got to?"

The door into the bedroom opened.

"My lord?" Mr. Bunter unobtrusively appeared, as he had unobtrusively stolen out to keep an unobtrusive eye upon the patient.

"Good," said Wimsey. "Stay where you are." His lackadaisical manner had gone, and he looked at the doctor as four years previously he might have looked at a refractory subaltern.

"Dr. Hartman," he said, "something is wrong. Cast your mind back. We were talking about symptoms. Then came the scream. Then came the sound of feet running. *Which direction did they run in?*"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Don't you? Symptomatic, though, doctor. They have been troubling me all the time, subconsciously. Now I know why. They ran *from the kitchen.*"

"Well?"

"Well! And now the window-cleaner ——"

"What about him?"

"Could you swear that it wasn't the window-cleaner who made those marks on the sill?"

"And the man Brotherton saw ——"

"Have we examined your laboratory roof for his footsteps?"

"But the weapon? Wimsey, this is madness! Someone took the weapon."

"I know. But did you think the edge of the wound was clean enough to have been made by a smooth stiletto? It looked ragged to me."

"Wimsey, what are you driving at?"

"There's a clue here in the flat — and I'm damned if I can remember it. I've seen it — I know I've seen it. It'll come to me presently. Meanwhile, don't let Brotherton ——"

"What?"

"Do whatever it is he's going to do."

"But what is it?"

"If I could tell you that I could show you the clue. Why couldn't he make up his mind whether the bedroom door was open or shut? Very good story, but not quite thought out. Anyhow — I say, doctor, make some excuse, and strip him, and bring me his clothes. And send Bunter to me."

The doctor stared at him, puzzled. Then he made a gesture of acquiescence and passed into the bedroom. Lord Peter followed him, casting a ruminating glance at Brotherton as he went. Once in the sitting-room, Lord Peter sat down on a red velvet armchair, fixed his eyes on a gilt-framed oleograph, and became wrapped in contemplation.

Presently Bunter came in, with his arms full of clothing. Wimsey took it, and began to search it, methodically enough, but listlessly. Suddenly he dropped the garments, and turned to the manservant.

"No," he said, "this is a precaution, Bunter mine, but I'm on the wrong tack. It wasn't here I saw — whatever I did see. It was in the kitchen. Now, what was it?"

"I could not say, my lord, but I entertain a conviction that I was also, in a manner of speaking, conscious — not consciously conscious, my lord, if you understand me, but still conscious of an incongruity."

"Hurray!" said Wimsey suddenly. "Cheer-oh! for the subconscious what's-his-name! Now let's remember the kitchen. I cleared out of it because I was gettin' obfuscated. Now then. Begin at the door. Fryin'-pans and sauce-pans on the wall. Gas-stove — oven goin' — chicken inside. Rack of wooden spoons on the wall, gas-lighter, pan-lifter. Stop me when I'm gettin' hot. Mantelpiece. Spice-boxes and stuff. Anything wrong with them? No. Dresser. Plates. Knives and forks — all clean; flour dredger — milk-jug

— sieve on the wall — nutmeg-grater. Three-tier steamer. Looked inside — no grisly secrets in the steamer."

"Did you look in all the dresser drawers, my lord?"

"No. That could be done. But the point is, I *did* notice somethin'. What did I notice? That's the point. Never mind. On with the dance — let joy be unconfined! Knife-board. Knife-powder. Kitchen table. Did you speak?"

"No," said Bunter, who had moved from his attitude of wooden deference.

"Table stirs a chord. Very good. On table. Choppin'-board. Remains of ham and herb stuffin'. Packet of suet. Another sieve. Several plates. Butter in a glass dish. Bowl of drippin' —"

"Ah!"

"Drippin' ——! Yes, there was ——"

"Something unsatisfactory, my lord ——"

"About the drippin'! Oh, my head! What's that they say in *Dear Brutus*, Bunter? 'Hold on to the workbox.' That's right. Hold on to the drippin'. Beastly slimy stuff to hold on to —— Wait!"

There was a pause.

"When I was a kid," said Wimsey, "I used to love to go down into the kitchen and talk to old cookie. Good old soul she was, too. I can see her now, gettin' chicken ready, with me danglin' my legs on the table. *She* used to pluck an' draw 'em herself. I revelled in it. Little beasts boys are, ain't they, Bunter? Pluck it, draw it, wash it, stuff it, tuck its little tail through its little what-you-may-call-it, truss it, grease the dish —— Bunter?"

"My lord!"

"Hold on to the dripping!"

"The bowl, my lord ——"

"The bowl — visualize it — what was wrong?"

"It was full, my lord!"

"Got it — got it — *got* it! The bowl was full — smooth surface. Golly! I knew there was something queer about it. Now why shouldn't it be full? Hold on to the ——"

"The bird was in the oven."

"Without dripping!"

"Very careless cookery, my lord."

"The bird — in the oven — no dripping. Bunter! Suppose it was never put in till after she was dead? Thrust in hurriedly by someone who had something to hide — horrible!"

"But with what object, my lord?"

"Yes, why? That's the point. One more mental association with the bird. It's just coming. Wait a moment. Pluck, draw, wash, stuff, tuck up, truss —— By God!"

"My lord?"

"Come on, Bunter. Thank Heaven we turned off the gas!"

He dashed through the bedroom, disregarding the doctor and the patient, who sat up with a smothered shriek. He flung open the oven door and snatched out the baking-tin. The skin of the bird had just begun to discolour. With a little gasp of triumph, Wimsey caught the iron ring that protruded from the wing, and jerked out

— *the six-inch spiral skewer.*

The doctor was struggling with the excited Brotherton in the doorway. Wimsey caught the man as he broke away, and shook him into the corner with a jiu-jitsu twist.

"Here is the weapon," he said.

"Prove it, blast you!" said Brotherton savagely.

"I will," said Wimsey. "Bunter, call in the policeman at the door. Doctor, we shall need your microscope."

In the laboratory the doctor bent over the microscope. A thin layer of blood from the skewer had been spread upon the slide.

"Well?" said Wimsey impatiently.

"It's all right," said Hartman. "The roasting didn't get anywhere near the middle. My God, Wimsey, yes, you're right — round corpuscles, diameter $\frac{1}{3621}$ — mammalian blood — probably human ——"

"Her blood," said Wimsey.

"It was very clever, Bunter," said Lord Peter, as the taxi trundled along on the way to his flat in Piccadilly. "If that fowl had gone on roasting a bit longer the blood-corpuscles might easily have been destroyed beyond all hope of recognition. It all goes to show that the unpremeditated crime is usually the safest."

"And what does your lordship take the man's motive to have been?"

"In my youth," said Wimsey meditatively, "they used to make me read the Bible. Trouble was, the only books I ever took to naturally were the ones they weren't over and above keen on. But I got to know the Song of Songs pretty well by heart. Look it up, Bunter; at your age it won't hurt you; it talks sense about jealousy."

"I have perused the work in question, your lordship," replied Mr. Bunter, with a sallow blush. "It says, if I remember rightly: '*Jealousy is cruel as the grave.*' "

Rounding out our Rogues' Gallery for this issue, we now offer you the curious psychological tale of one Joe Shupe who found himself with a green elephant on his mind and for all the peace and security it brought him, it might just as well have been a real green elephant!

This story was first published in the October 1923 issue of "The Smart Set" — The Aristocrat Among Magazines' when it was edited by that great critical team of George Jean Nathan and H. L. Mencken. For eleven years "The Green Elephant" remained a forgotten tale; then it appeared in print again, this time in THE SMART SET ANTHOLOGY *(1934), edited by Burton Rascoe and Groff Conklin. (Recently the books, manuscripts, and correspondence of the Conklin library were placed on sale at public auction. Your Editor successfully bid in for two books, but failed to land a Dashiell Hammett autograph-letter — the letter in which, strangely enough, Hammett gave permission to Messrs. Conklin and Rascoe to reprint "The Green Elephant.")*

It is a curious coincidence that after the publication of THE SMART SET ANTHOLOGY, *"The Green Elephant" lay dormant another eleven years — until we rediscovered it for EQMM. We doubt seriously if still another eleven years will elapse before "The Green Elephant" again breaks into print: stories from EQMM have acquired the habit of popping up ubiquitously in books compiled by other editors — see almost any recently published anthology. . . .*

Did you realize that Hammett has been writing for twenty-two years? Surely "The Green Elephant" is one of Hammett's earliest stories — possibly among the first half-dozen he wrote. It antedates the first Sam Spade story by six years, and probably came before the earliest Continental Op short story. To students of Hammett and the school he is credited with founding, "The Green Elephant" is especially interesting as a comparison-piece. For example, it shows none of the power latent in "Ruffian's Wife," written only two years later; it shows no sign of the accent on action which was shortly to characterize the earlier Continental Op stories; and the psychological probing, as specifically revealed in "The Green Elephant," was apparently a passing phase in Hammett's creative development, to be replaced later by his psychological preoccupation with violence and brutality, and still later, with nonchalant cynicism. Indeed, the evolution of Hammett as an originator and as a writing force is one of detective-storydom's most fascinating studies. . . .

THE GREEN ELEPHANT

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

JOE SHUPE stood in the doorway of the square-faced office building — his body tilted slantwise so that one thin shoulder, lodged against the gray stone, helped his crossed legs hold him up — looking without interest into the street.

He had stepped into the vestibule to roll a cigarette out of reach of the boisterous wind that romped along Riverside avenue, and he had remained there because he had nothing better to do. In fact, he had nothing else to do just now. Tomorrow he would revisit the employment offices — a matter of a few blocks' walk along Main and Trent avenues, with brief digressions into one or two of the intersecting streets — for the fifth consecutive day; perhaps to be rewarded by a job, perhaps to hear reiterations of the now familiar "nothing in your line today." But the time for that next pilgrimage to the shrines of Industry, through which he might reach the comparative paradise of employment, was still some twenty hours away; so Joe Shupe loitered in the doorway, and dull thoughts began to crawl around in his little round head.

He thought of the Swede first, with distaste. The Swede — he was a Dane, but the distinction was too subtle for Joe — had come down to the city from a Lost Creek lumber camp with money in his pockets and faith in his fellows. When the men came together and formed their brief friendship only fifty dollars remained of the Swede's tangible wealth. Joe got that by a crude and hoary subterfuge with which even a timber-beast from Lost Creek should have been familiar. What became of the swindled Swede's faith is not a matter of record. Joe had not given *that* a thought; and had his attention been called to it he probably would have been unable to see in it anything but further evidence of the Swede's unfitness for the possession of money.

But what was vital to Joe Shupe was that, inspired by the ease with which he had gained the fifty dollars, he had deserted the polished counter over which for eight hours each day he had shoved pies and sandwiches and coffee, and had set out to live by his wits. But the fifty dollars had soon dribbled away, the Swede had had no successors; and now Joe Shupe was beset with the necessity of finding employment again.

Joe's fault, as Doc Haire had once pointed out, was that he was an unskilled laborer in the world of crime, and therefore had to content himself with stealing whatever came to hand — a slipshod and generally unsatisfactory method. As the same authority had often declared: "Making a living on the mace ain't duck soup! Take half these guys you hear telling the world what wonders they are at puffing

boxes, knocking over joints, and the rest of the lays — not a half of 'em makes three meals a day at it! Then what chance has a guy that ain't got no regular racket, but's got to trust to luck, got? Huh?"

But Joe Shupe had disregarded this advice, and even the oracle's own example. For Doc Haire, although priding himself upon being the most altogether efficient house-burglar in the Northwest, was not above shipping out into the Couer d'Alenes now and then to repair his finances by a few weeks' work in the mines. Joe realized that Doc had been right; that he himself was not equipped to dig through the protecting surfaces with which mankind armored its wealth; that the Swede's advent had been a fortuitous episode, and a recurrence could not be expected. He blamed the Swede now. . . .

A commotion in the street interrupted Joe Shupe's unaccustomed introspection.

Across the street two automobiles were twisting and turning, backing and halting, in clumsy dance figures. Men began to run back and forth between them. A tall man in a black overcoat stood up in one of the cars and began shooting with a small-caliber pistol at indeterminate targets. Weapons appeared in the other automobiles, and in the hands of men in the street between the two machines. Spectators scrambled into doorways. From down the street a policeman was running heavily, tugging at his hip, and trying to free his wrist from an entangling coat-tail. A man was running across the street toward Joe's doorway, a black gladstone bag swinging at his side. As the man's foot touched the curb he fell forward, sprawling half in the gutter half on the sidewalk. The bag left his hand and slid across the pavement — balancing itself as nicely as a boy on skates — to Joe's feet.

The wisdom of Doc Haire went for nothing. With no thought for the economics of thievery, the amenities of specialization, Joe Shupe followed his bent. He picked up the bag, passed through the revolving door into the lobby of the building, turned a corner, followed a corridor, and at length came to a smaller door, through which he reached an alley. The alley gave to another street and a street-car that had paused to avoid a truck. Joe climbed into the car and found a seat.

Thus far Joe Shupe had been guided by pure instinct, and — granting that to touch the bag at all were judicious — had acted deftly and with beautiful precision. But now his conscious brain caught up with him as it were, and resumed its dominion over him. He began to wonder what he had let himself in for, whether his prize were worth the risk its possession had entailed, just how great that risk might be. He became excited, his pulse throbbed, singing in his temples, and his mouth went dry. He had a vision of innumerable policemen, packed in taxicabs like pullets in crates, racing dizzily to intercept him.

He got to the street four blocks from where he had boarded the street

car, and only a suspicion that the conductor was watching him persuaded him to cling to the bag. He would have preferred leaving it inconspicuously between the seats, to be found in the car barn. He walked rapidly away from the car line, turning thankfully each corner the city put in his path, until he came to another row of car tracks. He stayed on the second car for six blocks, and then wound circuitously through the streets again, finally coming to the hotel in which he had his room.

A towel covering the keyhole, the blind down over the one narrow window, Joe Shupe put the bag on his bed and set about opening it. It was securely locked, but with his knife he attacked a leather side, making a ragged slit through which he looked into depths of green paper.

"Holy hell!" his gaping mouth exclaimed. "All the money in the world!"

He straightened abruptly, listening, while his small brown eyes looked suspiciously around the room. Tiptoeing to the door, he listened again; unlocked the door quickly and flung it open; searched the dark hall. Then he returned to the black bag. Enlarging the opening, he dumped and raked his spoils out on the bed: a mound of grey-green paper — a bushel of it — neatly divided into little soft, paper-gartered bricks. Thousands, hundreds, tens, twenties, fifties! For a long minute he stood open-mouthed, spellbound, panting; then he hastily covered the pile of currency with one of the shabby grey blankets on the bed, and dropped weakly down beside it.

Presently the desire to know the amount of his loot penetrated Joe's stupefaction and he set about counting the money. He counted slowly and with difficulty, taking one package of bills out of its hiding place at a time and stowing it under another blanket when he had finished with it. He counted each package he handled, bill by bill, ignoring the figures printed on the manilla wrappers. At fifty thousand he stopped, estimating that he had handled one-third of the pile. The emotional seething within him, together with the effort the unaccustomed addition required of his brain, had by then driven his curiosity away.

His mind, freed of its mathematical burden, was attacked by an alarming thought. The manager of the hotel, who was his own clerk, had seen Joe come in with the bag; and while the bag was not unusual in appearance, nevertheless, any black bag would attract both eyes and speculation after the evening papers were read. Joe decided that he would have to get out of the hotel, after which the bag would have to be disposed of.

Laboriously, and at the cost of two large blisters, he hacked at the bag with his dull knife and bent it until, wrapped in an old newspaper, it made a small and unassuming bundle. Then he distributed the money about his person, stuffing his pockets and even putting some of the bills inside his shirt. He looked at his reflection in the mirror when he had finished, and the

result was very unsatisfactory: he presented a decidedly and humorously padded appearance.

That would not do. He dragged his battered valise from under the bed and put the money into it, under his few clothes.

There was no delay about his departure from the hotel: it was of the type where all bills are payable in advance. He passed four rubbish cans before he could summon the courage to get rid of the fragments of the bag, but he boldly dropped them into the fifth; after which he walked — almost scuttled — for ten minutes, turning corners and slipping through alleys, until he was positive he was not being watched.

At a hotel across the city from his last home he secured a room and went up to it immediately. Behind drawn blinds, masked keyhole, and closed transom, he took the money out again. He had intended finishing his counting — the flight across the city having rekindled his desire to know the extent of his wealth — but when he found that he had bunched it, had put already counted with uncounted, and thought of the immensity of the task, he gave it up. Counting was a "tough job," and the afternoon papers would tell him how much he had.

He wanted to look at the money, to feast his eyes upon it, to caress his fingers with it, but its abundance made him uneasy, frightened him even, notwithstanding that it was safe here from prying eyes. There was too much of it. It unnerved him. A thousand dollars, or perhaps even ten thousand, would have filled him with wild joy, but this bale. . . . Furtively, he put it back in the valise.

For the first time now he thought of it not as money, — a thing in itself, — but as money—potential women, cards, liquor, idleness, everything! It took his breath for the instant — the thought of the things the world held for him now! And he realized that he was wasting time, that these things were abroad, beckoning, while he stood in his room dreaming of them. He opened the valise and took out a double handful of the bills, cramming them into his pockets.

On the steps descending from the office to the street he halted abruptly. A hotel of this sort — or any other — was certainly no place to leave a hundred and fifty thousand dollars unguarded. A fine chump he would be to leave it behind and have it stolen!

He hurried back to his room and, scarcely pausing to renew his former precautions, sprang to the valise. The money was still there. Then he sat down and tried to think of some way by which the money could be protected during his absence. He was hungry — he had not eaten since morning — but he could not leave the money. He found a piece of heavy paper, wrapped the money in it and lashed it securely, making a large but inconspicuous bundle — laundry, perhaps.

On the street newboys were shouting extras. Joe bought a paper, folded it carefully so that its headlines were

out of sight, and went to a restaurant on First avenue. He sat at a table back in one corner, with his bundle on the floor and his feet on the bundle. Then with elaborate nonchalance he spread the paper before him and read of the daylight hold-up in which $250,000 had been taken from an automobile belonging to the Fourth National Bank. $250,000! He grabbed the bundle from the floor, knocking his forehead noisily against the table in his haste, and put it in his lap. Then he reddened with swift self-consciousness, paled apprehensively, and yawned exaggeratedly. After assuring himself that none of the other men in the restaurant had noted his peculiar behavior, he turned his attention to the newspaper again, and read the story of the robbery.

Five of the bandits had been caught in the very act, the paper said, and two of them were seriously wounded. The bandits, who, according to the paper, must have had information concerning the unusually large shipment from some friend on the inside, had bungled their approach, bringing their own automobile to rest too far from their victim's for the greatest efficiency. Nevertheless, the sixth bandit had made away with the money. As was to be expected, the bandits denied that there was a sixth, but the disappearance of the money testified irrefragably to his existence.

From the restaurant Joe went to a saloon on Howard street, bought two bottles of white liquor, and took them to his room. He had decided that he would have to remain indoors that night: he couldn't walk around with $250,000 under his arm. Suppose some flaw in the paper should suddenly succumb to the strain upon it? Or he should drop the bundle? Or someone should bump heavily into it?

He fidgeted about the room for hours, pondering his problem with all the concentration of which his dull mind was capable. He opened one of the bottles that he had brought, but he set it aside untasted: he could not risk drinking until he had safeguarded the money. It was too great a responsibility to be mixed with alcohol. The temptations of women and cards and the rest did not bother him now; time enough for them when the money was safe. He couldn't leave the money in his room, and he couldn't carry it to any of the places he knew, or to any place at all, for that matter.

He slept little that night, and by morning had made no headway against his problem. He thought of banking the money, but dismissed the thought as absurd: he couldn't walk into a bank a day or so after a widely advertised robbery and open an account with a bale of currency. He even thought of finding some secluded spot where he could bury it; but that seemed still more ridiculous. A few shovels of dirt was not sufficient protection. He might buy or rent a house and conceal the money on his own premises; but there were fires to consider, and what might serve as a hiding place for a few hundred dollars wouldn't do for many

thousands: he must have an absolutely safe plan, one that would be safe in every respect and would admit of no possible loophole through which the money could vanish. He knew half a dozen men who could have told him what to do; but which of them could he trust where $250,000 was concerned?

When he was giddy from too much smoking on an empty stomach, he packed his valise again and left the hotel. A day of uneasiness and restlessness, with the valise ever in his hand or under his foot, brought no counsel. The grey-green incubus that his battered bag housed benumbed him, handicapped by his never-agile imagination. His nerves began to send little fluttering messages — forerunners of panic — to his brain.

Leaving a restaurant that evening he encountered Doc Haire himself.

"Hullo, Joe! Going away?"

Joe looked down at the valise in his hand.

"Yes," he said.

That was it! Why hadn't he thought of it before! In another city, at some distance from the scene of the robbery, none of the restrictions that oppressed him in Spokane would be present. Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, the East!

Although he had paid for a berth, Joe Shupe did not occupy it; but sat all night in a day couch. At the last moment he had realized that the ways of sleeping-cars were unknown to him — perhaps one was required to surrender one's hand baggage. Joe did not know, but he did know that the money in his valise was not going to leave his hands until he had found a securer place for it. So he dozed uncomfortably through the ride over the Cascades, sprawled over two seats in the smoking-car, leaning against the valise.

In Seattle he gained no more liberty than he had had in Spokane. He had purposed to open an account with each bank in the city, distributing his wealth widely in cautious amounts; and for two days he tried to carry out his plan. But his nervous legs simply would not carry him through the door of a bank. There was something too austere, too official, too all-knowing, about the very architecture of these financial institutions, and there was no telling what complications, what questioning, awaited a man inside.

A fear of being bereft of his wealth by more cunning thieves — and he admitted frankly now that there might be many such — began to obsess him, and kept him out of dance-hall, pool-room, gambling-house, and saloon. From anyone who addressed even the most casual of sentences to him he fled headlong. On his first day in Seattle he bought a complete equipment of bright and gaudy clothes, but he wore them for only half an hour. He felt that they gave him an altogether too affluent appearance, and would certainly attract the attention of thieves in droves; so he put them away in his valise, and thereafter wore his old clothes.

At night now he slept with the valise in bed beside him, one of his arms bent

over it in a protecting embrace that was not unlike a bridegroom's, waking now and then with the fear that someone was tugging at it. And every night it was a different hotel. He changed his lodgings each day, afraid of the curiosity his habit of always carrying the valise might arouse if he stayed too long in any one hotel.

Such intelligence as he was ordinarily in possession of was by this time completely submerged beneath the panic in which he lived. He went aimlessly about the city, a shabby man with the look of a harried rabbit in his furtive eyes, destinationless, without purpose, filled with forebodings that were now powerless except to deepen the torpor in his head.

A senseless routine filled his days. At eight or eight-thirty in the morning he would leave the hotel where he had slept, eat his breakfast at a nearby lunch-room, and then walk — down Second to Yessler Way, to Fourth, to Pike — or perhaps as far as Stewart — to Second, to Yessler Way, to Fourth. . . . Sometimes he would desert his beat to sit for an hour or more on one of the green iron benches around the totem in Pioneer Square, staring vacantly at the street, his valise either at his side or beneath his feet. Presently, goaded by an obscure disquietude, he would get up abruptly and go back to his promenade along Yessler Way to Fourth, to Pike, to Second, to Yessler Way, to . . . When he thought of food he ate meagerly at the nearest restaurant, but often he forgot to eat all day.

His nights were more vivid; with darkness his brain shook off some of its numbness and become sensitive to pain. Lying in the dark, always in a strange room, he would be filled with wild fears whose anarchic chaos amounted to delirium. Only in his dreams did he see things clearly. His brief and widely spaced naps brought him distinct, sharply etched pictures in which invariably he was robbed of his money, usually to the accompaniment of physical violence in its most unlovely forms.

The end was inevitable. In a larger city Joe Shupe might have gone on until his mentality had wasted away entirely and he collapsed. But Seattle is not large enough to smother the identities of its inhabitants: strangers' faces become familiar: one becomes accustomed to meeting the man in the brown derby somewhere in the vicinity of the post-office, and the red-haired girl with the grapes on her hat somewhere along Pine Street between noon and one o'clock; and looks for the slim youth with the remarkable moustache, expecting to pass him on the street at least twice during the course of the day. And so it was that two Prohibition enforcement officers came to recognize Joe Shupe and his battered valise and his air of dazed fear.

They didn't take him very seriously at first, until, quite by accident, they grew aware of his custom of changing his address each night. Then one day, when they had nothing special on hand and when the memory of reprimands

they had received from their superiors for not frequently enough "showing results" was fresh, they met Joe on the street. For two hours they shadowed him — up Fourth to Pike, to Second, to Yessler Way. . . . On the third round-trip confusion and chagrin sent the officers to accost Joe.

"I ain't done nothing!" Joe told them, hugging the valise to his wasted body with both arms. "You leave me be!"

One of the officers said something that Joe did not understand — he was beyond comprehending anything by now — but tears came from his red-rimmed eyes and ran down the hollows of his cheeks.

"You leave me be!" he repeated.

Then, still clasping the valise to his bosom, he turned and ran down the street. The officers easily overtook him.

Joe Shupe's story of how he had come into possession of the stolen quarter-million was received by everyone — police, press and public — with a great deal of merriment. But, now that the responsibility for the money's safety rested with the Seattle police, he slept soundly that night, as well as those that followed; and when he appeared in the courtroom in Spokane two weeks later, to plead futilely that he was not one of the men who had held up the Fourth National Bank's automobile, he was his normal self again, both physically and mentally.

"The Case of the Pinchbeck Locket" is the second appearance in EQMM of Eric Ambler's Continental criminologist — "Dr. Jan Czissar (click of heels, clap of umbrella, punctilious bow), late Prague police, at your service!"

Dr. Czissar is a busybody bloodhound: he pokes his nose into other people's (Scotland Yard's) affairs — but, it must be confessed, with ratiocinative results that justify his meddlesome means. In point of actual time-sequence, "The Case of the Pinchbeck Locket" is the doctor's first intrusion, however polite and persuasive, on the good nature of Assistant Commissioner Mercer.

Are you familiar with Rachel Ferguson's excellent parody of The Master called "Holmes, Sweet Holmes!"? It is included in your Editor's anthology, THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (1944). *The last sentence is memorable for its delicious pun on the title of one of the Holmes short stories; Sherlock says "And now let us turn our attention to the affair of the missing Booth-Tarkington proofs"— a play, of course, on Doyle's own "Bruce-Partington plans."*

There is another line in Rachel Ferguson's parody that sticks tenaciously in our memory. It describes that bewildering (and Alice-in-Wonderlandish) moment when Holmes mutters: "Impossible — AND WHAT OF THE SOUP?"

That strange query again popped into our mind when we first read:

MERCER: Impossible!
CZISSAR: And what of the furnace?

But there was no humor, no sense of parody, in Dr. Czissar's question. The Czech detective was deadly serious. His simple "And what of the furnace?" was, as you will see, the crucial point of the case.

The saga of Czissar contains four more interfering investigations. All four will appear in coming issues of EQMM.

THE CASE OF THE PINCHBECK LOCKET

by ERIC AMBLER

THE winter afternoon on which Dr. Jan Czissar chose to introduce his peculiar personality into the life of Assistant Commissioner Mercer of Scotland Yard was cold and depressing. And Mercer, besides having a cold and being depressed, was also busy. Had Dr. Czissar not been in the possession of a letter of introduction from, as Sergeant Flecker put it, "one

of the 'Ome Office brass hats," he would not have seen the assistant commissioner at all.

The letter was brief. Having presented his compliments, the writer said that Dr. Jan Czissar had been, until September, 1938, a distinguished member of the Czech police organization, that he was a welcome guest in Britain, and that any courtesy which could be extended to him would be very much appreciated.

Mercer had dealt with distinguished visitors to Scotland Yard before. There would be the preliminary exchange of courtesies, then a tour of the buildings conducted by Inspector Denton, who would appear, as if by accident, a few moments after the visitor had entered Mercer's room and, finally, the farewell handshake and a safe conduct to a taxi.

Dr. Czissar was a plump middle-aged man of rather more than medium height, with a round pale face and a pair of sad brown eyes magnified to cowlike proportions by a pair of thick glasses. He wore a long gray raincoat which reached nearly to his ankles and carried an unfurled umbrella. As he entered the room, he stopped, clicked his heels, clapped the umbrella to his side as if it were a rifle, bowed, and said distinctly: "Dr. Jan Czissar. Late Prague police. At your service."

"Delighted, doctor. Take a seat."

"It is good of you," said the doctor suddenly, "to see me so promptly. It is an honor to be received at Scotland Yard. In common with my late colleagues of the Czech police, I have always admired your institution."

Mercer was used to dealing with this sort of thing. He smiled deprecatingly. "We do our best. Ours is a law-abiding country." And then his ears caught the sound they had been waiting for — the sound of Inspector Denton's footsteps approaching. He rose. "Well, doctor, now that you're here, I expect you'd like to see something of our organization, eh?"

Time had given the question a purely rhetorical significance for Mercer. For him, Dr. Czissar was already safely under the wing of the approaching Inspector Denton. And then the unbelievable happened.

Dr. Czissar said: "Oh, no, thank you. I will not trouble you."

For a moment Mercer thought he had misunderstood.

"Well, doctor. What can we do for you?"

"Pardon. It is I who can do something for you. I think," he added slowly, "that I can help you to discover a crime. Clever criminals are so stupid, are they not?"

"Very good of you. Now, if you'll just put the whole thing in writing and mail it to me, we'll look into it."

Dr. Czissar's thin smile vanished. The cowlike eyes flashed. "It is unnecessary. The matter is in writing and here." He put a newspaper clipping under Mercer's nose. "Please," he said firmly, "to read."

Again Mercer sat down. His eyes met those of Dr. Czissar. He read.

The clipping, from a Wessex weekly newspaper dated a fortnight previ-

ously, was the report of an inquest.

The body of a woman of 60 had been washed up in Shingles Bay and had been identified as that of Mrs. Sarah Fallon, of Seahurst, a village five miles from the seaside resort of Seabourne. Her husband had died 15 years earlier, leaving her a large fortune and Seahurst Grange with its 20-acre park. Soon after his death she had assumed the guardianship of his niece, Helen Fallon, who had married, 11 years later, Arthur Barrington, a Seabourne coal and builders' merchant. Since their marriage the Barringtons had lived with Mrs. Fallon at the Grange.

On the evening of Nov. 4 Barrington had reported to the police that Mrs. Fallon had disappeared. That afternoon Mrs. Barrington had, at her aunt's request, driven her into Seabourne to do some shopping. As Mrs. Fallon had said that she might call on a friend for tea, her niece had left her at South Square at a quarter to three, put the car in the municipal car park, and spent the afternoon in a movie. They had arranged to meet at South Square at six o'clock. Mrs. Fallon had not kept the appointment and later, when attempts to trace her movements through her friends had failed, the police had been informed.

Eight days later her body was found by a coastguard.

The post-mortem had revealed the cause of death as being shock following a fracture of the skull. The fracture could have been caused by violent contact with any blunt hard surface. It would have been consistent with a fall from a high cliff. She had not entered the water until several hours after death. The state of decomposition suggested that she had probably died on the date of her disappearance. Her doctor added that she had suffered from a cardiac disturbance and was liable to dizziness.

A child, Annie Smith, had given evidence of the finding, on the seventh of the month (three days after the disappearance), of a heart-shaped pinchbeck locket at the foot of Sea Head cliff, a local beauty spot within a few minutes' walk of South Square.

Mrs. Barrington had identified the locket as having belonged to her aunt. Her aunt, who had attached great sentimental value to the locket, had always worn it. Her aunt had been in the habit of sitting on the seat on the cliff during the afternoon. She had not, however, done so for several days prior to her disappearance as she had had a cold.

The coroner, summing up, had said there seemed very little doubt that the deceased had, after she had left her niece on the afternoon of the fourth, changed her mind about visiting her friends and walked up the hill to the cliff. Then, fatigued by the walk after her recent illness, she had had an attack of giddiness and fallen to her death on the beach below. High tide had been at six o'clock. Her body must have lain on the beach until ultimately carried out to sea.

A verdict of accidental death had been returned.

Mercer looked up. "Well, doctor?"

"Mrs. Fallon," said Dr. Czissar decisively, "was murdered."

"Impossible!" said Mercer.

"And what of the furnace?" asked the doctor.

"The furnace?" Mercer looked blank.

"Yes, the furnace. It went out, you know. The furnace at Seahurst Grange went out on the day Mrs. Fallon disappeared."

Mercer sighed and leaned back.

"Sergeant," he said, "get out the file on the Fallon case. Ah, thank you, sergeant. Here we are. All open and aboveboard. The niece first.

"She spent the afternoon just as she says she did. Car park and movie attendants both confirm that she spent the afternoon at Seabourne. She arrived home at seven o'clock, having waited for half an hour in South Square and spent ten minutes telephoning her aunt's friends. Barrington returned home soon afterwards. He had left at two-thirty to keep a business appointment in Haywick — that's 14 miles farther west along the coast — at three. He kept the appointment and several others that he had made in the Haywick district for that afternoon. Anyway, no murderer in his senses would try to push anybody off the cliff. There's a coast-guard station a quarter of a mile away. He would be too scared of being seen. Satisfied?"

Dr. Czissar smiled serenely. "Attention, please," he said. "I will present the case to you."

He raised one finger. "First," he said. "The thing that attracts my attention is this matter of the locket. So curious, I think. It is found at the bottom of the cliff. Therefore, Mrs. Fallon was killed by falling from the cliff. So simple. Perhaps a little too simple, do you think? It is found three days after the accident. Therefore it must have fallen on a place *not covered by the tide*. Six tides would certainly have buried it or swept it away, don't you think? Yesterday I went to Seabourne. I looked at the cliff. The cliff overhangs a little. I tried a little experiment. It is quite impossible to drop an object from the top of the cliff so that it lands on the beach above the high tide mark."

Mercer shrugged. "The clasp was broken. She probably clutched at it as she fell. She had heart trouble. It would be a natural gesture. It might fall anywhere."

"Mrs. Fallon," continued Dr. Czissar, "was murdered for her money by Arthur and Helen Barrington who, because they did not want to be found out, arranged alibis for themselves. They were not very useful alibis because nobody knew exactly when Mrs. Fallon was killed. In my opinion she was killed between half-past two and twenty-five minutes to three on the afternoon of her disappearance. She was placed in the sea at Haywick dunes after six that evening.

"At half-past two Barrington left to keep his appointment at Haywick. But instead of driving straight there, he stopped his car a little way down the road and walked back to the

drive. Five minutes later his wife left to motor Mrs. Fallon into Seabourne. As soon as she was out of sight of the house, but in the drive, she stopped. Her husband then killed Mrs. Fallon with the weapon he had ready. He then went back to his car and drove to his appointment at Haywick. Mrs. Barrington drove on to Seabourne."

"And where, pray, was the body?" inquired Mercer acidly.

"On the floor at the back of Mrs. Barrington's car, with a rug covering it. They could not leave it among the trees in case it should by chance be discovered. Barrington could not take it in his car. In the large municipal car park, Mrs. Barrington's car would be safe from inspection. There is only one attendant and he is at the gate. At half-past five, I think, Mrs. Barrington left the cinema, returned to her car and drove to the Haywick dunes, where she had arranged to meet her husband. High tide was at six. It would be dusk then, too. And that place is very lonely and deserted. The chances of Barrington's being seen as he carried the body to the water were small. Mrs. Barrington then drove back to Seabourne to make the inquiries of her aunt's friends. That is all, I think."

"I don't see where the furnace comes into it," the inspector remarked.

"The rug and the car mats would be soaked with blood, inspector. Mrs. Barrington would no doubt put them into the furnace. Even such thick materials would be destroyed, but they would put the fire out unless the dampers were also opened. The niece of a rich aunt would not know much about furnaces — and the furnace at the Grange went out, inspector, the day Mrs. Fallon was killed."

"You have yet to explain, Dr. Czissar," said Mercer, "the presence of the locket on the beach."

"Ah, yes. The locket." Dr. Czissar smiled. "It was," said Dr. Czissar, "something I saw the other day in a second-hand jeweller's window that reminded me of the Barringtons."

He put his hand in his pocket. It reappeared holding something swinging from a thin chain. It was a pinchbeck locket in the shape of a heart.

"The jeweller said," went on Dr. Czissar, "that these things are quite common. One can buy such a locket almost anywhere if one tries."

He looked at his watch. "I suggest also that you find out if Barrington purchased the new car mats and rug before or after the murder and if anyone saw his wife driving towards Haywick on the fourth. And a detailed account of Barrington's movements after five-thirty would, no doubt, provide you with more of the evidence you need for a conviction."

He got suddenly to his feet. "But I must really be going. So kind of you. Enchanted. Enchanted."

Then Dr. Czissar was gone.

Mercer drew a deep breath and picked up the telephone.

"I want," he said, "to speak to the chief constable of Wessex."

As most of you know, there is a "small society of writers of detective stories" (Chesterton's own description) in England called The Detection Club. The great, the beloved Chesterton was its first president and it is not difficult to imagine that he conducted its meetings in the manner of a 20th century Dr. Sam: Johnson. Since the death of Chesterton the president's chair has been filled (through not so voluminously) by E. C. Bentley. The membership of the club includes, among others, John Dickson Carr, Agatha Christie, Freeman Wills Crofts, the late R. Austin Freeman, the Coles, Anthony Berkeley and Dorothy L. Sayers — each, by the way, a contributor to EQMM.

You will be interested to learn that a similar organization has been formed in the United States. It is called Mystery Writers of America, Inc. — and the "Inc." proves how serious and important are the aims of this American association of crimeteers. At the time of this writing plans are being made for monthly meetings in the larger cities, for an annual banquet, for the issuance of club bulletins, brochures, and anthologies, for the awarding of annual prizes in various fields of the detective story, for the collection and maintenance of a criminological library, and most important, for the betterment of the detective-story writer's lot ("A policeman's lot," as we learned from Gilbert and Sullivan, "is not a happy one!" — but a detective-story writer's is often worse) — or, as the first pamphlet of the club phrases it:

CRIME DOES NOT PAY — ENOUGH!

Membership in the MWA, Inc. will be by invitation. It will include professional mystery writers as Full Members; editors, publishers, critics, literary agents, booksellers (and we hope, book collectors) as Associate Members; police officials and other distinguished members of allied fields as Honorary Members. The present Board of Directors includes Anthony Boucher, Richard Burke, Ken Crossen, Mignon G. Eberhart, Brett Halliday, Howard Haycraft, Dorothy B. Hughes, Baynard Kendrick, Ellery Queen, Edward D. Radin, Clayton Rawson, Craig Rice, Marie F. Rodell, Mabel Seeley, Kurt Steel, and Rex Stout. The officers pro tem are Baynard Kendrick, President; Ken Crossen, Executive Vice-President; Clayton Rawson, Treasurer; and Marie F. Rodell, Secretary.

All this good news on the occasion of bringing you another story by the President of Mystery Writers of America, Inc. — Baynard Kendrick — whose second appearance in EQMM is also the second appearance of his unusual investigator, Cliff Chandler, possibly the only ship's detective in the business. From time to time we'll bring you more news of MWA, Inc. — perhaps next on the occasion of persuading the Treasurer, Clayton Rawson, to make his short-story début in EQMM in the character of his sleight-of-hand sleuth, The Great Merlini.

THE EYE

by BAYNARD KENDRICK

THE *S.S. Moriander*, three days out from Southampton to New York, was heeling slightly under the drive of a moderate breeze from the northeast. The steady roll made noises which were magnified in the night — the creak of wood on metal, and somewhere down the passage, the intermittent swing of an open door in need of oil.

In stateroom 114, Cliff Chandler closed the book he had been reading, snapped off the light at the head of his berth, and lay down. The noises and creaks insinuated themselves slyly into the privacy of his room, and for a time he was not quite sure whether or not someone was tapping on his door.

He turned restlessly, adjusted himself to a more comfortable position, and closed his eyes. The rapping came again with persistent annoyance. Cliff swung his legs over the side of his berth, sat up in the darkness, and said, "Who's there?"

The timbers squeaked a response. Ordinarily Cliff found the voice of the great ship soothing. Tonight it was restless, disturbed — talking back to him mockingly when he expected to hear a human reply. He stood up, slipped into a dressing gown, and went to the door.

A woman stood outside, trim and svelte in an expensive tailor-made suit of checked tweeds. Her slight figure was rigid with surprise, as though she'd hardly expected him to open the door. Under the passage-light her lips were startlingly red against a face drained of blood. Cliff stared at her, fighting an hallucination that he was gazing at some strange foreign mask, for heavy white-rimmed black glasses hid her eyes.

"You're Mr. Chandler, aren't you?" she asked, her voice unsteady and low.

Cliff nodded and said, "What can I do?"

"You're a detective employed by the line?"

He nodded again. A step sounded in the long corridor at the end of the passage. Wordlessly, she pushed him back into the room and stepped inside the door.

"You'll think I'm insane," she said, when the sound of the footsteps had gone. "Perhaps I am! I'm in Suite K. Come quickly, please!" She turned out into the passage without waiting for a reply, turned her head, and said, "Be careful — we mustn't be seen!" and was gone.

Cliff looked out after her and saw her hesitate. Her shoulders dropped wearily. For the space of a few seconds, she leaned against the wall. As though driven by some great, inner determination beyond her control, she straightened up and walked round the corner to disappear from view.

Cliff closed the door. The brave set of the slender shoulders was still in his

mind when he picked up the phone and dialed the purser. The night clerk answered and Cliff said, "This is Chandler. Find out right away who's in Suite K and, call me back at 114!"

He hung up and began to dress. The phone rang when he was half-finished.

"Suite's booked in the name of George Harte and party," said the purser's clerk, smothering a yawn. "Six rooms and an office. They have one other stateroom on board, too — 28 on the deck below. Apparently it's quite a crowd."

"How many of 'em?" said Cliff.

"Three women, two men, and a boy."

"Names?"

"Now that," said the clerk, "I don't know. It's a private listing and you'll have to get it from Captain Jordan."

"Thanks," said Cliff, and hung up.

He took his .38 from a Gladstone bag beneath his berth and strapped it on under his arm before he switched off his light. In the dark the hands of his wrist-watch glowed into a luminous light and showed him it was half-past two.

The ship was more quiet outside of his room. The long corridor leading aft was empty — a yellow-lighted tunnel of blank-faced doors. A short way along it he found the open one which had been creakingly swinging. It led into a bathroom. He closed it and went on his way.

Suite K was two flights above. Cliff climbed the stairs, stepped out onto the promenade deck and stood looking round. Deck chairs were stacked in an angle of the ship in an orderly pile. Farther along, two men were washing down the floor with a hose. Dimmed, spaced lights set in the top of the covered deck gave it the appearance of a great, untenanted hall. Close beside him, a yellow square marked one of the windows of palatial Suite K. He tried to look in, but the blind was drawn inside, hiding the room. He turned away from the window; then, without speaking or moving, raised his hands.

A pair of pale, deep-set, expressionless eyes were gazing into his own. They were set in a large-mouthed face which might have been made of india-rubber. The hands of the man before him were thrust into the pockets of a black coat, and the right-hand pocket was raised directly on a line with Cliff's stomach.

"What's the idea?" asked Cliff. He knew the man had a gun — knew he would shoot skillfully and without hesitation at any sudden move.

"You tell me!" said the man. His voice was unexpectedly pleasant, as though, after a long time of waiting, he had at last found someone who could be quietly put out of the way.

"I'm on my way to Suite K." Cliff's voice grew hard.

"Through this window?" The man worked his mobile lips, causing the wrinkles in his face to dark about. "You needn't raise your hands. What I want you to do is talk!"

"All right," said Cliff. "Take that gun out of my stomach and listen to me!"

"I'll listen to you first — before I move the gun!" The black coat stayed upraised in a steady line.

"I'm an officer of this line."

"And you left your uniform at home!"

"I'm Cliff Chandler, the *Morian-der's* detective."

The flat, dangerous eyes moved nearer to Cliff's own. "Why didn't you say so at first, and not try looking in windows! Turn around and walk ahead of me."

"Where are we going?"

"Where do you think?" said the man. "To Suite K!"

The woman in the black glasses must have been waiting just inside the door. It opened in Cliff's face, throwing a soft pink oblong onto the deck from the shaded lights inside.

"He was trying to look in the window," said the man behind Cliff. "I nearly cracked down."

"It's all right, Knox." The woman in the black glasses moved inside from the door and added, "Hurry, please, and come in!"

Cliff felt that from behind the dark glasses she was watching him as he sat down, studying every move he made, trying to assure herself beyond doubt that it was safe to trust him to share some urgent problem of her own.

The curtain at the window behind her swung stealthily, moved by the ship's roll. The woman whirled as though startled by the threat of some living thing. When she turned back to him, her face was whiter than before. Facing him, she took the glasses from her eyes and laid them on the table.

"Do you know me now?"

"I knew you before," said Cliff. "You're Moira Nelson, the screen actress. Dark glasses aren't very effective as a disguise."

Wearily she brushed back the thick waves of her brown hair. "Lack of privacy," she said, "is a heavy price to pay, Mr. Chandler, even for money and fame. I've been able to stand it so far. Now, since I came on board this ship, I'm faced with something far more horrible and harder to bear — dread for the safety of my boy."

"Please go on, Miss Nelson." Cliff's fingers moved slightly, feeling the silken fabric of the chair. "Since you've asked me to come up here, the best course is frankness. I can't help you without that."

"I intend to trust you." She beckoned him across the room, and when he was by her side she cautiously opened a bedroom door. By the reflected light from the sitting-room, Cliff saw that the single bed was occupied by a sleeping boy. He was not more than twelve. As the light from the sitting-room struck his face, he restlessly moved one sun-tanned arm to shield his eyes.

"It's mother, Tip," Moira said gently. The boy turned over, mumbling a sleepy reply.

Back in the sitting-room she told Cliff, "He's the reason for Knox, the man with the gun who stopped you at the door. For ten years I have lived in terror for Tip's safety; had him guarded day and night; and now, here

in the middle of the Atlantic, where I expected him to be safer than anywhere else in the world, I find that he's in such great danger that I don't know where to turn or what to do!"

"What kind of danger?" asked Cliff.

Moira Nelson sat down on the arm of a chair and lighted a cigarette to keep herself in hand. "What kind of danger?" she repeated bitterly. "Mr. Chandler, I wish I knew! I've been threatened by phone."

"When was this?"

She snuffed out her cigarette and answered more calmly. "Two hours ago. Somebody called and spoke to Mr. Harte, my manager. They said that New York was calling, and gave the name of a Hollywood agent. Mr. Harte wasn't suspicious and put me on the phone. The voice which spoke to me sounded far away and said, 'Don't talk! If you value your son's life more than the pearls you bought in London a month ago, you'll wear them to the ship's concert tomorrow night and keep your mouth shut. Don't try to cheat! We know there are seventy-two pearls in that string.'"

She stood up, wavered slightly, then sank down limply in the chair.

"How much are they worth?"

"Fifty thousand dollars."

Looking down at her, Cliff knew he was standing before a Moira Nelson whom the public had never seen — a tired, distraught mother worried about her boy. He was gripped with a sudden cold fierceness against criminals who played on the strongest of human emotions. It showed itself in the twitch of his fingers and the slight pinch of his nostrils when he asked:

"How many people know you are on board, Miss Nelson?"

"Not many, I'm sure. Captain Jordan, the purser, and the members of my party."

"How many ashore?"

"Just a few there, too. I kept it out of the papers. Some old friends saw me off in England — they're about the only ones there."

"What about the agent whose name was used in the telephone call?"

"He might," she said thoughtfully. "He has a way of finding things out. That's why I answered the phone."

Cliff moved away to sit on a divan and nurse his knee. "Who are the members of your party?"

"George Harte, my business manager; Miss Hastings, my secretary; a masseuse, and Knox, who has the cabin on the deck below."

"You trust Knox?" Before she could answer Cliff went on, "Of course you do, or he wouldn't be acting as guard for your boy! What did Mr. Harte have to say about your consulting me?"

Moira bit her underlip and said, "He doesn't know."

"Why?"

"Because he urged me to see the Captain immediately after the call and I refused. I was frightened then and I intended to do what the message said — keep my mouth shut and tell no one." Her voice broke pitifully. "What shall I do now, Mr. Chandler? The pearls mean nothing

in the world to me whatever. I'm interested only in protecting my boy."

"I understand that fully," Cliff agreed sympathetically. He left the divan to stand before her again, his dark sensitive face grave with concern. "Has any phase of this affair struck you as particularly queer?"

She gave a dejected shake of her head. "One's faculties become dulled with worry, Mr. Chandler. I'm not able to reason normally when Tip is on my mind. All I know is that he's been threatened."

"Exactly, Miss Nelson! But why? That call didn't come from shore. Ship-to-shore calls don't sound as though they were coming from far away — they almost blast out your ears. Somebody on board the *Moriander* made that threat — apparently for the purpose of forcing you to wear your pearls."

"I intend to wear them!" Moira broke in emphatically. "I don't care if they're stolen. I don't care what happens to them —"

"Wait, please!" Cliff held up a hand. "That's the puzzling feature I spoke of just now. Jewel thieves seldom steal while they're on board a ship. They may spot their victims while crossing, but the final coup is usually made on shore. It's hard to get gems off a liner, Miss Nelson. Especially when every official is on his guard."

"Then why should they want to steal my pearls?" She sat up straighter in her chair.

"To dispose of them." Cliff snapped his fingers softly. "To throw them into the sea." He turned eagerly towards her. "Miss Nelson, this threat against your son came from close to home! Whoever made it knew the exact number of pearls in the string. They knew almost to the day when the pearls were bought, and where. No professional jewel thief would give so crude a warning. I'm afraid your pearls are already gone!"

"But —"

"Don't you see? Someone in your party has substituted imitation pearls for the real. You bought the real ones a month ago. They will have to be declared when you land. If they are imitation, it will be discovered then without fail."

Moira Nelson rose and stood before Chandler, resting a hand on his arm. Her expression was more tired, but some of the worry was gone, replaced by lines of the character and determination which had brought her to the top of the talking picture world.

"It may sound strange to you," she said, "but my manager, Mr. Harte, had the same idea. He said that I should examine the pearls, which are in the purser's safe, without delay. I refused then, but I have changed my mind. I want to see them right away!"

"I'll arrange it," Cliff said quickly. "Wait here. I'll call Captain Jordan and see the purser myself. Captain Jordan will stop by here for you and personally escort you down."

Yellow light spread in a clearly defined circle over the desk in the purser's office. A few feet beyond the desk it stopped abruptly, giving an illusion that the darkness was some tangible substance.

The shade of the desk lamp was green. Its reflected emerald touched Captain Jordan's strong, bronzed face and mixed badly with the tan. The Captain's cigar had died between his lips, and as he bent over the purser's shoulder watching his agile fingers at work on the safe-knob, he impatiently chewed the lifeless tobacco. The unpleasant smell of extinguished Havana became annoying.

Cliff lit a cigarette, sat down on the purser's desk and began to swing his feet. He was watching Moira Nelson, who appeared slender and small at Captain Jordan's side.

The vault door swung ponderously open answering the purser's pull. The hemmed-in light of the desk lamp broke confines, and glistened with steely brilliance upon row after row of numbered metal drawers.

"Miss Nelson's number is eight hundred and forty-two, sir," said Mr. Dobbs, the purser, in a tone reserved for officials of the line. He inserted a key in one of two locks on the specified drawer and added, "I'll have to ask you to use your key with me, Miss Nelson."

The actress complied, holding her key tightly between thumb and forefinger. Her hand was shaking as she fixed the key beside the purser's in the drawer and gave it a half-turn. Captain Jordan moved back until greenish light touched his face, again coloring the moisture under his cap brim.

There were five heavy manila envelopes in the drawer. Mr. Dobbs placed them on the desk, handling them reverently with the courtesy due a fortune committed to his care. Cliff got down from his seat on the desk to the floor.

Moira Nelson turned the envelopes over one by one, scrutinizing her distinctive, slanting signature written across the closed flap of each to make a seal. She selected the heaviest of the five.

"This hasn't been tampered with," she said, speaking very low.

"Naturally not, Miss Nelson!" The purser's very suavity indicated indignation. "This is a safe-deposit vault. You will find everything exactly as you put it in here, I assure you!"

Without replying, Moira slipped one pointed finger under the tightly-gummed flap and pulled it free. She took out an oblong morocco leather case, pushed a small catch in the front, and stifled a small cry as the lid sprang upward in her hand.

The string of pearls lay on a black velvet bed. Almost unconsciously Cliff read the name of the Bond Street jeweller chastely stamped in gold on the satin lining of the lid. He turned his eyes back to the pearls again.

Behind him Captain Jordan said, "They certainly look real to me!"

Mr. Dobbs said, "Please —" and lifted them out of the box, holding

them in his hands. Gently he rolled them about between his fingers, stroking their tapered length until they seemed to move with some uncanny force of their own.

"I'm something of an expert," Mr. Dobbs declared, and lay them back in the box again. "They certainly are real!"

Cliff found himself held by their lustre with a fascination hard to define — fifty thousand dollars' worth of pink and cream born on the bottom of the sea. A lump took shape inside of him close to his heart and began to grow. With the knowledge that the pearls were real, and that no substitution had been made, came a further knowledge that somewhere he had blundered — gone immeasurably wrong. What had looked at the start like a simple case of theft loomed into proportions which might almost bankrupt the entire line.

Cliff looked at his wrist watch, saw it was nearly four, and said, "It's quite late, Captain. I trust Miss Nelson will accept our assurance that the pearls are genuine and allow Mr. Dobbs to put them away."

Moira nodded, snapped the case shut, restored it to the envelope, and said, "If you have some more gummed tape, Mr. Dobbs, I'll make another seal."

Cliff felt slightly dizzy. It was hard when he had lived with the noise of a moving ship for so many voyages to realize that it surrounded him all the time. Yet the creaking and groanings and soft, stealthy scrapings were always there. Persistently they kept on blanketing the other sounds he was striving so hard to hear — the furtive movement of other people outside the purser's office door.

"You won't need to seal it, Miss Nelson," Cliff said casually. "Just put it back in. You can fix the seal in the morning."

"I'm sorry," Mr. Dobbs objected with a dry smile, "Miss Nelson's quite right. I can't accept unsealed valuables — it's against the rules of the line."

"Very well." Cliff spoke hopelessly, impotently, and began to move slowly towards the office door.

Captain Jordan, keen to sense impending disaster from his years at sea, spoke in an undertone. "Cliff, what the devil's the matter with you?"

The question was never answered, for before he finished speaking, the man who had stopped Cliff outside Suite K stepped through the door.

Moira Nelson turned around, holding the unsealed envelope in her hand. "Knox!" she said apprehensively. "Why have you left Tip unguarded? What are you doing here?"

The right-hand pocket of the man's black overcoat was raised in its deadly line. "My gun's silenced and I'll shoot through the cloth," he said pleasantly. "The combination of cloth and silencer makes very little noise. Put the envelope down!"

His bearing and manner were fanatically cool. Instead of shifting about, his flat eyes were encompassingly

steady; fixed on no one person, yet covering the entire room. Cliff had seen one such criminal go to the guillotine in France years before.

"You'd better do what he says," Cliff told Moira. He was chilled with the thought that, not taking Knox seriously, she might refuse to obey.

"Do you know this fellow, Miss Nelson?" Captain Jordan asked bluntly.

"Shut up!" Knox commanded warningly. Lines traced themselves deeper on each side of his pliable nose. He managed to indicate Cliff without shifting his feet or moving his head. "Get back beside the desk, you!"

Cautiously, Cliff obeyed. When he was near the desk, Moira incredulously laid down the envelope containing the pearls.

"All right," said Knox with no change of tone, "you can come in now. I can't turn around, so you'd better close the door."

Cliff heard Moira gasp as a second man entered the office and shut the door behind him. The rest of the great ship seemed suddenly remote and far away. Life was reduced to a unreal fantasy being played through in a crowded room, a room which swayed steadily from side to side, driven by forces beyond human control.

"George!" Moira's utterance of the name might have been a badly directed line on the screen.

"Capital, my dear Moira!" Her manager smiled and posted himself beside Knox at the only exit from the room. "You've really succeeded in injecting horror into my name. That's better than you've done in some time past. In fact, I'm sure your career is nearly through. I decided to protect myself before circumstances forced you to let me go!"

"Do I understand, gentlemen, that this is a desperate attempt on your part to secure Miss Nelson's pearls?" Captain Jordan asked.

George Harte lowered heavy white eyelids and made himself more comfortable by leaning against the door. He was tall and fair. Cliff searched the man's even features for weakness and found none, except a slight recession of the chin. Stalwart and assured in evening clothes, he dominated the scene.

"I'm afraid, Captain," he said, "that all of you underestimate my scheme."

"I've been a fool, an utter fool!" Moira spoke more to herself than to those in the room. "I've trusted you —"

"To the limit" Harte admitted. "Even to hiring the guards for your precious boy. I dislike dramatics, my dear. We haven't much time. Let's say I've been indiscreet with your personal finances. You've annoyed me enough about my accounting during the past six months — you really should know."

"I do now." Moira's red lips were unsure. "You're a cheap, despicable crook!"

"Despicable, perhaps," said Harte

chidingly, "but hardly cheap, my dear. Perhaps I shall go down in history as the only man who ever conceived a workable plan for looting the entire contents of a purser's safe on a ship at sea!"

"You're mad," said Mr. Dobbs. "Mad, sir. Quite mad!"

"I'm afraid," said Harte, "that I disagree. The Captain, I happen to know, has a pass key which used with yours will open every drawer in the safe. In fifteen minutes, two other men will be here to help us move the contents away. They're watching outside now, so we're free from interruptions. As members of the crew, it's their problem to get such a valuable fortune ashore. Arrangements have already been made. It's astounding what can be done to promote a prospective half a million dollars' haul!"

Captain Jordan's face was gray and haggard under his tan. "You've overlooked one point, sir. The difficulty of getting my key. This ceases to be robbery then, and becomes murder."

"Yes," said Harte quietly. "That's the unfortunate part of this affair. Four murders, to be exact! Three men and a girl. At the value of a hundred thousand dollars or so each, it's a glorious way to die!"

Cliff estimated that to his left the open door of the safe was not more than four feet away. As George Harte started towards Captain Jordan with outstretched hand, Cliff jumped for the shelter of the space between the heavy steel door and the wall, and reached for the .38 strapped under his arm. Across the purser's cabin, Knox's silenced automatic popped with no more noise than a suddenly opened champagne bottle.

The heavy calibre bullet tore sickeningly through the muscles of Cliff's thigh. There was no pain, just waves of weakness creeping up swiftly from deadened sinews, reaching his brain and sending him to the floor. His .38 dropped from his hand and slid from his sight under the door.

Fighting for consciousness, he realized that he had a second or two of safety. He clutched despairingly at the handle of the open safe door, pressing closer to the coldness of its shiny metal.

The huge unwieldy door moved away. He clung to it, striving to draw it closer, feeling his feet slide downward against the gloss of its side. The light appeared to be brighter. He knew then that the door was closing, swinging away from him, and that his place of shelter was gone. As his fingers slipped free and he slumped to the floor, the door clanged shut above his head.

Fine, polished shoes moved close to his face where he lay, and Cliff painfully moved his head. Through shimmering waves, he saw above him the arc of Captain Jordan's blue arm as the officer pushed down the handle locking the door, and gave the combination a twirl. The gun popped again.

"It will take dynamite to get in there now, gentlemen." The Captain's

unusually strong voice was wavery and thin. "I doubt if we're worth a hundred thousand apiece any more!"

It took some seconds for Cliff to recognize that the Captain was lying beside him on the floor.

"I don't think it will take so long." The smooth voice of George Harte came from far away. "I think we can persuade Mr. Dobbs to open it again. He must realize that we've gone too far to stop now!"

Cliff felt the alternating slope of the thick carpet tugging him towards the purser's desk and away again. It hurt his leg badly to resist the roll. He began to formulate a mental plan which would force the *Moriander* to be still. The concentration grew into an overwhelming effort, too great to bear. He closed his eyes and found that with them closed he was subject to red waves of excruciating pain.

The agony washed the murkiness from his brain. He opened his eyes, making a ceremony of it. The yellow bulb of the desk light above him shone brighter than the sun. He stared at it unwinkingly until it separated into two parts and began to float tantalizingly about the room. Lacking the strength to follow its journey, he turned his eyes downwards and saw that Captain Jordan's leg was resting across his own.

Above him, in the unrelated realm where people stood upright, voices kept ceaselessly mumbling, stirring the air with a dragging jumble of sound. Only one of the voices was real. The others were disembodied, saying things no mortal would ever say.

"Hold his hand against the side of the safe, Knox! He'll talk fast enough if we smash his fingers one by one."

The real voice then, undoubtedly real. The voice of Mr. Dobbs, the purser, speaking as a trusted employee of the line. "You shall only force me to yell and have to shoot me. I've no intention of opening that door!"

"I'm going to crack down on him, Harte! Be satisfied with what we've got. You said yourself the pearls are worth nearly fifty thousand alone!"

"I planned this job, Knox. I have a gun myself. I intend to carry it out my way. He'll talk before he dies. Jam this handkerchief in his mouth to keep him quiet. After he has a few broken fingers, we'll see what he has to say!"

Embarrassing, difficult words to comprehend, spoiling the peaceful wavering of the room. Cliff moved his head to shut them out, to avoid the crunching sound of a gun butt falling on Mr. Dobb's fingers!

He found that he was staring at an Eye. It was up in the other world and it had no expression at all. He hated it with furious intensity, for it worked on his mind, and his mind was full of pain. It was decidedly an inhuman eye, and therefore had some evil kinship with the voices which were unreal. Vainly he tried to stop his whirling brain from whispering that the Eye was on the wall.

It must be an eye, or a monocle in an eye, for monocles were round and

rimmed with gold. It was far too large to be human, but similarly the voices above him were much too far away. Stupidly, it glared back with scintillating coldness whenever he tried to blink it away.

He could break its coldness if he hit it, that he knew. It would smash and be robbed of its powerful spell. He closed his own eyes against it, knowing it was still there. Craftily, he began to plan again — to him, a greater plan than man had ever attempted before, an even mightier plan than the one which he hoped might keep the vessel still; a plan to rid the purser's office of that Eye.

Only the electric light, sun-bright above him, was standing in his way. Without the light the Eye could never see.

He started his plan by rolling with the floor, pushing the Captain's leg from off his own. Silently he laughed at the tearing, shooting pain, knowing it was part of the scheme to keep him from the Eye. The shadow of the desk was over him when the bottle cork popped again. He saw the thin-lined flame, but it flashed too late through the blackness. Cliff had already jerked the plugged-in light cord free.

The chair, a strategic part of his project, stood just beside the desk, underneath the Eye. One of Cliff's legs was useless, but strength was in his arms again, power to defeat the Eye. He swarmed up the rungs, over the seat, and knew he had won when the chair-back was in his grasp.

There was swearing behind him, and a second flash of fire. Cliff took one hand from the chair-back, doubled his fist and smashed the baleful glitter in the Eye, hitting again and again, until thin glass was raining on the floor. As he slipped slowly down beside the chair, he smiled — the *Moriander's* siren was splitting the night with sound. From every point of the ship glittering gongs were tapping out the signal: forty-three — fire in the purser's office — station forty-three!

The infirmary bed was soft and cozily warm. Cliff turned his head on the pillow and found he was looking into Captain Jordan's blue eyes twinkling over the top of the spread in a similar bed three feet from his own.

"I got a bullet over the cervical rib," the Captain said with a grin. "What did they do to you?"

"Made a fool of me," Cliff declared ruefully, "which hurts worse, but probably not in the same place! Did anything happen to Moira?"

The Captain tried to shake his head and winced with pain. "Shock," he said, "that's all. The nurse is in the cabin with her—she'll be all right by morning."

Cliff grimaced and turned his head away.

"What are you grousing about?" the Captain asked. "You saved a fortune in jewels and money for the line. The First Officer answered the alarm with his crew. He saw Harte and Knox come out of the purser's

office and join two other men. He called to them to stop, and like a fool, Knox opened fire. The Chief Engineer happened to be behind him, armed for Fire Duty. He shot Knox down."

"Killed?" asked Cliff.

"Unfortunately, no."

"And Harte?"

"He got away," said Captain Jordan, "by jumping into the sea. I want to thank you, Cliff. That was a sweet piece of work, starting that alarm."

"You'd better thank Dobbs," said Cliff. "Was he hurt?"

"One finger only. If it hadn't been for you, it might have been more. I still don't know how you did it with that devil Knox standing over you with a gun!"

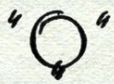
"No," said Cliff, after a time, "and you probably never will. You see, it wasn't me at all — it was my temper. Lying there on the floor, I got to thinking what a fool that fellow Harte had made of me. The more I thought, the madder I got!"

"You seem to forget, Cliff, that he also fooled Miss Nelson, Dobbs and me."

"He did it with my invaluable aid," Cliff insisted disgustedly. "He cooked up a perfect plan to make Moira insist on getting into the safe in the middle of the night, and she refused. It wouldn't have gone through if my brilliant deductions hadn't helped things along!"

"It didn't go through," said the Captain. "Again, I say, thanks to you."

"To my temper!" Cliff corrected. "What you'll never understand is this: I wasn't trying to save anybody or anything when I set off that alarm. I was trying to poke a gentleman named George Harte in the eye!"



More random speculations on the 1000 books of detective-crime short stories published since Poe's tall TALES: *a few thoughts on nomenclature, with particular reference to namesakes:*

In a field so comparatively limited, the duplication of a detective's surname is naturally rare. There is only one Holmes, one Fortune, one Thorndyke. When a newcomer faces the problem of christening a new detective character, he usually avoids the well-known and famous surnames. It would be odd indeed if a second Hewitt came upon the modern scene, or a second Carrados, or a second Zaleski. And since there is almost an infinite variety of names to choose from, even the lesser-known patronymics are seldom used by more than one writer.

The exceptions to the rule are few but fascinating. For example: there are two short-story detectives named — and this is not a common name by any means! — Chetwynd. One is Dr. Chetwynd in Mrs. L. T. Meade's and Robert Eustace's scarce book, THE SANCTUARY CLUB; *the other is Dennis Chetwynd, chronicled by Henry J. Fidler. There are, allowing for a nationalistic difference in spelling, only two Becks — M. McDonnell Bodkin's Paul Beck, the Rule of Thumb Detective, and William Le-Queux's Monsieur Raoul Becq, ex-sous-chef of the Sureté Générale of Paris. There are two sleuths named Barnes, three baptized Bell, and two who bear the family name of Treadgold.*

Even the names of Brown, Jones, and Smith have hardly been overworked in books of detective shorts. There is only one Brown — Chesterton's immortal and doubly unique Father Brown. There are only two Joneses, excluding parody names of Holmes — Samuel Hopkins Adams's Average Jones and Bennet Copplestone's "Cholmondeley Jones." And of that most ubiquitous (but no less honored) of all names, Smith, there are only three — R. T. M. Scott's Aurelius Smith, James B. Hendryx's Black John Smith, and Edgar Wallace's antidetective, Anthony Smith.

So when a well-known detective-story writer bridges the past and the present appellatively — well, that's news. And that is what Q. Patrick has done in the story we now bring to you. Q. Patrick gives us Lieutenant Timothy Trant, whose last name recalls one of the most important short-story detectives in the history of the genre — William MacHarg's and Edwin Balmer's Luther Trant whose achievements, published in book form in 1910, represented the first fictional attempt to use psychology, in its truly scientific sense, as a method of crime detection.

But the derivative quality of Q. Patrick's Timothy Trant is purely cognominal. Timothy bears "Grandpa" Luther's last name, and there the similarity ends — he owes nothing more to his titular prototype. College trained, Princeton '35, Timothy Trant is a contemporary man-

hunter — a member of the New York Homicide Division who can wear a dress suit and still not look like a plainclothesman. And like all the incredulous investigators before him, Timothy Trant has a passionate interest in the less orthodox aspects of human (and criminal) behavior.

WHITE CARNATIONS

by Q. PATRICK

LIEUTENANT TIMOTHY TRANT of the New York Homicide Division eyed his visitor appraisingly. She was young, beautiful in a careful way and cool — cool as the spray of white carnations she wore at her shoulder.

She said: "I'm Angela Forrest. You don't remember me, do you?"

Trant searched an almost flawless memory. "I don't think . . . yes, of course. Princeton. A prom. Nine years ago. A white evening dress, very little back. You waltzed superbly."

The blue eyes widened. "How extraordinary! You do remember! But then why shouldn't you? I did. You've done such clever things in those nine years. That's why I thought of you when I needed help."

"Help?" queried Trant. "From the Homicide Division?"

"Help from someone in the Homicide Division who isn't just an ordinary policeman, help from someone with enough imagination not to think I'm insane." Gravely she unpinned the white carnations from her lapel. "I've come about these flowers."

It was a passionate interest in the less orthodox aspects of human behavior which had deflected Timothy Trant, Princeton '35, from a solid business career into the police force. A pretty girl who brought flowers to the Homicide Division was unorthodox. Miss Angela Forrest was intriguing him.

"It's my birthday today." She put the carnations down on the desk. "These arrived this morning — dozens of them, anonymously."

"And it worries you?"

"It frightens me." Fear, controlled with an obvious effort, made the blue eyes hard. "You see, two other people in my family received white carnations anonymously on their birthdays. Within a few hours both of them were — dead."

"How discouraging!" said Lieutenant Trant, fascinated.

Quick to take offense, the girl flared: "You don't believe me?"

Trant smiled. "I can't believe you or not believe you until I know more."

"I — I suppose so. You want me to tell you the whole story?"

"Very much," said Lieutenant Trant. "Very much indeed."

She crossed her legs. They were

good legs. The traces of fear were still in her eyes, but she was obviously on her mettle as if she'd sworn to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help her God.

"My uncle, Colonel John Forrest, was the first. You may have heard of him. He died six months ago. Shot with his own revolver. He'd just been sent back from the Pacific. Some sort of shell shock, they said."

Lieutenant Trant remembered the case: A tired Army officer overstrained by the hell of a difficult campaign and returned to a civilian life which seemed meaningless to him. A tragic and not infrequent aftermath of war. The department had written Colonel Forrest off as an open-and-shut case of suicide.

Angela Forrest said: "Uncle John lived alone here in New York. The whole thing happened on his birthday. The family, all of us, were coming into town to celebrate by having dinner with him. I arrived early to take him some little present. No one answered my ring. I was worried. I had the janitor open the apartment for me. The first thing we saw when we went into the living room was the white carnations — dozens of them scattered across the carpet. There was a vase, too, a broken vase and a pool of water. I bent to pick up the flowers, and saw that some of them were splotched with red. That's how I found Uncle John. He was lying there, the revolver in his hand — he had knocked over the vase as he fell." She shivered. "It was blood on the carnations."

She paused as if steeling herself to continue. Lieutenant Trant made no comment. He merely murmured, "And?"

"The police came, of course. They investigated. They said it was suicide. Oh, the carnations didn't seem important then. I thought it was strange his having them because Uncle never liked flowers, but . . . but it wasn't until the next thing happened that I began to feel the white carnations were — sinister."

"There were more of them?"

"Last February. My aunt, Mrs. Lucia Dean. She was my father's sister. She died on her birthday, too. Dean — Chippogue, Long Island. Do you remember?"

Lieutenant Trant did. The case had been outside his territory but his friend, Inspector Cadbury of the Chippogue police, had been much interested in it. A middle-aged society woman who had given a family birthday party had later been found in her garage, dead from carbon-monoxide poisoning. An accident . . . that was what the coroner had said. No connection had been traced between her death and that of her brother.

"Our family always gets together for birthdays, Lieutenant," said Angela Forrest. "It's about the only time we see one another. We were all at Aunt Lucia's house. The carnations came that morning. They must have been sent anonymously because she asked me if I'd sent them. I hadn't. Later she was found in her car in the

garage — dead. Inspector Cadbury's men brought her into the living room. We all came down. The carnations were there by her body. The smell of them seemed to be everywhere, that sweet, horrible smell . . . as if they had been sent for her funeral." There was a catch in her voice: "That was carnations — twice. And now today when I opened that box and I saw . . ."

She broke off, throwing up her hands to cover her face.

Quietly Trant asked: "You told Inspector Cadbury about the carnations?" .

"Of course." She spoke huskily. "He wasn't interested. Coincidence, he said."

"Three coincidences," murmured Trant. "I suppose you're giving a birthday party tonight, Miss Forrest?"

"Yes. The whole family, all that's left of us. They're to spend the night."

"Put them off."

"I can't. I . . ." She stopped. "Then you do believe there's danger? You don't think I'm crazy to feel that . . ."

"No, there's something more than coincidence about anonymously sent white carnations arriving for two people on their birthdays a few hours before they died. Of course I don't think you're crazy." Lieutenant Trant watched her keenly. "Do white carnations have any particular significance in your family?"

"None that I know of."

"Strange," said Trant. "A murderer sending flowers to his intended victim. Very unorthodox. You suspect no one specifically, no member of the family?"

"No."

"No one has any reason for wanting to kill your uncle, your aunt — or you?"

She hesitated. "Well, in a way, we all have a motive."

"In a way?"

"You'd call it a motive, I suppose. My father had all the money. When he died, he made one large trust fund. The income is equally divided among his brothers and sisters and their children. If any one of us dies, the rest split his share."

"I'd call that a motive." Trant picked up one of the carnations from the desk. "How did these come?"

"Through the mail. Special delivery. In a plain box."

"Why can't you put off your party tonight?"

She looked at him desperately. "What good would that do? If the carnations mean what I think they mean I couldn't stop this thing by putting a party off." She paused. "There's only one thing to do. Oh, I've thought and I've thought and I'm sure of it."

"And that is?"

"To give the party, to give this person every chance and — and somehow bring it out into the open." She leaned across the desk impulsively. "That's why I came to you. I thought if you'd . . ."

"Come to the party?"

"Yes. I know it's terribly . . ."

"Unorthodox," put in Lieutenant Trant happily.

"But I'm frightened, Lieutenant. I'll admit it now." She paused. "But I wouldn't be frightened — if you were with me when the danger starts."

As Lieutenant Trant watched the lovely oval of her face, he found that it was not only the detective in him that was stirred by her plea.

"It would be a little obvious having a policeman to dinner," he murmured. "A friend, I think, don't you? An old Princeton beau?"

Angela Forrest's smile was radiant. "Then you will come?"

"Delighted," said Lieutenant Trant. "Most delighted."

Her relief was pathetic. It was as if a great burden had been lifted from her shoulders. She rose, handing him a card from her pocketbook. "Here's the address. It's an old barn of a house, but Daddy left it to me and I've nowhere else to live. Oh, I can't tell you how grateful I am."

"On the contrary," said Trant, "I'm very grateful to you."

"For what?"

Lieutenant Trant smiled. "For giving me something interesting to think about — and for waltzing so beautifully years ago."

After she had left the office, he picked up one of the wilting carnations and stared at its limp petals.

Then he reached for the telephone.

The ensuing conversation with his friend, Inspector Cadbury of Chippogue, convinced Lieutenant Trant that something was very wrong in the Forrest family. Cadbury was competent and stolid. He had a hard-boiled man's contempt for such feminine whimsies as sinister white carnations, and he stated firmly that Colonel Forrest had unquestionably committed suicide. But he also stated that it was different in the case of Mrs. Dean. Although Cadbury had no shred of evidence to implicate any one individual member of the family, he was convinced that Mrs. Dean's "accident" in the garage had been murder.

"Call it a hunch, if you like," he grumbled into the phone, "but it's a hunch with twenty years' police experience behind it. I smelled murder at the time. I smell it still."

"Interesting," murmured Lieutenant Trant.

After ten minutes, Trant had at his finger tips the facts of Mrs. Dean's death. He learned that, so far as opportunity was concerned, any member of the Forrest clan could have faked the "accident." The people involved — presumably the same as would be present at Angela's birthday party — were four in number: Philip Forrest, Angela's cousin, a bachelor and a reasonably unsuccessful Wall Street broker with a weakness for liquor; Herbert and Lucy Bartram, twin cousins, who were both ardent and eccentric research chemists: and, finally, Miss Ellen Forrest, Angela's maiden aunt whom Cadbury described succinctly as a "holy horror."

"You're sure," inquired Trant before ringing off, "that the smell you

smelled in Mrs. Dean's garage wasn't the scent of — white carnations?"

"Carnations — nuts!" snarled Cadbury. "That Forrest girl with her carnations! If you ask me, she's as batty as the rest of 'em."

"Oh, no," Lieutenant Trant sounded pained. "I wouldn't say that. Not at all . . ."

That evening Trant arrived at the address Angela had given him, a severe old brown-stone house in a fading neighborhood. He was wearing a dashing shirt-and-tie combination in a deliberate attempt to look as unpolicemanlike as possible. Before ringing the bell, he took a stroll around the block to make sure that the precautionary plain-clothes man he had bespoken had arrived. The man was there, waiting unobtrusively at the mouth of an alley which ran parallel to the back yard. Trant nodded to him and, returning to the front door, announced himself.

Angela herself let him in. She was wearing a creamy white dress which enhanced her extreme pallor. Her manner, however, was admirably controlled. With a soft little laugh, she said:

"I'm still alive, you see."

Trant was almost fooled by that laugh, but as she drew him into the hall he felt that her arm against his was trembling.

"I was hoping you'd arrive first but my cousin Philip's already here." She lowered her voice: "Is — is there anything you think I should do?"

Trant looked very grave. "Don't get alone with anyone. That's all. If there's any chance of it, make an excuse to take me along. Promise me you'll do that."

A flicker of alarm showed in her eyes. "I promise."

Philip Forrest was in the large, old-fashioned living room with a shaker of cocktails in front of him. He was indulging the "weakness for liquor" described by Inspector Cadbury and, as Angela introduced him, he was already feeling no pain.

On the piano in a large silver bowl, Angela, rather macabrely, Trant thought, had arranged the huge bunch of white carnations. Neither the flowers nor the ramblings of Philip Forrest added much gaiety to this theoretically gay anniversary.

The arrival of the two Bartrams did not help either. Herbert and Lucy, the chemical twins, both had red hair, thin, scientific faces and quacking voices which spoke interminably about the problems of their current researches. Having informed Angela that they would have to leave immediately after the birthday dinner to attend an important lecture, they drank cocktails, shouted at each other and paid no attention to anyone else.

The single, decrepit maid was in the living room bringing a second shaker of cocktails when the front doorbell rang again.

"That'll be Aunt Ellen. I'll go, Mary."

Angela started to the door and then, remembering Trant's warning, came back, took his hand and drew

him out of the room with her.

As they passed through the hall Trant ventured: "Charming relatives.

She grimaced. "Wait till you see Aunt Ellen."

When they opened the door, Aunt Ellen, large and bosomy and formidable, strode in. Inspector Cadbury's "holy horror" carried a fat suitcase and demanded to be taken immediately to the room where she was to spend the night.

With Lieutenant Trant following with the suitcase, Angela conducted her aunt to a room at the head of the stairs. As Trant set the suitcase down by the bed, Aunt Ellen emitted a shrill scream and pointed to a sleek black cat which was batting contentedly at a catnip mouse under a bureau.

"Cats, Angela! You know I'm allergic to cats. I shall sneeze now for hours and hours."

"I'm sorry, Aunt Ellen. I can't imagine how Minnie got in here."

Angela removed the cat, but Aunt Ellen was not mollified. It was impossible for her to sleep in a room where a cat had been, she said. With a sigh of resignation, Angela murmured:

"All right, Aunt. I'll sleep here. You can have my room." She turned to Trant. "Perhaps you'd be good enough to take the suitcase. Just down the passage."

Even Angela's room failed to satisfy Aunt Ellen. It was cold, she objected. There was an old-fashioned gas heater. Trant lighted it.

Aunt Ellen sneezed. "That's better. Now, Angela, let's have dinner. I'm hungry."

The birthday dinner was certainly a dismal affair. No one paid any attention to Angela, who tried bravely to be charming; Philip Forrest, unattractively drunk by now, ate in an apathetic stupor; the two Bartrams quacked at each other and Aunt Ellen complained.

Trant, almost sure that one of these people seated around the table was a murderer, was frankly puzzled. His work had given him a grudging admiration for murderers — especially those imaginative enough to send their victims flowers. He found nothing to admire in his fellow guests.

At length they all returned to the living room. The maid had put a tray with coffee, liqueur glasses and a bottle of peach brandy on a table by the fire, and Angela was offering liqueurs when Cousin Philip roused himself sufficiently to mutter:

"Hey, wait a minute. I got a present for Angy. In my coat. Angy's birthday."

He weaved out to the hall and returned with a bottle of brandy. "Real brandy," he announced. "Much better than that peach stuff." He broke the seal, spilled some of the liquid into a glass and gulped it down. "Happy birthday, Angy." He splashed some into a second glass and handed it to Angela.

Angela, smiling a strained smile, thanked him and put the glass down on a little table at her side while she poured peach brandy for the Bartrams

and Trant. Philip flourished the bottle at Aunt Ellen.

"How 'bout a snorter of Angy's present, Auntie?"

"Philip, you're drunk." Aunt Ellen's eyes snapped. "Angela, why on earth do you have those white carnations? You know I hate them. All those cups Lucia won for them cluttering up my dining-room closet. I'm cold. Get my wrap. It's on top of my suitcase."

Trant rose. "I'll get the wrap, Miss Forrest."

As he returned downstairs with the wrap, he saw Angela with the two Bartrams in the hall. Her cousins were scrambling into their coats, quacking about being late for their chemical lecture.

"Nice party." The female twin pecked at Angela's cheek. "Back around eleven-thirty. Don't wait up. Is there a key?"

Angela gave her one, and the twins hurried out, slamming the front door behind them.

Angela made a helpless gesture at Trant. "I'm rather ashamed to have asked you."

He grinned. "I didn't come to be entertained, you know."

"I know." Her lovely face was pale. "But all this . . . it's so dismal and ordinary. They always act just this way. I'm beginning to believe I must have been imagining things and that . . ."

"The white carnations aren't sinister?"

She shivered. "What do you think?"

"I'm not thinking yet," said Trant. "I'm just watching and waiting."

Back in the living room, Trant put the wrap around Miss Forrest's plump shoulders. Philip, surly now, stirred in his chair.

"For heaven's sake, can't anyone be amusing? Angy, drink. You haven't touched your present."

He made a grab at the brandy bottle and poured some more for himself. Angela reached for her liqueur, smiled at her cousin and tilted the glass to her lips. She was just about to drink when her forehead crinkled in a puzzled frown and she lowered the glass.

Instantly Trant said: "Angela, I think you've got my drink. This is yours.'

He passed her his glass and took hers from her cold fingers. Unobtrusively he lifted the glass to his nostrils. He realized then what had made Angela pause.

He was excited now. At last the party was becoming really — unorthodox. With a pretense of casualness he mentioned a forgotten phone call and asked Angela to show him the telephone. Still holding his glass of peach brandy, she led him through the dining room into a small, linoleum-floored pantry.

"Why did you change drinks?" she asked tensely. "I didn't have yours. That was mine. I know, because I left it on that table."

His eyes grim, Trant asked: "You started to drink and then didn't. Why?"

"Because . . . because the drink smelled like peach brandy and yet I saw Philip pour it out of his bottle of straight brandy. I was puzzled. I thought perhaps . . ."

Trant cut in: "Smell the glass you have in your hand. That's my drink. That's real peach brandy."

Uncertainly she sniffed at the glass.

"Okay." Trant took the glass and handed her the other glass that had been hers. "What does this one smell like?"

"Sort — sort of like the peach brandy."

"Sort of like. What else does it smell like?"

"I suppose it's more like . . ." She broke off, a look of horror slowly creeping into her eyes. "It's more like almonds."

"Exactly. Almonds. Bitter almonds."

"Prussic acid." Angela took a step toward him, and the glass dropped from her limp fingers, breaking against the linoleum. "Then . . . then it happened!"

"Smart," muttered Trant. "Poisoning peach brandy with prussic acid. If Cousin Philip hadn't brought that straight brandy, it would have been foolproof. You'd have drunk it. You'd never have noticed the smell."

Now that the danger had come, Angela Forrest's control had deserted her. She stood there, swaying slightly, her eyes fixed on Trant's face. "But who . . .?"

Trant scowled. "That's what makes me mad. I was upstairs getting the wrap. Did you leave the living room ahead of the Bartrams or with them?"

"With them, but . . . but they forgot to say good night to Aunt Ellen. They went back."

"Then any of them could have done it. Any of them."

"What — what are we going to do?"

"The Bartrams get back at eleven-thirty. We won't do a thing until then." Trant was very alert now. "Listen, I don't want your cousin and your aunt suspicious. You go back. I'll join you in a minute. And for heaven's sake don't drink anything."

She hesitated, watching him desperately. Then, without a word, she left.

Alone, Trant stared down at the linoleum. A little pool of liquid had collected around the broken glass. He stooped, sopped the liquid up in his handkerchief, put the handkerchief into a Mason jar he found on the pantry shelf and slipped out into the kitchen. There was no sign of the decrepit maid, who had presumably left for the night. Trant moved out of the kitchen, across the yard to the alley at the back of the house. His plain-clothes man was waiting. Trant gave him the jar, telling him to rush it to the laboratory for immediate analysis and to return.

Trant went back to the living room. From the scene that confronted him it was almost incredible that, only a few moments before, a cold-blooded and subtle attempt had been made to murder Angela. Philip, half asleep, was slumped at one side of the fire.

Aunt Ellen was lost in a game of solitaire. Angela, white with haunted eyes, sat alone on the sofa.

Trant joined her. For what seemed like an interminable period the birthday party marked time, and during that period a very unorthodox thought started to formulate in Lieutenant Trant's mind — a thought that brought a tingle of astonished fascination.

Promptly at ten Aunt Ellen put her cards away and rose. "I'm going to bed," she informed everyone, then wrinkled her nose at Philip, who seemed to be completely asleep now. "Better get him to bed, too, Angela. Liquor. Disgusting." Like the female Bartram she pecked at Angela's cheek. "Good night, Mr. . . . er . . . er. Good night, Angela. Nice party."

After her aunt had gone Angela looked from the sleeping Philip to Trant.

Trant said: "I'll soon cope with Cousin Philip. Which is his room?"

Angela told him, and Trant shook Philip sufficiently awake to guide him upstairs and flop him onto the bed in his room where he promptly started to snore.

Locking the bedroom door and pocketing the key, Trant came downstairs again. Angela was waiting anxiously in the hall.

"The Bartrams won't be back for an hour and a half. What are we going to do?"

Lieutenant Trant smiled at her. "You, Miss Forrest, are going to bed."

"To bed?"

"You're not going to wait up for the Bartrams. You're going to your room and you're going to stay in it with the door locked until morning."

"But you said you were going to try to find out who . . ."

"I think I have found out." He smiled again. "And don't worry. Unless I'm very much mistaken, there won't be any more murders in the Forrest family tonight."

Angela stared. "You don't mean . . ."

Trant put his hand on her smooth white arm. "Do what I say, promise. For the sake of the Princeton prom and the white dress with very little back. Tomorrow I'll be here early and I think I'll be able to explain everything. You'll understand then."

He leaned forward and pecked at her cheek in imitation of Aunt Ellen.

"Nice party," he said. "That seems to be the popular description of it. Goodby until — tomorrow. . . ."

After instructing his plain-clothes man to keep the house under close observation, Lieutenant Trant returned to police headquarters and called Cadbury to inform the astonished inspector that, if he came into town early tomorrow morning, he would be able to arrest Mrs. Dean's murderer.

Having left Cadbury spluttering he called the police laboratory for the analyst's report on the brandy-soaked handkerchief.

"Hi, Trant." The analyst's voice was sardonic. "Funny brandy on that handkerchief. Couldn't have tasted very nice."

"So I imagine," said Trant.

The analyst chuckled. "Guess I know what you've been expecting. Nice little lethal dose of prussic acid, eh? Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you. There is an alien liquid in that brandy but it's only . . ."

"Oil of bitter almonds?" asked Trant.

The analyst snorted. "Darn you, Trant. What's the point of analyzing anything for you? You always know the right answer before the report gets back to you."

He rang off.

For a moment Trant sat at his desk, a faint smile playing around his mouth. The room was dark and dimly lighted. A sudden scuffling made him lift his eyes. A small mouse sat in the corner watching him with beady eyes and twitching nose. Lieutenant Trant stared back at the mouse. As he did so, the color faded from his cheeks and a look of acute anxiety darkened his face.

"The catnip mouse," he exclaimed. "Good Lord, the catnip mouse."

He leaped from his desk, sending the mouse scurrying to safety. He ran downstairs, jumped into a police car and started to drive recklessly toward Angela Forrest's house.

He was in danger of having made the most tragic blunder of his career.

He parked the car one block away and hurried to the mouth of the alley where his plain-clothes man was waiting. He gripped the man's arm. "Has anyone gone into that house since I left?"

"Yeah, Lieutenant, the couple of redheads. Came back about half an hour ago."

"Half an hour ago," moaned Trant.

He swung around, peering at the back of the house. In the shadows he managed to locate Angela's bedroom window and turned swiftly to his man. "Listen, Kelly," he said, "I've got to get into that third window upstairs, and I've got to get there quick."

"Easy, sir. I looked the place over pretty good by daylight. There's a bay window on the dining room and, right above it, a drain pipe." He grinned. "Seen you tackle worse than that in your time, sir."

The two men slipped into the back yard. Kelly was right. In less than a minute, Trant had swung himself onto the roof of the bay window and had swarmed noiselessly up the short stretch of pipe to the open window of Angela's room.

Holding his breath, he slid through into the deep darkness of the room. Still as stone, he listened. Heavy, stertorous breathing came from the bed. At the sound of it, relief flooded through him.

He wasn't too late.

He stole toward the bed. In the darkness he could just make out the head of the sleeping figure. Something gleamed white on the table at the bedside. He touched it. A glass. He picked it up and saw that it was half full of milk. Tilting it, he let some of the liquid fall on his tongue. The faintly tart taste confirmed his worst suspicions.

The milk was doped.

He remembered the layout of the room. Silently he moved past the unlighted gas heater to the clothes closet and sneaked inside. As he waited in the darkness, he could feel the irregular pounding of the pulses in his wrists.

The luminous dial of his watch told him it was half an hour later when he heard the footsteps in the passage outside. They paused in front of the door. Then Trant heard the squeak of a key turning cautiously in the lock. The door made a tiny groan as it opened. The muffled footsteps were in the room now.

In a second Trant heard the first sound he had been waiting for — the throb of the window being stealthily shut. The tension was almost unendurable as he waited for the second, the much more sinister sound.

And, as he crouched in the darkness against the faintly perfumed dresses, that second sound came.

The sharp hiss of gas escaping from the unlighted heater.

This was the moment. Silently he slipped from the closet to the door and stood with his back to it. The gas hissed evilly in the darkness. He could dimly make out a figure moving from the heater, the figure who had broken into the room, turned on the gas — and had not lighted it.

He felt for the wall switch and snapped it down. As the room sprang into light there was a little scream. Trant moved his eyes from the figure of Aunt Ellen sleeping her drugged sleep in the bed to the other figure, the figure which stood transfixed between the bed and the gas heater.

It was the figure of Angela Forrest.

She had changed her white evening dress for a dark suit. She stared at him blindly.

Quietly he said: "Catching the murderer red-handed I believe is the recognized clichè." He paused. "Since it will be difficult to asphyxiate Aunt Ellen without asphyxiating you and me, too, I think, with your permission, I'll turn off the gas."

Angela Forrest, her dark hair tumbled around her chalk-white face, did not speak. He crossed to the heater, turned off the gas and moved back to the door.

His voice almost self-deprecatory, Trant said: "Extremely stupid of me to say there'd be no more murders tonight. You see I made a great mistake. I overlooked the catnip mouse."

He continued to watch her. "I didn't realize until a few minutes ago that you'd put the catnip mouse in the spare room to lure the cat in there so that Aunt Ellen with her allergy would insist on changing rooms with you. Tomorrow, of course, poor Aunt Ellen was going to be found asphyxiated by gas in your bed. Since no one in the family knew you'd switched rooms, everyone would believe she'd been murdered in mistake for you."

He paused. "When I heard from my man outside that the Bartrams had come back, I was terrified because I saw you wouldn't kill Aunt Ellen until they were here to be suspects.

But . . . well . . . I did arrive in time, didn't I?"

Angela's tongue flickered between her lips.

Rather sadly Trant continued: "When I left tonight, I'd realized that you faked that poison attempt yourself. Too bad you dropped the glass on linoleum instead of on the carpet. Otherwise I'd have had difficulty in having that 'prussic acid' analyzed and discovering it was only harmless oil of bitter almonds. Yes, I saw then that you were clever but I underestimated your cleverness. You were the poor little frightened girl. I was the big strong policeman who was to save you from being murdered. Turning a policeman into your knight in shining armor before you even committed the murder — that was brilliantly unorthodox, Miss Forrest."

Still she did not speak. As he studied her, there was an expression of grudging admiration in his eyes. "You had me summed up so well. You knew exactly the sort of story that would intrigue me. Eerie white carnations arriving anonymously on birthdays to spell doom. Frankly, I fell for it until Aunt Ellen let slip that Mrs. Dean grew white carnations for flower shows. It was obvious to me then that white carnations were the most likely of all flowers to find in Mrs. Dean's house and her brother's apartment."

Angela Forrest had clenched her hands into fists.

Trant murmured: "You probably didn't murder Colonel Forrest. But the extra share of the trust fund that came to you on his suicide was pleasant and it gave you the idea of removing Mrs. Dean, too. That was meant to be an accident but recently I suppose you got wind of the fact that Inspector Cadbury suspected murder." He shrugged. "Hence tonight's little exhibition. An ingenious scheme for proving your innocence and liquidating Aunt Ellen at the same time."

His smile was apologetic. "Excuse my inquisitiveness, but there's one thing I still don't quite understand. Why did you do it? Kill another aunt, buy a new hat? Was that the idea?"

Angela's eyes were blazing now. In a sudden, shrill voice she almost screamed:

"It was my money. It was always my money. It belonged to *my* father. It was wicked. The others had no right to it."

"Oh, dear!" Lieutenant Trant gave a sigh. "What a stereotyped motive. I was hoping for something a little less run-of-the-mill."

It was several days after Angela Forrest's arrest that Lieutenant Trant found the wilted carnation hidden under some papers on his desk. Almost with reverence he picked it up and put it away in a drawer.

"For my memory book," he murmured.

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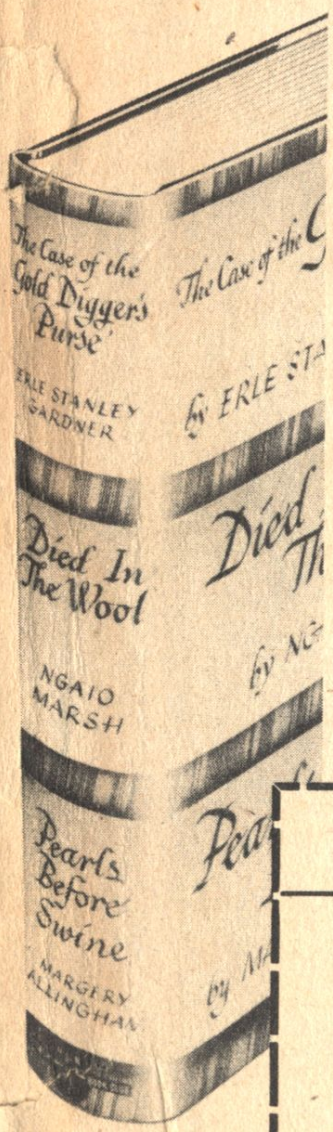

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