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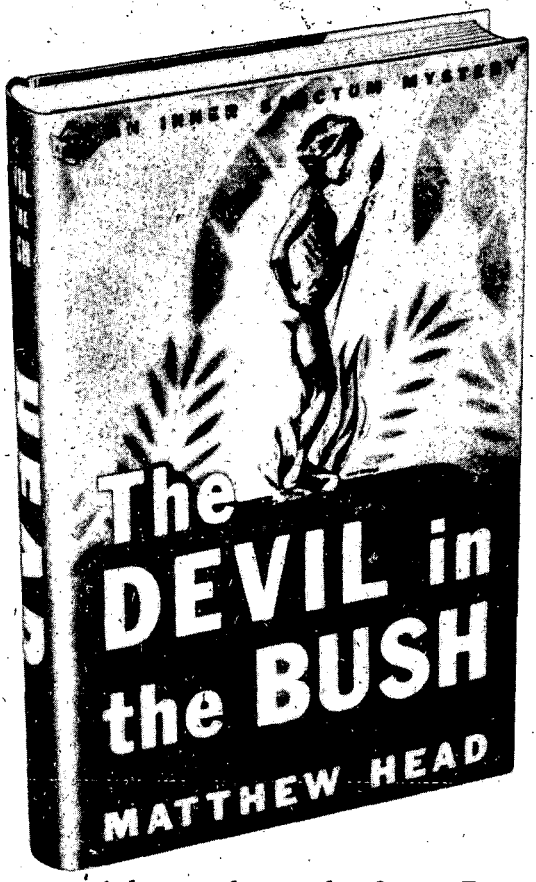

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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Beginning with this issue

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

WILL BE PUBLISHED *EVERY MONTH*

instead of every other month

We are grateful for the interest and enthusiasm of our readers which has made this possible. We assure you that ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will continue to publish each month the best detective stories, both new and old.

The next issue will be February, 1946 (not March, as heretofore) and will be published on January 8, 1946. Thereafter, a new issue of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will appear on the 8th of each month.

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THE SECOND NEW PROF. POGGIOLI STORY

There is only one book of Poggioli stories — CLUES OF THE CARIBBEES, *published by Doubleday, Doran in 1929. This book is considered a modern classic in the field of the detective short story. Of it that discerning aficionado, Charles Honce, wrote the following in his "Detective Stories as Literature," privately printed in 1940: ". . . there is nothing like* [CLUES OF THE CARIBBEES] *in the detective field, and one of the tales, 'A Passage to Benares,' is positively thunderous; it will knock you right out of your seat."*

Mr. Stribling is now engaged in writing, especially for readers of EQMM, a brand-new series of Poggioli investigations. The first has already appeared — "The Mystery of the Chief of Police," in our July 1945 issue. The second, "The Mystery of the Sock and the Clock," is offered now. And a third is carefully locked away in our secret vaults — "The Mystery of the Paper Wad." We hope and plan that there will be a dozen more as time goes on. . . .

If you read "The Mystery of the Chief of Police," you will remember it as one of the most daring and thought-provoking detective short stories ever written. This quality of extreme unusualness and true intellectual approach characterizes all the new Poggioli stories Mr. Stribling has written. Indeed, in his last letter to your Editor, Mr. Stribling wrote: "You know, the great thing about EQMM is that it doesn't shy away from thought. It seems intended for intelligent persons, which is an amazing idea in publishing fiction."

While "The Sock and the Clock" does not carry on the philosophic implications in "The Mystery of the Chief of Police," it again achieves the unusual: Poggioli, as a detective character, is treated in a completely unorthodox manner — with a realism that does not rely for its effectiveness either on sexy hardboiledism or studied brutality. Here is the private investigator really coming of age and learning the facts of crime. . . .

It is always interesting to peek behind the scenes. Your Editor cannot resist giving you a glimpse of T. S. Stribling, the man, as revealed in one of his letters. At the time of this correspondence, Mr. Stribling was living in Miami Beach, Florida. Your Editor had informed him of persistent illness in the Editor's family. In reply Mr. Stribling voiced his regrets, sent his best wishes, and said of himself:

"I enjoy such careless health (I knock on wood) that it seems everybody should too. My only trouble right now is a strained left arm. I work

on the horizontal bar at the beach every day, and I slowly developed a one-handed pull-up — with either arm — but my left got a muscle pulled (so the trainer said) and for about a month has been very sore, although it is coming around all right again. I have a lot of fun with the soldiers on the beach. They, of course, are all young fellows and many of them fool around with the horizontal bars, but I have seen only two who can do one-handed pull-ups and both were physical directors. So when I come hobbling by, a year-riddled ancient, stop and look at them perform, then creep up and chin myself with one hand and then move shakily off down the beach, leaving them wondering 'What the hell?', naturally it is a bit fantastic . . . and droll."

Mr. Stribling, that grand young man, is 64 years old.

THE MYSTERY OF THE SOCK AND THE CLOCK

by T. S. STRIBLING

THE delicate, some might even say, the presumptuous errand on which I had come to the American Hospital in Cuernavaca was chased completely from my head when I saw my old friend, Professor Henry Poggioli, standing in the patio — Henry Poggioli, Professor of Criminal Psychology of the Ohio State University, no doubt on another sabbatical leave. After our flurry of greetings he continued his conversation with Dr. Beveridge, physician in charge. The two were talking, of course, about Poggioli's professional field, crime. In the morning paper Dr. Beveridge had read that a woman's body had been found in an old Spanish well near Taxco. Here Dr. Beveridge turned to me and suggested casually that I might use the incident in a detective story.

I said it would make a very trite beginning, that every detective-story reader expects to find mangled bodies in old wells, or else why drag in an old well. And I added, there was no mystery attached to such a find since the body evidently had to be thrown in from the top.

Here Professor Poggioli smiled and said, "You came to the hospital this morning on some rather annoying matter, didn't you?"

I had to think back to see why I had come.

"Since you mention it, I believe I did. But how did you know that? I'm not disturbed now."

"Because your humor about Dr. Beveridge's suggestion was a little abrupt, not to say tart. I gathered it was a carry-over from some annoyance already in your mind."

I was too well acquainted with my old friend's subtleties to lift an eyebrow at this one. Dr. Beveridge, however, was startled. He discussed my friend's deduction at some length, then eventually turned to me and wanted to know my trouble.

Played up to like this I hardly knew how to start my complaint. It really was nothing. I told them so and tried to beg out of it, but both Poggioli and Beveridge would not have it, so finally I said baldly:

"Well, it's about one of the nurses here, a Miss Birdsong."

The physician was surprised, "Emma . . . Emma Birdsong! What has Miss Birdsong done that could possibly affect you or anybody else adversely?"

"Well, not me, personally," I admitted, "but all of us American residents in Cuernavaca." Then I went on and explained that Miss Birdsong had been attending a sick child, a little José Mendez, at the Quinta Catalina. When the little boy recovered and Miss Birdsong was leaving the Quinta, Doña Catalina, the child's grandmother, had invited the nurse to remain and make the Quinta her home. Such an invitation, of course, was pure Spanish formality, but Miss Birdsong turned around, went right back into the old manor and did make it her home.

"Now I learned all that from my Mexican *criada*, Concepçion," I explained, "and I hope it isn't true. But if it is true I want to protest for the benefit of other Americans. The natives here charge every boorish act of one American to all the other Americans collectively, and it isn't doing right by the rest of us for her to act like that."

Poggioli as a newcomer was amused, but the physician who had twenty-odd years in Mexico was serious. He said my *criada* had misinterpreted the whole incident. He explained when little José recovered, Miss Birdsong had not wanted to remain at the Quinta, but Doña Catalina had begged and implored the nurse to stay there nights. She, the Doña, said it was the greatest benefit that little José could possibly have. So much against his will and convenience, Dr. Beveridge permitted the nurse to sleep at the Quinta and report for work at the hospital every morning. That was the real status of the case. I was about to return the conversation to the woman in the well because, after all, murders are pleasant and interesting events and I don't know what the human race would do if they should all suddenly stop. But Poggioli sidetracked me by saying:

"If the little boy was well, as you say, Doctor, why did Doña Catalina want the nurse to stay on?"

"I meant that little José was physically well."

"Is he mentally unwell?" I asked with some concern because I knew the child and his grandmother.

"Don't leap at conclusions," soothed the house physician, "there are other disturbances besides a mental breakdown. This little boy developed a great fondness for Miss Birdsong and

Doña Catalina asked that she might live at the Quinta for the child's sake."

Here Professor Poggioli stroked his chin. "Now just what are you holding back, Doctor?" he inquired good humoredly.

"I'm not aware that I'm . . ."

"Possibly not aware, but of course you really are. You say the little boy had a mental disturbance, but this disturbance turns out to be a great love for his nurse — which is no disturbance at all but a perfectly healthy reaction. So there must be something you are consciously or subconsciously trying to conceal because your explanation explains nothing at all."

Dr. Beveridge was a little taken aback. "I believe there *is* a gap there." He tapped his cigaret and looked at its coal. "I may have been covering up one little detail unconsciously. Little José's unfortunate psychological twist is not his affection for his nurse; it's his aversion to Doña Catalina, his grandmother. She told me her little grandson was very unhappy with her and he seemed to love Miss Birdsong. She thought every child ought to have someone to love, and so did I. That is why I allowed Emma to spend her nights at the Quinta."

Here the psychologist asked if Doña Catalina drank, if she were sadistic, if she were cold-natured and strict?

"Nothing of the sort. There's no better woman alive. She tries in every way to please the child but he won't have anything to do with her."

"Why doesn't she give him back to his parents?"

"His parents are dead."

In the little pause that followed a taxicab drew up in front of the hospital and a moment later Miss Birdsong entered the doorway.

Now I barely knew Miss Birdsong but all Americans in Mexico are on a hail-fellow-well-met footing, so I called to her as she came down the patio.

"How does it happen that American nurses rate taxicabs in Cuernavaca?"

Dr. Beveridge replied for her that every day the Señora Mendez sent her up in the family car.

"But," I said, "the auto I see through the door is not the Mendez. . . ."

Here to my surprise Miss Birdsong gave me a slight shake of the head. I hushed, wondering why a taxicab should be a delicate subject. The nurse sensed my puzzlement for she immediately asked me in a significant voice if I had seen the hospital's new X-ray machine.

Dr. Beveridge answered for me: "Emma, he's a story writer; he has no interest in mechanics."

Now it irritates me to hear people classify story writers as if we were a separate species of animals; so I told Miss Birdsong I would be glad to see the machine, although I really hadn't a breath of interest in mechanics. So I followed her into the electrical appliances room just off the patio.

Inside, Miss Birdsong pointed to a bulk under a dust cover. "That's it,"

she said, evidently to fulfill her promise to show the instrument, then added in an embarrassed voice, "I've been wanting to see you for some time. You don't mind me . . . running off with you like this, do you?"

With some curiosity I said I didn't; then she drew breath to reinforce her own courage, and asked: "You write detective stories, don't you?"

Then I knew why I had been closeted. I began smiling. "Are you another one of those persons who has a wonderful plot . . . if you could only write it. . . ."

She flushed abruptly. "Why, I'm nothing of the sort. I wouldn't waste my time thinking up story plots. I want to do some good in the world while I'm alive. . . . Now you've seen the machine, we can go back." And she turned toward the entrance.

"Wait a minute," I begged, "I'm sorry I got off on the wrong foot."

"Oh, it's all right if you don't want to help me."

"But I didn't realize you needed help."

"Why did you think I signaled you to follow me in here?"

"I — I don't know."

She relented a little at this. I have noticed that as a rule women always relent in time to put you to work for them.

"It's that taxicab I drove up in. You saw me shake my head so you wouldn't mention it before Dr. Beveridge, didn't you?"

"M-mm . . . yes . . . but why shouldn't I mention a taxicab?"

"Well, there's something about it that's very . . . disagreeable . . . and mysterious."

"About a taxicab!"

"Yes . . . exactly . . . about a taxicab, at least about that taxicab."

"Then why do you ride in it?"

"I . . . I can't help it." I stared at her in astonishment and she went on, "It's the most mysterious thing, and . . . and since you write detective stories, I thought maybe you could solve it for me."

I shook my head. "No, I can't solve it."

"But you do solve mysteries in your stories."

"No, I don't. I *make up* mysteries, but I already know the solution. My only job is to keep the reader from finding the answer too soon."

The nurse was painfully let down at this. She turned toward the door again. "Well, we might as well go back. . . ."

I was not only interested, I was moved. "Listen," I said, "why don't you consult Professor Poggioli? He's probably the greatest criminal analyst in America."

"This isn't a regular crime, it's just . . . disagreeable . . . and . . . mysterious . . . and a little scary."

"That's all right, he'll answer any kind of question. Stick your head out the door and ask him to come and see the new X-ray machine."

Miss Birdsong went to the door and called, and Poggioli came in.

"So you weren't able to answer her questions about the taxicab, eh?" he

inquired lightly of me.

The nurse was bewildered by his penetration but I told her to think nothing of it, that when he explained how he knew, it would sound very simple. Here Poggioli took up the matter for himself. He said that when I had mentioned taxicabs as Miss Birdsong entered the hospital, she had shaken her head at me — so he had supposed there was some kind of trouble about the cab.

The criminologist now began questioning the nurse and the account she gave really was quite odd. It seemed that a very handsome, aristocratic, but annoying and even threatening Mexican paid her taxicab fare every morning from the Quinta to the hospital. That was why she did not want the taxicab mentioned before Dr. Beveridge.

"But it seems to me you would have wanted it mentioned!" I stressed in amazement.

"No-o . . . on account of little José . . ." began the nurse.

"Wait a minute," interrupted Professor Poggioli, "let's not jump into the middle of this. Begin at the beginning, Miss Birdsong, and tell us how any man could maliciously and with ill will furnish you with a taxicab every morning and why you *have* to ride in it?"

"Does sound funny, doesn't it? I first saw him standing outside José's nursery window, in the alley outside the Quinta. He wasn't doing anything, just standing there, gazing at the roses . . . and I didn't like his looks."

I stopped her. "Hold on, Miss Birdsong. Why didn't you like the looks of a rich, handsome, aristocratic young man. . . ."

"Because I could see he was one of the idle rich, and just wasting his time, without a single thought except to indulge himself," she replied warmly.

"Miss Birdsong," interposed Poggioli gently, "how could you decide this young man was self-indulgent on your first glimpse of him through the nursery window?"

"I . . . I didn't say 'glimpse,' Dr. Poggioli, I said 'sight.'"

"They don't mean the same thing?"

"No, 'glimpse' means just a short look at anybody; 'sight' means seeing everything he did while you watched him."

"I see. . . . So he did something besides just look at the roses?"

"Yes, he did," she nodded, with an adverse compression of her lips. "He was waiting for someone."

"And for whom?"

The nurse hesitated. "I don't think you ought to mention people unless you can say some good about them."

The criminologist nodded understandingly. "So it was a woman?"

"How did you know that?"

"Because you say evil things about this man and think nothing of it at all; yet you boggle over somebody else. So it must be a woman . . . in fact, a young woman, of your own age."

The girl gasped in admiration.

"Now why," continued the psy-

chologist, "did you decide he was self-indulgent?"

"Well . . . that's very plain. A rich handsome man like him waiting at the Quinta fence for Socorro, the maid, to come out and talk to him; and for them to talk very intimately and uneasily, too. Socorro looked around several times to see if anyone saw her."

Dr. Poggioli nodded. "I see. It would be a natural construction."

"Well, don't you believe it, too?"

"I don't know yet. What else happened?"

"Nothing right at that moment. But a little later when I started to walk over to the hospital, who should drive up in a taxi but this man whom I had seen flirting with Socorro and ask to take me to the hospital!"

"You refused?"

"Certainly I did!"

"And what did he do?"

"He went away that morning."

"But came back the next morning?"

Miss Birdsong gave Dr. Poggioli a questioning look, but finally she answered a simple, "Yes."

"And then how did he *make* you ride in the taxicab, Miss Birdsong?"

The girl's face warmed in anger. "Why, he simply slowed down the cab and drove along the street beside me. When I walked faster, he had the chauffeur go faster; when I walked slower, he went slower. Once when I stopped, he stopped. I said to him 'Why don't you go on?' He said, 'This is what I came out for, to place a taxi at your convenience.' And I said, 'Well, I don't want it!' and he said, 'Well, you don't have to have it but if you change your mind it's ready for you.' I said, 'This is more conspicuous than riding with you!' And he said 'I hadn't thought of that but it is, isn't it?' I appealed to him, 'Listen, this could cost me my job. I'm working in an American missionary hospital. If people see you following me like this they would misunderstand it.' 'Then why don't you ride?' asked the man, 'nobody would notice it then.' So-o . . . I rode . . . it was all I could think of doing."

I shook my head. I had lived in Mexico over a year and I knew of a great many crazy things the Mexicans did, but this was the craziest I had heard of. I glanced at Poggioli to see what he was thinking. The criminologist stood tapping the dust cloth on the X-ray machine. "Is it possible he's trying to drive you away from the Quinta?"

"You think so?" asked the nurse, quite impressed and frightened.

"Ye-es, I think so."

At this point a doctor entered the laboratory to take an X-ray photograph, so our conversation ended. Poggioli said he would think over the matter and try to decide what the nurse had better do. Miss Birdsong was very grateful and thanked him as if he were some superhuman being who had promised her aid.

It was tacitly understood that Professor Poggioli would be my guest while in Cuernavaca, so after saying

good-bye to Dr. Beveridge and the nurse, we set out for my apartment on Ignacio Abad *calle*. When we reached my place we were still debating the cause of the Mexican's strange persecution of Miss Birdsong. Poggioli gradually developed an hypothesis of *jealousy*.

It was perfectly absurd, of course, but his reasoning held together in an odd way. He said the only connection Miss Birdsong had with the Quinta was the little boy. If this Mexican wanted the nurse *out of* the Quinta, it was because the little boy loved her. The Mexican wanted the little boy to love only him. . . .

"But Poggioli," I cried, "that makes no sense at all! How can you be sure the Mexican even knows the little boy?"

"He must know the household of the Quinta very well," declared the criminologist.

During this discussion, my Mexican *criada*, Concepçion, slid back and forth from refrigerator to living-room, from dining-room to kitchen, with an odd mixture of timidity and ironic amusement, as if she were some sort of supercilious mouse. Whether she understood our English or not, I don't know. She never spoke it. But I did observe that when I gave her an order in Spanish I usually had to repeat it in English before she knew what I meant.

Well, Poggioli developed his theory of the little boy's kinship with the unknown Mexican man all afternoon, and after dinner, in the evening, he decided we would walk over to the Quinta Catalina to interview the little boy and find out why the child didn't love its grandmother. He seemed to feel that somehow or other this would shed light on the case.

I knew, of course, that it wouldn't. I was sure there could be no possible connection between a little child's aversion to his grandmother and a strange Mexican annoying an American nurse. They were logical incompatibles. However, as host I was showing the town to my guest anyway, and as the Quinta was the third tourist attraction in town, the first and second being the cathedral and the native market, I was very glad to walk over with him.

It was a typical Mexican evening; one of those marvellous evenings that made an American wonder how the town could be so dirty and yet seem so poetic and lovely. The Quinta looked mysterious half seen behind a high iron fence, with four or five dim lights pointing up the gloom of the eucalyptii and the rose trees. Everything was fragrant, with a hint of surface sewage in it.

I went to the tall iron gate and reached to ring the bell when I heard a woman's voice give a brief suppressed cry. It startled me for an instant but I was immediately reassured by a child's voice imitating a grown-up's reprimand.

"What you squealing about, Emma? Nothing to be afraid of. . . ."

A moment later woman and child came toward us out of the shadows

and the woman said in a nervous undertone, "I thought he had come back."

"What if he had; he couldn't eat you, could he?"

By this time the woman recognized us and came forward eagerly. "Oh, it's you! Has . . . has the Professor decided anything?" She evidently was using the slight obscurity of speech with which grown-ups puzzle childish ears.

I answered in the same vein by saying Poggioli thought that by talking to some one in the Quinta he might get a clue to the information she desired.

"You mean by talking to . . .?" asked the nurse, coming up to the inside of the gate.

"Yes," I nodded.

"Why, what would that have to do with it?"

"Just a possibility," said Poggioli behind me, "nothing certain at all. He and I could just have a little talk together. . . ."

"I see. . . . Well, come in." She attempted to unlatch the tall gate but found it locked. "Darling," she said, "will you run and get the key from Socorro?"

The child standing three or four yards behind her said no.

"Why, José, darling, won't you go for me?"

The boy repeated his no, and after a moment added, "And I won't talk to him."

We three grown-ups stood with the frustrated feeling of having been understood all the time. Miss Birdsong called Socorro's name and presently Socorro appeared out of the darkness.

"Socorro," explained the nurse in a reproachful voice, "I asked José to tell you to bring me the gate key and he refused."

"*Ça*, José," chided Socorro, and then added, "I'll go get it, Señorita."

The combined disapproval of all the grown-ups turned little José around and sent him walking slowly into the Quinta. We watched him until his little figure moved under the illumination of the dome light over the entrance. Then Socorro went for the key.

Poggioli turned to the nurse. "We seemed to startle you when we appeared at the gate. Are you nervous all the time?"

"No, I thought . . . he had come back."

The psychologist moved to see her more plainly through the bars. "I understood he annoyed you only in the mornings, in the taxicab?"

"Yes," she said in a worried voice, "but this afternoon as José and I started for a walk he came up with a little gun to give to José. . . ."

"Oh, a toy gun," interrupted Poggioli.

"Yes. He was very polite and self-effacing about it, in a sarcastic sort of way." She shivered. "He's the most disagreeable man I ever met. When he came up on José and me this afternoon, so unexpectedly . . ."

"How do you mean, unexpectedly? Didn't he just come walking along

the street?"

"No, he came from the alley," she pointed, "around the corner, where I saw him that first morning, and he was right on us all at once. . . ."

Here she was interrupted by Socorro appearing in the shadows again.

"Señorita," said the servant, "I can't find the regular gate key. Somebody has misplaced it. Shall I get the Doña's master key?"

Poggioli stood a moment in silence. The whole situation seemed somehow to rest completely with him.

"No, no, that's all right, Socorro," he said at length, "we were just going anyway."

Naturally both Poggioli and I were disturbed over the missing gate key. For some time we walked silently through the darkness toward my rooms on Ignacio Abad *calle*, then finally I said, "Do you think that man got the gate key from Socorro?"

"Whether he has or hasn't got it, I don't believe he will do any physical harm to Miss Birdsong," said Poggioli thoughtfully.

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"From Socorro's manner. It was quite casual. Either the key has been mislaid as she said it was or she has given him the key so many times that it no longer disturbs her poise."

"But I don't see what that has to do with physical harm. . . ."

"It's very simple. He couldn't have entered the Quinta a great many times and worked physical harm to anyone without discovery and action from the law, even Mexican law."

"That sounds to me as if you were hanging Miss Birdsong's safety on a rather thin limb. I think we ought to tell the police and have them watch the . . ."

"And stop him?"

"Certainly stop him — if he attempts anything!"

"And have him put off his attempt, whatever it is, until we are off guard, and miss this opportunity to trap him?"

I was taken aback. "I hadn't thought of it that way," I admitted, "I was thinking of Miss Birdsong."

"You were thinking of her present," said Poggioli, "I was thinking of her future."

"Yes, I see. But if he kills her tonight, she won't have any future."

"He won't kill her, Socorro was too calm for that . . . and besides she really may have mislaid the key."

I personally didn't like to gamble on such a narrow margin. I was so disturbed that when I got home and to bed I couldn't sleep at all. I heard the cathedral clock strike every hour. When it tolled one, I thought that at that very minute he could easily be doing Miss Birdsong to death. And for me and Poggioli to lie here like this, when we knew an attack and perhaps a tragedy was imminent . . . that is, if the key were not really lost . . . it was horrible. Finally I must have gone to sleep because the next time I woke up it was high Mexican daylight.

Poggioli was up, apparently had been up for some time. He had the

morning paper and when he saw I was awake, called out cheerfully, "Listen to this. 'This morning at an early hour, a train carrying forty American tourists was held up at La Victoria, robbed by armed bandits, and then sent on to Mexico City. The robbers relieved the travelers of cash and jewelry.' That's an out of the ordinary crime. I was wondering if you could get a mystery story out of it?"

I had a headache. I said, "Poggioli, if the friends of a writer would only forget about plots, it would make the writer's path through life a lot smoother and pleasanter." And then I added, as a dig at the way he had treated Miss Birdsong, "It seems to me a criminologist's duty ought to be as much to prevent crime as to detect it after it has been committed."

"Now, wait," argued Poggioli, "how could I possibly have prevented forty American tourists from being . . ."

"Forty your foot! You know I'm not talking about forty American tourists!"

"Oh, that. Well, I don't think anything's happened; nearly ten o'clock and we haven't heard anything."

At that moment Concepçion put her head in our doorway and said big-eyed and in frightened Spanish, "Señor, a man has come for the police!"

"For the what?" I said.

"For the police, Señor."

"You mean *from* the police!"

"No, Señor, *for* the police," and looked at Poggioli. "Is he not a policeman?"

I got into a dressing gown and Poggioli and I went outside.

A private automobile, one of those large, expensive, resplendent cars such as rich Mexicans always own, stood at the foot-wide curb outside my doorway. In the rear seat sat a suave, agreeable gentleman with his chauffeur in front. The gentleman began begging our pardon, but he had noticed in the paper that Professor Poggioli, the American criminologist, was visiting at this street and number, and he had also noticed in the same paper that an American woman had been robbed. He said he was afraid that we didn't read Spanish, or that we didn't take the local Cuernavaca paper, therefore he was taking the extreme liberty of calling to the attention of a great American criminologist the fact that a fellow countryman of his, a woman, was in distress. He hoped we would consider this a friendly gesture. . . .

I am sure he would have gone on talking and apologizing in excellent English all day if I had not interrupted with a guilty pang.

"Was it Emma Birdsong . . . at the Quinta Catalina?"

The Mexican gentleman referred to a paper in his hand. "I believe that is correct, a Miss Emma . . ."

"We are very, very interested," I interrupted him, giving Poggioli a condemning glance. "We will go over immediately."

"Might I run you gentlemen over in my car?" offered the samaritan.

"No, we won't put you to the trouble. We'll do that much for ourselves," I said significantly.

The gentleman was agreeable and signaled his chauffeur to drive ahead.

"Why didn't we go with him?" asked my guest.

"You wouldn't understand if I told you, Poggioli!" I said bitterly.

My friend looked at me. "Why are you so disturbed?"

"For heaven's sake, man," I cried, "How can you stand there calmly and talk like that? She's been robbed! Maybe she's also been attacked, hurt, killed . . . and it's our fault!"

Poggioli clicked his tongue at my simplicity. "Why, she can't have been hurt. That would have been the headline in the paper, not the robbery."

"Poggioli," I said, "you are too scientific to make a good friend, and you may be wrong, too. These Mexican papers report things according to their whim, not according to psychology."

Here a taxi came in sight. I first whistled at it American fashion, then remembered and hissed Mexican fashion, and it came to us. I rode to the Quinta in the greatest self-reproach.

When we reached the place everything was in confusion. The police were there; the grounds were being searched; the servants questioned. Little José watched everything with dour unchildlike eyes. Doña Catalina herself seemed suddenly aged. I asked her where the nurse was and the poor old dowager pointed to a room. I hadn't the hardihood to ask if Miss Birdsong had been injured. When I entered the boudoir and saw the girl, I still wasn't sure; she seemed so pale and shaken. She was so glad to see us. I asked her if she had been harmed. She shook her head. "Oh no, nothing like that." Then I asked her had he taken much of value.

She shook her head as if she were ill. "No, no particular value."

"What did he take?"

"A sock."

"A what?"

"A sock." She lowered her voice to a whisper. "He woke me up, talked to me, took my sock . . . and went away."

I looked at her, trying to understand. "Did it have money in it?"

"No, no, that's what makes it so frightening! What can he want with a sock?"

Poggioli was behind me, pulling at his chin in deep thought. He spoke out of his cogitations. "I believe this man is the cleverest criminal I have ever met."

I turned impatiently. "Say what you mean, say it plainly! My Lord, this is no time for . . ."

"I mean, stealing a sock, and the psychologic effect he aimed to produce. If he had stolen money, jewels, it would have been a commonplace. But a sock! It throws an air of mystery, almost of menace, over the crime. It suggests a strand in some unknown plot . . . and it's terrifying. Miss Birdsong is much more frightened than if he had taken her rings. Isn't that true, Miss Birdsong?"

"A rich man, he wouldn't have taken money," said the nurse.

"Perhaps not. So the object of the sock is simply to be mysterious, to frighten you, to drive you away from the Quinta. That's the explanation and you needn't really be frightened any more. This fellow is bluffing."

The nurse was enormously relieved. "I suppose that is right. I hope it's right. But why does he want me to go away? What on earth have I . . ."

"As I explained to you, I can't go into that, Miss Birdsong. I haven't enough facts, and probably I haven't the Mexican psychology either. You haven't told the police what you know?"

"No, indeed. I'm afraid to. . . . Think what he would do if I told the police on him. He might murder me."

"But he would be put in jail," I pointed out.

"Maybe. . . ."

Poggioli interrupted. "Miss Birdsong, you'll have to make a decision: whether you'll give up little José and go back to the hospital, or whether you'll use the law, fight this man with it, and stay here with your patient."

"But would they put him in jail . . . just for stealing a sock?"

"Now there you are," I said, "I hadn't thought of that. I don't know whether you'd better tell the police or not."

Still undecided we went out on the Quinta grounds where the little Mexican police were busy with their investigation. The police captain was explaining to the Señora that it was an inside job because the vines on the iron fence were unbroken. This proved that no one had climbed over the wall. Moreover, it proved that an amateur burglar was at work because a professional always broke vines when a servant let him in — to clear the servant of complicity. So the marauder had had an accomplice in the Quinta. ". . . at what hour did this burglary take place?"

The robbery was committed at four o'clock. The Doña was sure of that. She had heard Emma scream, had got out of her bed and noticed the clock in her room; it was exactly four o'clock.

"How did you come to look at the clock in the excitement, Señora?"

"It struck just as I got up."

"*Exactemente.* May we look at the clock?"

The whole crowd of us, servants, policemen and all, marched into the Señora's bedroom to look at a grandfather's clock in the corner. The hour was then three minutes past ten.

"The time is correct now," stated the little officer, glancing at his own watch. "It must have been correct then." He turned to Miss Birdsong. "Señorita, did you mark the hour?"

"Yes — it was two o'clock."

"*Two* o'clock!" exclaimed the officer, "but Señora says *four* o'clock and her clock is right!"

Miss Birdsong shook her head, half in stubbornness, half in bewilderment. "When I woke up it was two o'clock — I looked carefully."

"Señorita, if you woke up fright-

ened by a thief, why should you note the hour?" inquired the chief officer.

"Because I'm a nurse and trained to observe the exact time when anything happens — and it was two o'clock, not four."

"*Si*, may we now enter your bedroom and *con su permission* examine your clock, Señorita?"

"Certainly. This way."

The crowd moved into the nurse's bedroom. Miss Birdsong's clock was an ormolu, standing on her dresser.

The chief officer smiled broadly and spread his hands. "There is no mystery," he said, shrugging. "Look. The Señorita's clock is two hours *slow*."

Miss Birdsong's ormolu stood at four minutes after eight.

"Did this clock ever lose time before?" asked the officer.

"Never," replied Miss Birdsong.

Here Poggioli spoke to Miss Birdsong in English and in a casual voice: "It's all right now — no more danger." And we made our adieus to the Señora and the nurse, and went away, leaving the nurse plainly a little frightened. I myself was uneasy for her. Outside the Quinta I asked Poggioli why in the world he said there was no danger now when this new clock mixup seemed to complicate the situation?

"Why, don't you see through that?"

"No."

"Do you really suppose that Miss Birdsong's ormolu actually lost two hours, precisely two hours, not a second more, not a second less, since early this morning?"

"Why, I hadn't thought of it that way," I said. "It would be odd."

"Odd? It would be impossible!"

"Then what happened?" I asked.

"Think, man!" Poggioli lectured me as if I were a stupid pupil. "The robbery actually took place at four o'clock — we know that from the Doña's clock, which is on time now, and from Miss Birdsong's ormolu, which is now two hours slow. Don't you see? The intruder was in Miss Birdsong's room at four in the morning. Before waking her, he turned back her clock two hours — from four to two."

"But why?" I asked.

"To make Miss Birdsong think that her room was entered at two o'clock — therefore, to make her testify that the robbery was committed at two o'clock. All he stole was a sock — yet even for so petty, so trivial a theft, he has obviously arranged an unbreakable alibi for two o'clock. We are dealing with a timid man really. He's no more to be feared than a toy terrier. But we shall fool him, for all his tricks."

I couldn't help saying admiringly: "Poggioli, old man, frankly you're a wonder."

Later, when we were back in my rooms on Ignacio Abad *calle*, the telephone rang. I strode to it with a premonition of a new alarm. Sure enough, no sooner had I spoken my name into the transmitter than Miss Birdsong's voice cried unhappily in my ear.

"This is Emma! They've got him!

They've summoned me down to the court to identify him!"

"Well, look here," I soothed, "don't be so down-hearted. We wanted to get him — now we have!"

"Ye-es," she wavered, "but I have to identify him — I'm so afraid."

"Listen, Miss Birdsong, Poggioli has reasoned him out to be a complete coward. He says you need have no further fear of him whatsoever."

"Oh, does he!" she exclaimed gratefully. "I'm so glad. But you two men must go with me to the courthouse. I'd never have the nerve to sit and testify against that man alone."

"We'll go with you, Miss Birdsong. Just drop by on your way over and pick us up."

I was quite excited, naturally, and even Poggioli seemed keyed up. When Miss Birdsong arrived in a taxi, we joined her eagerly; but as we drove away, I saw Concepçion standing in my doorway and there was a queer expression on her sallow face.

"Now, listen," said Poggioli to both of us in the cab. "He expects Miss Birdsong to swear that he was in her room at two o'clock. Then he will prove that at that time he was somewhere else, not in the Quinta. His alibi will be perfect — so he will go scotfree. But we'll fool him. Miss Birdsong, you explain how your clock was tampered with, put two hours ahead; you insist — insist, mind you! — that it was really four o'clock when he stole the sock. His carefully prepared alibi for two o'clock will then be meaningless, will fall to pieces. You understand?"

Miss Birdsong nodded her head in agreement. Poggioli's clear instructions braced both me and the nurse. We even began to laugh a little over the coming trial, not very heartily, but a little.

When we entered the courthouse, I instantly saw the prisoner at the bar, and the strangest feeling of my life came over me. I turned to my friend and whispered: "For God's sake, Poggioli, do you see what I see?"

Miss Birdsong heard me and ejaculated in an undertone: "What — what is it?"

"That man in the prisoner's dock," I whispered, "he's the *same man* who drove up to my apartment this morning and told us you had been robbed!"

This new discovery completely unnerved me. Miss Birdsong was white as a sheet. Poggioli gripped her arm and whispered confidently: "Remember, do exactly as I told you. If you follow my instructions, there will be no danger, I assure you."

Miss Birdsong went to the witness stand and was sworn in. The trial came off without a hitch. The nurse identified the man, identified the stolen sock, and fixed the time of the theft at four o'clock. The Mexican did not even offer a defense. He was found guilty and sentenced to prison. As he was led away, he bowed gallantly to Miss Birdsong. Strangely enough, he seemed to bear no resentment — he was smiling as he walked off between two officers.

We left the courthouse, got into a

ıi, and started back. At Ignacio ɔad *calle*, Miss Birdsong dropped and our last words to her were not be afraid; the fellow would be in il for a while and could not continue s persecutions.

Concepçion was once more in the ɔorway, waiting our return. As e came up she called out: "The eñorita witnessed for him. I knew ıe would — everybody does."

"No, Concepçion," Poggioli corected with satisfaction. "Miss Birdɔng witnessed *against* him. She sent ım up for a jail term."

"But Señor, Secorra told me over he telephone that the Señorita swore ıe was in her room at four o'clock this norning."

"That's right," said Poggioli.

"Si, Señor," Concepçion burst out, "but he was not in her room at four o'clock!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Poggioli. "Of course he was!"

"No, Señor — not at four o'clock. He was at the Quinta *at six o'clock* in the morning. All the clocks were fixed — the Doña Catalina's, too. Secorra told me how she set all the clocks back, the Doña's to four o'clock, and the American lady's to two o'clock — just as he instructed Secorra to. Later Secorra changed the Doña's back to the right time, but she left the Señorita's two hours slow."

"But why?" I demanded.

"So that the Señorita would be twice as sure that he came at four. He *wanted* the Señorita to testify that he entered her room at four o'clock!"

"But *why?*" I demanded again. Poggioli was strangely silent, although his lips were moving angrily.

"*Caramba*, Señor, everybody in Cuernavaca knows why! At four o'clock Señor Carlos Mendez was at La Victoria — robbing the forty Americans in the train! It takes him two hours to drive from La Victoria — so he is in the Quinta at six. But if the American lady insists he was in her room at four, he would be convicted of *small stealing*. Then he cannot be accused of *big stealing* at exactly the same hour!"

My house seemed to reel.

"He always escapes some way, Señor," said Concepçion, her eyes shining. "You see, he is Doña Catalina's son and the father of little José."

"But I thought Doña Catalina said little José's father was dead!"

"He is to her, Señor. Such a life as her son leads, robbing and shooting — he is dead to her."

Poggioli never discusses this case. To one who was accustomed to really serious crimes and important trials, this little affair, however piquant, had seemed only a trifling matter to the great Poggioli. But that brilliant criminal, Señor Mendez, hoodwinked the Professor completely. He permitted Poggioli to win a minor skirmish, but the major battle — Poggioli lost. It was Poggioli's greatest failure.

To refresh your memory: Agatha Christie conceived the brilliant plot-idea of writing a saga of Herculean labors in which her modern Hercules — Hercule Poirot — accepts only twelve more cases before retiring from active practice and in these twelve modern labors emulates his legendary namesake. So far we have brought you three of these mythological tales, which, while they stem from ancient Herculean themes, have been completely modernized and detectivized by the ingenious Miss Christie. These three were "The Nemean Lion, or The Case of the Kidnaped Pekinese" (EQMM, September 1944); "The Horses of Diomedes, or The Case of the Drug Peddler" (EQMM, January 1945); and "The Stymphalian Birds, or The Case of the Vulture Women" (EQMM, September 1945).

Now we bring you "The Girdle of Hippolyta, or The Case of the Missing Schoolgirl," and this Modern Labor of Hercules (ninth in point of classical sequence) was meant to be the last of the series to be printed in EQMM. But with the war won and paper rationing destined to become only a memory, we are planning to publish "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" monthly instead of bi-monthly. That will mean twelve issues each year instead of six — with the result that we will need twice as many stories for the simple reason that we will use them twice as fast.

Faced with this accelerated editorial pace,[1] we took prompt and decisive measures to invigorate our inventory, replenish our reserve, and one of the first purchases we made was another pair of Modern Labors of Hercules.

It is a genuine pleasure, therefore, to announce two more appearances of Poirot: "The Hydra of Lernea, or The Case of the Gossipers," and "The Cretan Bull, or The Case of the Family Taint," both to appear in EQMM within the next half-year.

Mythology marches on!

The Labors of Hercules:
The Girdle of Hippolyta, or
THE CASE OF THE MISSING SCHOOLGIRL

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

ONE thing leads to another, as Hercule Poirot is fond of saying without much originality. He adds that this was never more clearly evidenced than in the case of the stolen Rubens.

[1] For full details please see page 2.

He was never much interested in the Rubens. For one thing Rubens is not a painter he admires, and then the circumstances of the theft were quite ordinary. He took it up to oblige Mr. Simpson, who was a friend of his, and for a certain private reason of his own.

After the theft, Alexander Simpson sent for Poirot and poured out all his woes. The Rubens was a recent discovery, a hitherto unknown masterpiece, painted, as Rubens often did, on a wooden panel. But there was no doubt of its authenticity. Placed on display at Simpson's Galleries, it had been stolen in broad daylight. It was at a time when the unemployed were pursuing their tactics of lying down on street crossings and penetrating into the Ritz. A small body of demonstrators, carrying a sign which read: "Art is a Luxury. Feed the Hungry," had entered the Simpson Galleries and lain down. The police had been sent for, everyone had crowded round in eager curiosity and it was not till the demonstrators had been forcibly removed by the police that it was noticed that the new Rubens, a small picture, had been stolen.

The unemployed men, it was later discovered, had been paid for their innocent part in the robbery. They were to demonstrate at Simpson's Galleries. But they had known nothing of the reason until afterwards.

Hercule Poirot did not see what he could do about it. The police, he pointed out, could be trusted to deal with a straightforward robbery. Alexander Simpson said: "Listen to me, Poirot. I know who stole the picture and where it is going."

It had been stolen by a gang of international crooks on behalf of a certain millionaire not above acquiring works of art at a very low price — and no questions asked! The Rubens, said Simpson, would be smuggled over to France where it would pass into the millionaire's possession. The English and French police were on the alert. Nevertheless Simpson was of the opinion that they would fail. "And once it has passed into this dirty dog's possession, it's going to be more difficult. The situation's going to be delicate. You're the man to handle it."

Finally Poirot was induced to accept the task. He agreed to depart for France immediately. He was not very interested in his quest, but because of it, he was introduced to the Case of the Missing Schoolgirl, which interested him very much indeed.

He first heard of it from Chief Inspector Japp who dropped in to see him just as Poirot's valet was packing. "Ha," said Japp. "Going to France, aren't you?"

Poirot said: "*Mon ami*, you are incredibly well informed at Scotland Yard."

Japp chuckled. "We have our spies! Simpson's got you on this Rubens business. Doesn't trust us, it seems. Well, that's neither here nor there, but what I want you to do is something quite different. As you're going to Paris anyway, I thought you might as well kill two birds with one stone.

Hearn's over there cooperating with the Frenchies — you know Hearn? Good chap but not very imaginative. I'd like your opinion."

"What is the matter of which you speak?"

"Child disappeared. It'll be in the papers this evening. Looks as though she's been kidnaped. Daughter of a Canon down at Cranchester. Winnie King, her name is."

He proceeded with the story.

Winnie had been on her way to Paris, to join that select and high-class establishment for English and American girls — Miss Pope's. Winnie had come up from Cranchester by the early train, had been seen across London by a member of Elder Sisters, Ltd., who undertook such work as seeing girls from one station to another, had been delivered at Victoria to Miss Burshaw, Miss Pope's second in command, and had then, in company with eighteen other girls, left Victoria by the boat train.

Nineteen girls had crossed the channel, had passed through the customs at Calais, had got into the Paris train, had lunched in the restaurant car. But when on the outskirts of Paris Miss Burshaw had counted heads, it was discovered that only eighteen girls could be found.

"Did the train stop anywhere?" asked Poirot.

"It stopped at Amiens, but at that time the girls were in the restaurant car and they all say positively that Winnie was with them then. They lost her, so to speak, on the return journey to their compartments. That is to say, she did not enter her compartment with the other five girls who were in it. They did not suspect anything wrong, merely thought she was in one of the other reserved compartments."

"So she was last seen — when exactly?"

"About ten minutes after the train left Amiens. She was last seen entering the washroom."

"There is nothing else?" said Poirot.

"Yes, one thing. Her hat was found by the side of the line — at a spot approximately twenty minutes from Amiens."

"But no body?"

"No body."

Poirot asked: "What do you yourself think?"

"Difficult to know what to think. As there's no sign of her body, she can't have fallen off the train."

"Did the train stop at all after leaving Amiens?"

"No. It slowed up once, for a signal, but it didn't stop, and I doubt if it slowed up enough for anyone to have jumped off without injury. You're thinking that the kid got a panic and tried to run away? It was her first term and she might have been homesick, that's true enough, but all the same she was fifteen and a half — a sensible age, and she'd been in quite good spirits all the journey, chattering away."

Poirot asked: "Was the train searched?"

"Oh, yes, they went right through it before it arrived at the Nord station.

The girl wasn't on the train, that's quite certain."

Japp added in an exasperated manner. "She just disappeared — into thin air! It doesn't make sense, M. Poirot. It's crazy!"

"What kind of girl was she?"

"Ordinary normal type as far as I can make out. I've got a snap of her here. She's not exactly a budding beauty."

He proffered the snapshot to Poirot, who studied it in silence. It represented a lanky girl with hair in two limp plaits. It was not a posed photograph — the subject had clearly been caught unawares. She was eating an apple, her lips were parted, and her slightly protruding teeth were confined by a dentist's brace. She wore spectacles.

Japp said: "Plain-looking kid — but they are plain at that age! Was at my dentist's yesterday. Saw a picture in the *Sketch* of Marcia Gaunt, this season's beauty. I remember her at fifteen when I was down at the Castle over their burglary business. Spotty, awkward, teeth sticking out, hair all lank and anyhow. They grow into beauties overnight — I don't know how they do it! It's like a miracle."

Poirot smiled. "Women," he said, "are a miraculous sex! What about the child's family? Have they anything to say?"

"Nothing that's any help. Mother's an invalid. Poor old Canon King is absolutely bowled over. He swears that the girl was frightfully keen to go to Paris — had been looking forward to it. Wanted to study painting and music. Miss Pope's girls go in for Art with a capital A. Miss Pope's is very well known. Lots of society girls go there. She's strict — and very expensive — and extremely particular whom she takes."

Poirot sighed. "I know the type. And Miss Burshaw, who took the girls over from England?"

"Not exactly frantic with brains. Terrified that Miss Pope will say it's her fault."

"There is no young man in the case?"

"Does she look like it?"

"No, she does not. But notwithstanding her appearance, she may have a romantic heart. Fifteen is not so young."

"Well," said Japp. "If a romantic heart spirited her off that train, I'll take to reading lady novelists." He looked hopefully at Poirot. "Nothing strikes you — eh?"

Poirot shook his head slowly. He said:

"They did not, by any chance, find her shoes also by the side of the line?"

"Shoes? No. Why shoes?"

"Just an idea . . ."

Hercule Poirot was just going down to his taxi when the telephone rang. He took off the receiver.

"Yes?"

Japp's voice spoke: "Glad I've just caught you. It's all off, old man. Found a message at the Yard when I got back. Girl's turned up. At the

side of the main road fifteen miles from Amiens. She's dazed and they can't get any coherent story from her, but she's all right. Nothing wrong with her."

Poirot said slowly: "So you have, then, no need of my services?"

"That's right. In fact — sorrrry you have been trrrroubled . . ." Japp laughed at his own witticism and rang off.

Hercule Poirot did not laugh. He put back the receiver slowly.

Detective Inspector Hearn looked at Poirot curiously. "I'd no idea you'd be so interested, sir."

Poirot said: "You had word from Chief Inspector Japp that I might consult with you over this matter?"

Hearn nodded. "He said you were coming over on some other business, and that you'd give us a hand with this puzzle. But I didn't expect you now it's all cleared up. I thought you'd be busy on your own job."

"My own business can wait. It is this affair here that interests me. You called it a puzzle, and you say it is now ended. But the puzzle is still there, it seems."

"Well, sir, we've got the child back. And she's not hurt. That's the main thing."

"But it does not solve the problem of how you got her back, does it? What does she herself say? A doctor saw her, did he not? What did he say?"

"Said she'd been doped. She was still hazy with it. Can't remember anything much after starting off from Cranchester. All later events seem to have been wiped out. Doctor thinks she might just possibly have had slight concussion. There's a bruise on the back of her head. Says that would account for a complete blackout of memory."

"Which is very convenient for — someone!"

Inspector Hearn said in a shocked voice:

"You don't think she is shamming, sir? I'm sure she isn't. She's a nice kid — a bit young for her age — that's all."

"No, no, she is not shamming." Poirot shook his head vigorously. "But I want to know *how she got off that train.* I want to know who is responsible — and why."

"As to why, I should say it was an attempt at kidnaping, sir. They meant to hold her for ransom."

"But they didn't!"

"Lost their nerve with the hue and cry — and planted her by the road quick."

"And what ransom were they likely to get from a Canon of Cranchester Cathedral? English Church dignitaries are not millionaires."

Detective Inspector Hearn said cheerfully:

"Made a botch of the whole thing, sir, in my opinion."

"Ah, that's your opinion."

Hearn said, his face flushing slightly: "What's yours, sir?"

"I want to know how she was spirited off that train."

The policeman's face clouded over. "That's a real mystery. One minute she was there sitting in the dining car, chatting to the other girls. Five minutes later she's vanished — like a conjuring trick."

"Precisely, like a conjuring trick! Who else was there in that particular coach?"

"That's a good point, sir. That's important. It's particularly important because it was the last coach on the train and as soon as all the people were back in their coaches, the doors between the coaches were locked — actually so as to prevent people crowding along to the restaurant car and demanding tea before they'd had time to clear up lunch and get ready. Winnie King came back to the coach with the others — the school had three reserved compartments there."

"And in the other compartments?"

Hearn pulled out his notebook. "Miss Jordan and Miss Butters — two middle-aged spinsters going to Switzerland. Nothing wrong with them, highly respectable, well-known in Hampshire where they come from. Two French commercial travellers, one from Lyons, one from Paris. Both respectable middle-aged men. A young man, James Elliot and his wife — flashy piece of goods she was. He's got a bad reputation, suspected by the police of being mixed up in some questionable transactions, but has never touched kidnaping. Anyway his compartment was searched and there was nothing in his hand luggage to show that he was mixed up in this. Don't see how he could have been. Only other person was an American lady, Mrs. Van Suyder, travelling to Paris. Nothing known about her. Looks O. K. That's the lot."

"And it is quite definite that the train did not stop after it left Amiens?"

"Absolutely. It slowed down once, but not enough to let anyone jump off — not without damaging themselves pretty severely and risking being killed outright."

Poirot murmured: "That is what makes the problem so interesting. The schoolgirl vanishes into thin air just outside Amiens. She reappears from thin air also just outside Amiens — but in a different place. Where has she been in the meantime?"

Inspector Hearn shook his head.

"It sounds mad, put like that. Oh! by the way, they told me you were asking something about shoes — the girl's shoes. She had her shoes on all right when she was found, but there *was* a pair of shoes on the line, a signalman found them. Took 'em home with him as they seemed in good condition. Stout black-laced walking shoes."

"Ah," said Poirot. He looked gratified.

Inspector Hearn said curiously:

"I don't get the meaning of the shoes, sir? Do they mean anything?"

"They confirm a theory. A theory of how the conjuring trick was done."

Miss Pope's school was situated in Neuilly. Hercule Poirot, staring up

at its respectable façade, was suddenly submerged by a flow of girls emerging from its portals.

He counted twenty-five of them, all dressed alike in dark blue coats and skirts with uncomfortable-looking British hats of dark blue velour on their heads, round which was tied the distinctive purple and gold of Miss Pope's choice. They were of ages varying from fourteen to eighteen, thick and thin, fair and dark, awkward and graceful. At the end, walking with one of the younger girls, was a gray-haired, fussy-looking woman whom Poirot judged to be Miss Burshaw.

Poirot stood looking after them a minute; then he rang the bell and asked for Miss Pope.

Miss Lavinia Pope was a very different person from her second in command, Miss Burshaw. Miss Pope had personality. Miss Pope was awe-inspiring. Her gray hair was dressed with distinction, her costume was severe but chic. She was competent and omniscient.

The room in which she received Poirot was the room of a woman of culture. It had graceful furniture, flowers, some framed signed photographs of those of Miss Pope's pupils who were of note in the world — many of them in their presentation gowns and feathers. On the walls hung reproductions of the world's artistic masterpieces and some good watercolor sketches.

Miss Pope received Poirot with the competence of one whose judgment seldom fails.

"M. Hercule Poirot? I know your name, of course. I suppose you have come about this very unfortunate affair of Winnie King. A most distressing incident." Miss Pope did not look distressed. She took disaster as it should be taken, dealing with it competently and thereby reducing it almost to insignificance. "Such a thing," said Miss Pope, "has never occurred before."

Hercule Poirot said: "It was the girl's first term here, was it not?"

"It was."

"You had had a preliminary interview with Winnie — and with her parents?"

"Not recently. Two years ago. I was staying near Cranchester — with the Bishop, as a matter of fact. While I was there I made the acquaintance of Canon and Mrs. King. Mrs. King, alas, is an invalid. I met Winnie then. A very well-brought-up girl, with a decided taste for art. I told Mrs. King that I should be happy to receive her here in a year or two — when her general studies were completed. We specialize here, M. Poirot, in art and music. The girls are taken to the Opera, to the Comédie Française; they attend lectures at the Louvre. The very best masters come here to instruct them in music, singing, and painting. The broader culture, that is our aim."

Miss Pope remembered suddenly that Poirot was not a parent and added abruptly:

"What can I do for you, M. Poirot?"

"I should be glad to know what is the present position regarding Winnie?"

"Canon King has come over to Amiens and is taking Winnie back with him. The wisest thing to do after the shock the child has sustained." She went on: "We do not take delicate girls here. We have no special facilities for looking after invalids. I told the Canon that in my opinion he would do well to take the child home with him."

"What in your opinion actually occurred, Miss Pope?"

"I have not the slightest idea, M. Poirot. The whole thing, as reported to me, sounds quite incredible. I really cannot see that the member of my staff who was in charge of the girls was in any way to blame — except that she might, perhaps, have discovered the girl's absence sooner."

"You have received a visit, perhaps, from the police?"

A faint shiver passed over Miss Pope's aristocratic form. She said glacially:

"A Monsieur Lefarge of the Préfecture called to see me, to see if I could throw any light upon the situation. Naturally I was unable to do so. He then demanded to inspect Winnie's luggage, which had, of course, arrived here with that of the other girls. I told him that that had already been called for by another member of the police. Their departments, I fancy, must overlap. I got a telephone call, shortly afterwards, insisting that I had not turned over all Winnie's possessions to them. I was extremely short with them over that. One must not submit to being bullied by officialdom."

Poirot drew a long breath. He said:

"You have a spirited nature. I admire you for it, Mademoiselle. I presume that Winnie's trunk had been unpacked on arrival."

Miss Pope looked a little put out of countenance. "Routine," she said. "We live strictly by routine. The girls are unpacked on arrival and their things put away in the way I expect them to be kept. Winnie's things were unpacked with those of the other girls. Naturally, they were afterwards repacked, so that her trunk was handed over exactly as it had arrived."

Poirot said: "*Exactly?*" He strolled to the wall. "Surely this is a picture of the famous Cranchester Bridge with the Cathedral in the distance."

"You are quite right, M. Poirot. Winnie had evidently painted that to bring to me as a surprise. It was in her trunk with a wrapper round it and 'For Miss Pope from Winnie' written on it. Very charming of the child."

"Ah!" said Poirot. "And what do you think of it — as a painting?"

He himself had seen many pictures of Cranchester Bridge. It was a subject that could always be found represented at the Academy each year, sometimes as an oil painting, sometimes in the water-color room. He had seen it painted well, painted in a mediocre fashion, painted boringly. But he had never seen it quite as crudely represented as in the present example.

Miss Pope was smiling indulgently: "One must not discourage one's girls, M. Poirot. Winnie will be stimulated to do better work, of course."

"It would have been more natural, would it not, for her to do a water color?"

"Yes. I did not know that she was already attempting to paint in oils."

"Ah," said Hercule Poirot. "You will permit me, Mademoiselle?"

He unhooked the picture and took it to the window. He examined it, then, looking up, he said: "I am going to ask you, Mademoiselle, to give me this picture."

"Well, really, M. Poirot —"

"You cannot pretend that you are very attached to it. The painting is abominable."

"Oh, it has no artistic merit, I agree. But it is a pupil's work and —"

"I assure you, Mademoiselle, that it is a most unsuitable picture to have hanging upon your wall," Poirot said.

"I don't know why you should say that, M. Poirot."

"I will prove it to you in a moment."

He took a bottle, a sponge and some rags from his pocket. He said: "First I am going to tell you a little story, Mademoiselle. It has a resemblance to the story of the ugly duckling that turned into a swan."

He was working busily as he talked.

"You do not perhaps go much to Revues?"

"No, indeed, they seem to me so trivial."

"Trivial, yes, but sometimes instructive. I have seen a clever Revue artist change her personality in the most miraculous way. In one sketch she is a cabaret star, exquisite and glamorous. Ten minutes later, she is an undersized anemic child with adenoids, dressed in a gym tunic; ten minutes later still, perhaps she is a ragged gypsy telling fortunes by a caravan."

"Very possible, no doubt, but I do not see —"

"But I am showing you how the conjuring trick was worked on the train. Winnie, the schoolgirl, with her fair plaits, her spectacles, her disfiguring dental brace — goes into the *toilette*. She emerges a quarter of an hour later — to use the words of Detective Inspector Hearn — as a flashy piece of goods. Sheer silk stockings, high-heeled shoes — a mink coat to cover a school uniform, a daring little piece of velvet called a hat perched on her curls — and a face — oh, yes, a face. Rouge, powder, lipstick, mascara! What is that woman, that quick-change artist, really like? Probably only the good Lord knows. But, you Mademoiselle, you, yourself, you know how the awkward schoolgirl changes almost miraculously into the attractive, well-groomed debutante."

Miss Pope gasped. "Do you mean Winnie King disguised herself as — "

"Not Winnie King — no. Winnie was kidnaped on the way across London. Our quick-change artist took her place. But she could not afford actually to arrive here, since you were

quainted with the real Winnie. So - hey, presto! Winnie disappears, and stead a man called Jim Elliot, whose assport includes a wife, acquires that ife just after Amiens. The fair plaits, ne spectacles, the lisle thread stock- ngs, the dental brace — all that can o into a small space. But the thick nglamorous shoes and the hat — hat very unyielding British hat — nave to be disposed of elsewhere; hey go out of the window. Later, the eal Winnie is brought across the channel — no one is looking for a sick child being brought from England to France — and is quietly deposited from a car by the side of the main road. If she had been doped all along with Scopolamine, she will remember very little of what has occurred."

Miss Pope was staring at Poirot. She demanded: "But why? What would be the *reason* for such a senseless masquerade?"

"Winnie's luggage! These people wanted to bring something from England into France, something that every Customs man was on the lookout for — in fact, stolen goods. But what place is safer than a schoolgirl's trunk? You are well-known, Miss Pope, your establishment is justly famous. At the Gare du Nord the trunks of the Mademoiselles, the little *pensionnaires*, are passed *en bloc*. It is the well-known English school of Miss Pope! And then, after the kidnapping, what more natural than to send and collect the child's luggage — ostensibly from the Préfecture?"

Hercule Poirot smiled. "But fortunately, there was the school routine — and a present for you from Winnie — but not the same present that Winnie packed at Cranchester."

He continued: "You have given this picture to me. Observe, now, you must admit that it is not suitable for your school." He held out the canvas. As though by magic Cranchester Bridge had disappeared. In its place was a classical scene in rich dim colorings.

Poirot said softly:

"The Girdle of Hippolyta. Hippolyta gives her girdle to Hercules — painted by Rubens. A great work of art — *mais tout de même* not quite suitable for your drawing room."

Miss Pope blushed slightly. Hippolyta's hand was on her girdle — she was wearing nothing else. She said:

"A fine work of art. All the same — as you say — after all one must consider the susceptibilities of parents. Some of them are inclined to be *narrow* . . . if you know what I mean . . ."

Your Editor's definitive anthology of the detective short story, 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT, *is divided into six sections — The Great Detectives, The Great Women Detectives, The Great Humorous Detective Stories, The Great Thieves, The Great Crime Stories, and as a sort of epilogue-tale, The Detective Story to End All Detective Stories. Before making a final decision on these classifications, we discussed the larger framework with certain intimate members of the "fraternity" — aficionados and enthusiasts-of-the-blood like Vincent Starrett, Howard Haycraft, and Anthony Boucher. One adverse criticism popped up consistently: beware humor. Humor-and-detection, some claimed, succeeds so rarely in the short story that it would be courting disaster to allocate one entire division of the anthology to so dangerous a category; or, in other words, there aint no such detection.*

Your Editor listened, pondered, weighed — and stuck to his guns. And when 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT *achieved permanent form, The Great Humorous Detective Stories resolved itself into three selections: a Tish story by Mary Roberts Rinehart, a Tuppence and Tommy parody by Agatha Christie, and a Florian Slappey adventure by Octavus Roy Cohen. And your Editor was proved right: in the four years that* 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT *has been on sale not a single reader has raised a single objection to the Rinehart-Christie-Cohen combined hilarity; instead, many readers have praised this particular section of the anthology.*

The Octavus Roy Cohen story in 101 YEARS' *is "The Mystery of the Missing Wash," a gem in which, believe it or not, the Harlequin of Harlem, the Beau Brummel of Birmingham, operates his own private inquiry office. If you recall the story, a newly lettered proclamation on the ground-glass door of Florian's office announced:*

FLORIAN SLAPPEY DETECTIVE AGENCY
F. Slappey — Prop. & Chief
All Jobs of Detecting Neatly Done
Prices Reasomble
"GET SOLVED BY SLAPPEY"

Florian Slappey now makes his début in EQMM. We wish we could say that "Ultra Violent" is another case from the files of the Florian Slappey Detective Agency — but it isn't. In this story Florian is not a ferret, Slappey is not a sleuth; but that gay, debonair, ubiquitous colored gentleman does find himself inextricably mixed up with fraud, theft, assault and battery, and a spot of cardsharping — a rollicking chunk out of the "Compleat Calendar of Crime."

Read hearty!

ULTRA VIOLENT

by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

WHEN *The Weekly Epoch* made its appearance on the streets of Birmingham, Alabama, on this particular Saturday morning, it carried an advertisement in its classified columns which evoked outbursts of merriment throughout the length and breadth of Darktown:

> NOTICE — IMPORTANT: Anyone having information concerning the whereabouts of one Florian Slappey kindly communicate immediately with Mr. Morbid Watkins, Room 318, Sally Crouch's Cozy Home Hotel for Colored.

There was plenty of cause for mirth in that modest little ad. Inquiring for information about Florian Slappey in Birmingham was like advertising for the location of the Empire State Building in New York or the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. He was a landmark, an institution. A gay, debonair, ubiquitous colored gentleman who was known by everyone in the city, and liked by many.

When *The Epoch* appeared, Mr. Slappey was relaxing in his room at Sis Callie Flukers' boarding house on Avenue F, and regarding the world through rose-colored glasses.

There were reasons. His health was excellent, trouble had not recently molested him, and he had almost five hundred dollars on deposit in the First National Bank.

His tranquillity was shattered by the insistent clamor of the telephone downstairs. Sis Callie's strident voice summoned him. He ambled down the stairway, held a conversation which was marked by incredulous exclamations from both ends of the line, and started upstairs again.

But he never reached the top of the stairs. That call was the beginning of a continuous annoyance. Ladies and gentlemen of the colored persuasion — persons of high and low degree — telephoned at intervals of every few minutes to check on his whereabouts. They also asked questions: Who was Morbid Watkins? Why did he seek Mr. Slappey? How come he had to make such a foolish advertisement? To all of which queries Florian replied that he didn't know nothin'. He felt important, mysterious, and bewildered.

He dressed in haste, suspecting that a major development was brewing. He walked downtown to Sally Crouch's Cozy Home Hotel for Colored, went up to the third floor. He rapped on a door, and a deep bass voice bade him enter.

The man who rose to greet him was large and powerful and very, very black. Florian said, "You is Mistuh Morbid Watkins?"

"Ise he."

"I got information on the whereabouts of Mistuh Florian Slappey."

"Yeah? Where at is he?"

"He's right heah. Ise him."

Mr. Watkins subjected his visitor to a long and embarrassing scrutiny. He broke the silence with an explosive statement: "Ise fum Greenville, South Ca'lina. I got tidings."

"I got ears."

"You say you is Florian Slappey? Can you prove it?"

"Don't talk silliment, Brother Watkins. Co'se I can prove it. But why should I?"

"Plenty reason. Impawtant reasons. I can tell you this much — they is extremely financial."

Mr. Slappey said, in a voice which trembled only slightly, "Send, brother. Leave me know what gives."

Mr. Watkins produced a sheaf of papers. He thumbed them impressively.

"Is yo' parents livin' or dead?"

"Defunct. Completely."

"What was yo' mother's name?"

"Mantilla."

"An did yo' mother have a brother?" asked Mr. Watkins.

"Uh-huh," replied Florian. "His name was Rupert."

"Then Rupert would be yo' uncle."

"So what? Is I s'posed to git excited about that?"

"You most posolutely is, Brother Slappey."

"On account of which?"

"On account Rupert is dead. He demised intestate, leaving no wife or children. One Florian Slappey seems to be his sole heir."

"Hot diggity dawg! Tha's me. How much I inherit?"

"Ev'ything. Dependin' on whether you can prove you is Florian Slappey."

Mr. Slappey fidgeted. "Ain't I a'ready tol' you I can prove it? Right away I'll go to the Bureau of Vital Sadistics an' git a birth certificate."

Morbid shook his head. "That wouldn't be enough," he said.

"How come not?" inquired Mr. Slappey.

"Such would on'y prove that somebody named Florian Slappey was birn. It wouldn't prove you is he."

"But ev'ybody here in Bumminham knows. . . ."

"You got to prove it, feller. When it comes to a big estate an' a hunk of inheritance, us cain't take chances. Co'se I realize that you is you, but I got to salisfry myse'f that you is also Florian Slappey, an' not somebody masqueradin' under that name."

Florian assured the stranger that there would be no difficulty. Morbid said that he was certain of it. And now that the formalities had been completed, the men became more cordial toward each other.

To Florian, the stranger was a most fascinating person. He came with good news, and perhaps with money. He was tight-lipped with reference to the magnitude of Rupert's estate, but on other subjects he was loquacious.

Morbid, it appeared, would remain in the vicinity of Birmingham for several days. He had other missions, of course, but this was the most important. He said casually, "You got a bank account, ain't you, Brother Slappey?"

"Co'se I has."

"Then I wonder will you do me a favor. I got a whole slew of cash money. Ise gwine be out of town over the weekend, an' I don't crave to carry that much in my pockets. How about you depositin' it in the bank fo' me?"

This was the clincher. Mr. Slappey said he'd be delighted to act as custodian for a lot of money. Morbid hoisted his Gargantuan frame from the chair, flung a suitcase on the bed and extracted therefrom a small steel box. He unlocked the box and withdrew a sheaf of bills. He counted them into Florian's palm. "Four hund'ed dollars, even. I'll git it back fum you Monday or Tuesday."

Florian shoved it into his wallet. He felt wealthy. He said, "I'll give you a receipt, Morbid."

"Ain't no need, Florian. I trust you explicitly."

The now empty tin box was returned to the suitcase, which was duly closed and pitched into the clothes closet. The two men shook hands and Mr. Slappey departed.

Mr. Watkins walked to the window and saw Mr. Slappey strut importantly toward Eighteenth Street, the seething center of Birmingham's Darktown. He then went to the door of his own room, stuck his head into the hall and emitted three low whistles.

Another door opened. A man appeared and walked lightly down the hall to Morbid's room.

Willie Grease was smaller than Morbid, but he was compact and tough. His complexion was light, and his eyes narrow.

Morbid said, "He fell fo' it, Willie."

"You give him the money?"

"Four hund'ed dollars. I tol' him to put it in the bank, but he cain't on account it's Saddy, an' the banks is a'ready closed. Tha's where you come in."

Willie Grease said, "I understand."

"Saddy night he usually stays out late shootin' pool. He walks home an' cuts across a vacant lot towards his boardin' house. It's dark there. You be waitin' fo' him. You git that money offen him, but good."

Mr. Grease appeared to entertain no doubt of his ability to accomplish this task. "He ain't nothin' but a shrimp. He won't know what hit him. So after I git the money . . . ?"

"We meets in yo' room. Ise s'posed to be goin' out of town. Monday I show up an' request my four hund'ed dollars fum Florian."

"S'posin' he won't give?"

"He will. He thinks he's about to inherit a millium dollars. He ain't goin' to let on about losin' the money. He'll draw some of his own out of the bank an' give it to me. The minute he does, we will have a profit of four hund'ed dollars. Then we start figurin' how maybe we can also git some mo'."

Willie Grease said, "I always heard Florian Slappey was smart. How come he didn't suspeck nothin'?"

"'Cause a feller ain't sispicious less'n you try to take somethin' offen him, Willie. What I does is diff'ent. Ise makin' him b'lieve that his Uncle

Rupert lef' a lot of money."

"He didn't leave nothin', did he?"

"Wrong, brother, wrong. Rupert done lef' a big flock of debts. How I heard about it, they was tryin' to find out in Greenville was they any relatives who craved to pay them debts. So it started me thinkin' that if somebody didn't know the troof, he would right away b'lieve he was gwine inherit some heavy money. You see, Willie, what *is* don't matter to nobody; it's what you *think* is. Tha's why Florian Slappey is feelin' pert right now."

And Florian was. He journeyed to Twentieth Street only to find the doors of the First National closed. That was still okay with him. He walked toward Darktown feeling twice as important by reason of the wad of cash reposing against his puny bosom.

Florian's progress that afternoon and evening was a triumphal procession. He enjoyed the envy he was exciting. He loved the spotlight. He cast himself in the role of a potentially wealthy person who was not above associating with the hoi polloi.

But even while taking full advantage of the situation, Mr. Slappey was not wasting time. He started his job of proving incontrovertibly that he was Florian Slappey.

True, he made no startling headway. In general, his queries about his identity elicited only guffaws. In Birmingham, at least, there was no argument on the subject. Florian was Florian. With such a preponderance of evidence in his favor, he felt confident that even so hard-bitten a person as Morbid Watkins could eventually be convinced.

He dined at Bud Peaglar's Barbecue Lunch Room & Billiard Parlor where he inhaled a large bowl of succulent Brunswick stew and followed it with two tasty barbecue sandwiches and a cup of coffee. He did not notice a medium-sized stranger who sat a few stools away from him at the counter and gave ear to his conversation with Bud. And if he had noticed, it would have spelled nothing. Florian did not know Mr. Willie Grease.

After dinner, Florian horned into a game of Kelly pool. He played indifferently and won very little. During this procedure, Mr. Grease was a languid spectator. He continued to be one until Florian announced to all and sundry that he thought he'd call it a day. He waved goodnight and stepped out into Eighteenth Street.

Willie Grease followed. He had inspected the territory in which he was to operate, and it now behooved him to get there ahead of Florian.

Mr. Grease avoided the bright lights. He walked fast. He reached the vacant lot through which Florian would pass, and stationed himself in the shadow of a scrawny tree. There he commenced a patient vigil.

But Florian Slappey did not immediately go home. At the corner of Eighteenth Street and Second Avenue, opposite the Old Post Office, something was happening.

A truck bearing the inscription of

Midnight Pictures Corporation, Inc. was backed up against the curb. Through a modern P.A. system, an appeal was being made to the dusky citizenry of Birmingham to buy war bonds. As the crowd-catcher, celebrities from the studio were present, strutting their stuff. There was a good deal of singing, some nifty hoofing, and then an inspiring oration by Julius Clump, ending up in a dramatic and moving appeal to all present to contribute to the war effort by buying bonds.

There was a moment's pause. Then a score of eyes turned toward the new plutocrat. Mr. Slappey knew that it was up to him to do something magnificent. He did.

"Whoever buys the fust bond fo' how much," he announced loudly, "I will duplicate it."

There was a smattering of applause which swelled into great acclaim and wound up in a cheer. Lawyer Evans Chew, leading legal light of Birmingham's colored fraternity, made a brief speech. He lauded Mr. Slappey's patriotism, and ended by purchasing a five-hundred-dollar bond.

Florian didn't hesitate. With superb insouciance he extracted a long thin wallet from his coat pocket and counted out $375 in cash. Admittedly, this was a transaction of greater magnitude than he had anticipated, and the departure of $375 left the wallet containing nothing more than $25 of Morbid's money plus two forlorn dollar bills which were the personal property of Mr. Slappey.

But at that moment Florian was in the throes of patriotic ecstasy. The entire procedure looked simple and logical. Certainly it was better to give the Treasury a helping hand than to let his own money lie idle in the bank. As to the cash which must be returned to Morbid on Monday, he decided to withdraw $375 from his account, hand it over to Brother Watkins, and to exist as well as might be until the golden day when he should come into his inheritance.

Florian moved off in solitary grandeur. He was gaily whistling a *samba* as he took his customary shortcut across the vacant lot. He felt no portent of evil.

Halfway across the lot, he saw one shadow detach itself from another shadow. He started to turn, and caught a brief glimpse of something unpleasant before lightning struck.

Mr. Grease handled his blackjack expertly. The blow he delivered was just hard enough to render Mr. Slappey hors de combat without, however, endangering him. There was no word, no sound save the thud of Mr. Slappey's inert figure against the turf.

Willie reached into Florian's coat and extracted the wallet. He shoved this into his own pocket and walked away.

In Willie's room at Sally Crouch's Cozy Home Hotel for Colored, Morbid Watkins was waiting. Willie grinned, said, "Got it," and tossed the wallet to his massive confederate.

Mr. Watkins opened it, leaped to his feet. "What gives?" he inquired angrily.

"What gives which?"

"The money . . . ?"

They scrutinized their trophy. One wallet containing membership cards to The Sons & Daughters of I Will Arise and The Over the River Burying Society. Two ten-dollar bills and one five, originally the property of Morbid Watkins. Two decrepit one-dollar notes.

And one Series E war bond, with a maturity value of five hundred dollars, made out to Florian Slappey!

Morbid spluttered and swore. Willie couldn't understand why. "We anyhow got the bond, didn't we, Morbid?"

"Yeah. But what good is it?"

"The printin' on it says five hund'ed dollars."

"To be paid to Florian Slappey. Don't you understand, Egghead — nobody cain't cash this bond 'ceptin' on'y Florian." Mr. Watkins was submerged in gloom. "What is us gwine do now."

Mr. Grease said timidly, "We ain't losin' nothin', Morbid. Come Monday, Florian is gwine give you four hund'ed dollars — even if it ain't the same four hund'ed you gave him."

Morbid struck an attitude. "You reckon I come all the way fum South Ca'lina to git an even break? What I crave is Florian's money, an' that's what Ise gwine git. Question is how."

"Yah. How?"

Mr. Watkins was deep in thought. "We got to trick Florian into cashin' this bond," he said softly. "We got to scheme somethin'."

The big man paced the room. He did it for a long time. Willie fired up a cigarette and waited. And finally Morbid swung on him triumphantly. "I think I got it, Willie."

He pulled up a chair and started to talk. When he finished, Mr. Grease said, "Sounds like you cooked up somethin' good, Morbid. Maybe it'll work."

Mr. Watkins was indignant. He said, "Maybe! 'Tain't no maybe about it, Willie. It's got to!"

Sunday was no gala day for Mr. Slappey. He was in a melancholy mood. Hard luck had smitten him. He was mucking around in the depths of despond, and having lots of no fun doing it.

Of one thing he was sure. He must never let the elegant Mr. Watkins know that misfortune had backed up against him and pushed. He must carry on. Chin up, and all that sort of thing. After all, thanks to Morbid's interest, Florian was potentially rich. Maybe within a couple of weeks he'd be usin' hund'ed dollar bills to light his cheroots.

Florian was at the bank when it opened Monday morning. He drew out four hundred and ten dollars, the ten being for running expenses. He went to the Cozy Home Hotel for colored and rapped on the door of 318. Morbid's voice bade him enter.

Florian pretended to be cheerful. Morbid pretended to be cheerful. Between them, they made a fairly good job of it.

Mr. Slappey paid over to Mr. Wat-

kins the four hundred dollars which had been entrusted to him. He gave no hint that this was a heart-breaking procedure. So well did he act his role that Morbid gathered the impression that Florian Slappey was still exceedingly well heeled. He inquired, "What you doin' tonight, Florian?"

"Me? Nothin' special."

"You ever play poker?"

Florian smiled. "Poker is my middle name, an' I was bawn twins."

There was further conversation, as the result of which Messrs. Slappey and Watkins agreed to get together that night for a friendly session of draw poker.

From the Cozy Home Hotel, Mr. Slappey went to the Penny Prudential Bank building where he obtained a private audience with Lawyer Evans Chew. Florian had no way of knowing that anything was wrong, but he definitely wished to ascertain how much was right.

He suggested that Lawyer Chew do a bit of telephoning to Greenville, South Carolina, for the purpose of finding out how much wealth had been left by the departed Uncle Rupert. Lawyer Chew agreed, provided Florian would guarantee the telephone tolls. Florian further entrusted to the erudite attorney the task of proving to Morbid's satisfaction that he was indeed Florian Slappey.

He spent the balance of his daylight hours doing nothing energetically. At six o'clock, he drifted into Bud Peaglar's place and seated himself at the counter. Ten minutes later Morbid Watkins appeared, and with him was Willie Grease.

Introductions were performed. Florian shook hands and stated that he was delighted to meet Willie. As they ordered, Florian gazed at the stranger in the mirror back of the counter. He had an idea that, somewhere, he had encountered Mr. Grease before, and he felt that the meeting had not been pleasant.

The answer eluded him until he was on his second slice of lemon meringue pie. Then it hit.

He remembered a vacant lot, a shadow moving from under a scrubby tree, a blow on the head . . . He had got just a glimpse before being walloped, but suddenly he knew. He controlled himself with an effort, and his brain commenced to function at top speed.

No question of it, Mr. Grease was his assailant. Mr. Grease had stolen his bond and his petty cash. Mr. Grease was an intimate of Morbid Watkins. Therefore — and now there was no further doubt in Florian's mind — he was the victim of a colossal fraud.

Mr. Slappey's thoughts did not interfere with his smooth, friendly chatter. He explained that he was expecting an important telephone call, and insisted therefore that Morbid and Willie should play in his room at Sis Callie's. They said that suited them fine. Mr. Slappey then excused himself. He said he'd be right back.

He skidded around the corner to the place where his friend, Jasper de Void, worked. He shoved Jasper into

a corner, and told the story of his troubles from beginning to end. Mr. de Void was sympathetic but pessimistic.

"They sho' been shovin' you around, ain't they, Florian?"

"Brother, you don't know."

"This poker game — you reelize what's gwine happen?"

"Co'se I do. Ise gwine git whipsawed. Ise askin' fo' it."

"But good. You start this game with nothin', an' you is gwine finish with half of that."

"Wrong, Jasper. 'Cause we is gwine play at Sis Callie's."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Plenty." Florian's eyes grew thoughtful. "Ise yo' best friend, ain't I, Jasper?"

"Yassuh. You always been a true companion . . . Hey! Wait a minute! You got an evil glint in yo' eye."

"Tha's on account you is fixin' to he'p me out, Brother de Void. You is gwine storm the breach fo' me."

"I ain't stormin' no britches fo' nobody. What kind of a scheme you done schum, Florian?"

Florian spoke swiftly and persuasively. He stated that he would keep Morbid and Willie absorbed in their poker game. That meant that Morbid's room at the Cozy Home would be vacant.

"In Morbid's closet is his suitcase, Jasper. In the suitcase is a tin box about this big. In the tin box is my bond. You won't have no trouble gittin' into the room. Even if you was seen, it wouldn't matter, on account you know Sally Crouch so good. All you got to do is git the bond —"

"— an' spend the rest of my life in the Big Rock."

"Don't talk foolishment. It's my money, ain't it? An' Ise givin' you premission to git it. Ise holdin' these fellers at my house. All you do is git that bond an' let me know you got it."

"An' then . . . ?" Jasper was markedly lacking in enthusiasm. "By that time they'll be into you fo' a lot of money, an' you won't be able to pay."

"I'll worry 'bout that when the time comes. Right now, all Ise thinkin' about is gettin' my war bond back."

Mr. de Void was not a valiant soul. He required a heap of persuading, and he got it. "Minute you git that bond," said Florian, "you telephone me. I'll take care of myse'f some way."

"Failin' which," stated Jasper lugubriously, "you'll start jivin' with the Angel Gabriel's band."

Mr. Slappey found a telephone booth, dropped in a nickel, and called Lawyer Chew at his home. The attorney's tidings confirmed his fears. Chew reported that, on the basis of preliminary information, nobody had been interested in finding his Uncle Rupert's heirs except Uncle Rupert's creditors.

Florian rejoined his arch-enemies at Bud's. They traveled to Sis Callie's in a taxi. Florian produced a new deck of cards and a box of poker chips. The three dusky gentlemen divested themselves of coats and ties, grouped around

a table and cut for deal.

"Stakes?" inquired Morbid.

"Make it light on you'se'f, brother."

"Dollar limit befo' the draw, an' two dollars after?"

"I feel expensive, too. Le's go."

Florian played slowly and carefully. Time was what he needed, and he dragged every hand to the limit.

It didn't take him long to realize that he had sized the situation up perfectly. These gentlemen were knifing him. They seemed to be masters of the art of dealing, and of signaling. When one had an overpowering hand, the other would keep Florian from calling. Mr. Slappey was helpless.

Not that he himself didn't know a few tricks, or that he hesitated to use his skill. It was simply that he was outnumbered, and in spite of all he could do, the chips and IOU's flowed steadily in the wrong direction.

No word yet from Jasper. Mr. Slappey was sweating. He was getting in deeper than he intended. He was alone and friendless. And it now occurred to him that even if Jasper came through, he'd be in no enviable situation.

At eleven o'clock the worst happened. Morbid shoved back his chair and said, "Tha's enough, Florian. Ise cashin' in."

Willie Grease followed suit. Mr. Slappey looked from the large frame of Morbid Watkins to the evil visage of Willie Grease. He thought, "Ise up the creek without a paddle. Jasper has th'owed me down."

He protested against ending the game, but got nowhere. Morbid and Willie counted winnings. All told, he owed them one hundred and fifty-six dollars. "An' we crave cash," stated Mr. Watkins.

This, reflected Florian, was worse than terrible. He stood up and said, "Gemmun, Ise sorry, but I ain't got that much on me."

"How much you got?"

"Six dollars."

They roared with anger. They announced that they'd either get the money or they'd take it out of his hide.

Mr. Slappey was too discouraged for argument. "Okay," he said. "Heah's my hide. Start takin'."

They needed no further invitation. Willie Grease made a flying tackle, and Morbid Watkins hit Florian on the way down. They collaborated beautifully.

Florian did his ineffectual best. He punched and gouged and kicked. But it was two against one, and either of the two could have pulverized him single-handed. He struggled until somebody's fist crashed against the side of his jaw and the lights went out.

For ten minutes he knew nothing, which was in the nature of a relief. Then he struggled back to consciousness. They had picked him up off the floor and flung him on the bed. Willie stood on one side, Morbid on the other. They looked outraged and indignant.

"Liar!" sizzled Morbid.

"How come Ise a liar?" asked Florian.

"You said you didn't have nothin' on'y six dollars."

"I was troofin'."

Morbid waved something in Florian's face. "While you was subconscious, we went thoo yo' pockets. We found this."

"This" was a Series E war bond, maturity value five hundred dollars, made out to the order of Florian Slappey.

Florian sat up and blinked. His bond. The bond Willie Grease had taken from him. Now he understood. Now for the first time the full extent of his trouble was apparent.

They couldn't cash his bond without his personal aid. He himself had to perform that office in the presence of an agent who knew him. The poker game had been a device. Now they had him where they wanted him, hog-tied and helpless.

He said weakly, "'Tain't no use, brethren. It says right there on the bond it cain't be cashed fo' sixty days."

Morbid glowered. "They must be some way. An' does you doesn't think of it, us once more starts pushin' you around."

Additional mayhem was something Mr. Slappey was in no mood to have inflicted upon himself. He tried argument, cajolery. He never before had felt so forsaken. He was still feeling that way when the door was thrust open and Jasper de Void barged into the room.

Jasper was not alone. Behind him towered two colored gentlemen who looked like peaches and honey to the harassed Mr. Slappey. One of them was Simeon Broughton. The other was an ex-pugilist and ex-wrestler known as Buddy Blank. They were at present employed at the Ensley steel mills, and what they might have lacked in brain they more than atoned for in sheer physical power.

"I brung them with me," stated Jasper. "I was skeered to come alone."

Mr. Slappey was instantly master of the situation. Reinforcements had arrived — and what reinforcements!

He started talking. He told his new allies of the conspiracy against him; he told of the fake inheritance story, of the attack in the vacant lot, of the heinous offense of stealing a United States Government war bond, and, finally, of the crooked poker game with its crowning insult of assault and battery.

"Them," he declared, pointing dramatically toward Morbid and Willie, "is the kind of citizens us don't crave to have nowheres near the vicinity of Bumminham."

Simeon and Buddy were apparently of the same mind. They descended upon Messrs. Watkins and Grease in a cloud and proceeded to deal out a dose of the same medicine the two had administered to Florian. Their attack was halted only by the terrified howls of the victims and the screams of an outraged Sis Callie, who had flown upstairs at the sound of continuous battle action.

Simeon announced that Morbid and Willie were on their way else-

where, as of that moment. He and Buddy would act as personal escort to the train. They turned deaf ears to the roars of indignant protest and threats of arrest.

"P'lice," sneered Simeon. "You is crazy as you look. Try goin' to the p'lice an' see how you make out when they hear all what you done. Where y'all is goin' is away, an' you is gwine stay there."

They shoved the two cringing conspirators out of Florian's room. They were headed for the Terminal Station.

Alone with Jasper, Florian Slappey flung himself on the bed. He was battered and bruised, but his soul was tranquil. He gazed beatifically at the bond which was clutched in his right hand. He said, "I di'n't git me no inheritance, Brother de Void, but I di'n't git took, either. What I got towards you is gratitude."

Jasper did not seem to be entirely happy, and Florian inquired the reason.

"You tol' me," stated Mr. de Void, "that yo' bond was in that tin box in Morbid Watkins' suitcase."

"It had to be. I didn't know they was planning to bring it with them. But it don't differ nohow."

"Yes it does."

"How come?"

Jasper picked up something which he had placed on the chair when he first entered the room. "The tin box was locked," he explained. "So I brung it."

The tin box! Florian emitted a howl of glee and pounced on it. He grabbed a screw driver and forced it open. Inside he found four hundred lovely dollars.

"Feast yo' eyes, Jasper! Feast yo eyes. Yonder sits my inheritance."

"You gwine keep it?" inquired Jasper.

"I sho' is. I earned it, didn't I?"

"Yeah . . . but what you fixin' to do with it?"

Florian hesitated. Then he smiled. "Ise gwine do a big favor for Morbid Watkins," he said. "It's somethin' he asked me to do the first time I met him."

Mr. Slappey beamed upon his friend. "Jasper," he said, "Ise gwine put this money in the bank. In my name."

"O"

FROM *Ashenden* TO *Zambra*

Among the 1000 books which represent the entire publishing output of detective-crime short stories in the last one hundred years, only a handful, surprisingly enough, are devoted exclusively to the machinations of secret service agents. Of course many of the demi-detectives created by E. Phillips Oppenheim, William LeQueux, and Sax Rohmer flirt constantly with international intrigue, but few of their books deal wholly with diplomatic skulduggery; and occasionally one of the great manhunters of fiction takes a fling at counter-espionage — Margery Allingham's Mr. Campion, for example, in "The Meaning of the Act," May 1945 issue of EQMM; and Sherlock Holmes in "The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans" and "His Last Bow" — but these are random shots in otherwise stately, if not affairs-of-stately, careers.

Perhaps the finest of all English books of secret service stories is W. Somerset Maugham's ASHENDEN, OR THE BRITISH AGENT *(1928). Here the emphasis is not on plot, in the usual blood-and-thunder sense; Maugham is too crafty a craftsman to subordinate the higher virtues of compelling realism and depth of characterization to tricks and counter-tricks. Much closer, however, to the conventional conception of secret agents are the exploits of William Dawson in* THE LOST NAVAL PAPERS *(1917), by Bennet Copplestone;* THE ADVENTURES OF HEINE *(1919), by Edgar Wallace; and the secret service tales in Valentine Williams's* THE KNIFE BEHIND THE CURTAIN *(1930). Even the English boy-detective has taken a whack at the insidious and sinister spy — witness the two books about P. J., the Secret Service Boy (1922–1923), by Lord Frederic Hamilton; P. J. is, of course, young Philip John Davenant. And if memory serves, Headon Hill's Sebastian Zambra saves Britain from a fate worse than death in one of the stories that make up* CABINET SECRETS *(1893). Thus, from* Ashenden *to Zambra . . .*

In America, the secret service sleuths include George Bronson-Howard's Yorke Norroy in NORROY, DIPLOMATIC AGENT *(1907),* SLAVES OF THE LAMP *(1917), and* THE BLACK BOOK *(1920) — Norroy derives from the Graustarkian school of diplomatic detectives; Clarence Herbert New's Lord Trevor (an American despite his title) in* THE UNSEEN HAND *(1918); R. T. M. Scott's* SECRET SERVICE SMITH *(1923), first name Aurelius; and Melville Davisson Post's* WALKER OF THE SECRET SERVICE *(1924). There are others, on both sides of the Atlantic, but not enough to fill a five-foot shelf.*

For a concentrated short-cut to the thrills and excitement of spies and spy-catchers, we recommend that excellent anthology, WORLD'S GREAT

SPY STORIES (*1944*), *edited by Vincent Starrett; the only other collections of this kind known to your Editor are* MY BEST SPY STORY (*1938*), *and* MY BEST SECRET SERVICE STORY (*1940*), *the latter edited by A. D. Divine, and neither published in the United States.*

All of which brings us to the immediate matter in hand — a secret service story by none other than John Dickson Carr. "Strictly Diplomatic" has never before appeared in America, in any form whatsoever — so again EQMM presents an important detective-story discovery . . .

The doctor prescribed adventure — "in the grand manner" — for his friend Andrew Dermot. At the Ile St. Cathérine, a Continental spa, Dermot met Betty Weatherill — and adventure with a capital A. He met something else too, something that brought terror to the Hotel Suchard — an impossible disappearance. How did the former schoolmistress "vanish like a puff of smoke"? Even to the secret service story John Dickson Carr affixes his famous hallmark — the impossible crime that in the end proves to be completely possible. But this time Mr. Carr adds something new: one of the most unhackneyed motives in the modern detective short story.

STRICTLY DIPLOMATIC

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Now that he was nearly at the end of his rest-cure, Dermot had never felt so well in his life.

He leaned back in the wicker chair, flexing his muscles. He breathed deeply. Below him the flattish lands between France and Belgium sloped to the river: a slow Flemish river dark green with the reflection of its banks. Half a mile away he could see the houses of the town, with the great glass roof of the spa smoky in autumn sunshine. Behind him — at the end of the arbor — was the back of the hotel, now denuded of its awnings.

They had taken down the awnings; they were closing up many of the bedrooms. Only a few guests now pottered about the terrace. A crisp tang had come into the air: work, and the thunder of London again, now loomed up as a pleasant prospect. Once, hardly a month ago, it had been a nightmare of buses charging straight at you, like houses loose; a place where nerves snapped, and you started to run.

Even with that noise in his ears, he had not wanted to go away.

"But I can't take a holiday now!" he had told the doctor.

"Holiday?" snorted the doctor. "Do you call it a holiday? Your trouble is plain overwork, a complaint we don't often get nowadays. Why don't you relax? Not hard up, are you?"

"No, it isn't that."

"You're too conscientious," the doctor had said, rather enviously.

"No. It's not a virtue," said Dermot, as honestly as he could. "I can't help it. Every second I'm away from work, I'm worrying about it until I get back. I'm built like that. I can't relax. I can't even get drunk."

The doctor grunted.

"Ever try falling in love?"

"Not since I was nineteen. And, anyway, it's not something you can take down like a box of pills and dose yourself with. Or at least I can't."

"Well," said the doctor, surveying him. "I know a rising barrister who's going to come a cropper unless you get out of this. Now I warn you. You get off to the Continent this week. There's a spa I know — Ile St. Cathérine. The waters won't do you any harm; and the golf will do you good."

Here the doctor, who was an old friend of Andrew Dermot's, grinned raffishly.

"What you want," he added, "is adventure. In the grand manner. I hear there's a fenced-off area near Ile St. Cathérine, bayonets and all. The casino is probably full of beautiful slant-eyed spies with jade ear-rings. Forget you're turning into such a moss-back. Pick up one of the beautiful slant-eyed spies, and go on the razzle-dazzle with her. It'll do you all the good in the world."

Alone on the lawn behind his hotel, Dermot laughed aloud. Old Foggy had been right, in a way. But he had gone one less or one better than that. He had fallen in love.

Anyone less like a slant-eyed spy than Betty Weatherill would be difficult to imagine. In fact even the tension which tautened nerves in the rest of Europe did not exist in Ile St. Cathérine. It was a fat, friendly, rather stodgy sort of place. Looking round the spa — where fountains fell, and people got very excited on the weighing-machines — Dermot wondered at old Foggy's notion of bayonets. He felt soothed, and free. Bicycle-bells tingled in the streets under once-gilded houses. At night, when you ordered thin wine by the glass, a band played beneath lights in the trees. A mild flutter in roulette at the casino caused excitement; and one Belgian burgher was caught bringing his supper in a paper packet.

Dermot first saw Betty Weatherill on the morning after his arrival.

It was at breakfast. There were not many guests at the hotel: a fat Dutchman eating cheese for breakfast, half a dozen English people, a foreign envoy, a subdued French couple. And, of course, the sturdy girl who sat alone at the sun-steeped table by the windows.

Dermot's nerves were still raw from the journey. When he first saw her he felt a twinge of what he thought was envy at her sheer health. It flashed out at him. He had an impression of a friendly mouth, a sun-tanned complexion; of eagerness, and even naïveté. It disturbed him like the clattering coffee-cups. He kept looking round at her, and looking round again, though he did not understand why.

He played execrable golf that day.

He saw her again next morning. They ran into each other buying stamps at the cash-desk. They both smiled slightly, and Dermot felt embarrassed. He had been trying to remember whether the color of her hair was fair or chestnut; it was, he saw, a light brown. That afternoon his golf was even worse. It was absurd that he, thirty-five years old, should seem as stale and crumpled as an old poster against a wall. He was a nerve-ridden fool. And he fell to thinking of her again.

On the following day they went so far as to say good morning. On the third day he took his nerve in both hands, and plumped down at the breakfast-table next to hers.

"I *can't* do it," he heard her say, half-laughing.

The words gave him a start. Not a ladies' man, this move of his had struck him as distinctly daring. Yet he felt the communication between them, an uncomfortable awareness of each other's presence. He looked up, to find her eyes fixed on him.

"Do what?" he asked quickly.

"Manage Continental breakfasts," she answered, as though they were old friends discussing a problem of mutual importance. "I know I shouldn't, but every day I order bacon and eggs."

After that their acquaintance was off at a gallop.

Her name was Betty Weatherill. She was twenty-eight, and came from Brighton. She had been a schoolmistress (incongruous idea); but she had come into a small inheritance and, as she confessed, was blueing part of it. He had never met a girl who seemed so absolutely right: in what she said, in what she did, in her response to any given remark.

That afternoon they went to the fair and ate hot dogs and rode round and round on the wooden horses to the panting music of an electric piano. That night they dressed for the casino; and Andrew Dermot, shuffling roulette-counters, felt no end of an experienced gay-dog. And the knowledge came to him, with a kind of shock, "Good lord, I'm alive."

Betty was popular at the hotel. The proprietor, Monsieur Gant, knew her quite well and was fond of her. Even the fat Dr. Vanderver, of the Sylvanian Embassy, gave her a hoarse chuckle of appreciation whenever she went by. Not that she had no difficulties. There was, it appeared, some trouble about her passport. She had several times to go to the prefecture of police — from which she emerged flushed, and as near angry as it was possible for her to be.

As for Dermot, he was in love and he knew it. That was why he exulted when he sat by the teatable on the lawn behind the hotel, at half-past five on that lazy, veiled autumn afternoon, waiting for Betty to join him. The lawn was dotted with little tables, but he was alone. The remains of tea and sandwiches were piled on a tray. Dermot was replete; no outside alarms troubled Ile St. Cathérine; no black emblems threw shadows.

This was just before he received the greatest shock of his life.

"Hello!" said Betty. "Sorry I'm late." She came hurrying out of the arbor, with the breathless smile she always wore when she was excited. She glanced quickly round the lawn, deserted except for a waitress slapping at crumbs. Dermot got up.

"You're not late," he told her. "But you swore to me you were going to have tea in town, so I went ahead." He looked at her suspiciously. "Did you?"

"Did I what?"

"Have tea."

"Yes, of course."

For no reason that he could analyze, a chill of uneasiness came to Dermot. His nightmares were cured. But it was as though an edge of the nightmare returned. Why? Only because the atmosphere suddenly seemed wrong, because the expression of her eyes was wrong. He drew out a chair for her.

"Sure you wouldn't like another cup? Or a sandwich?"

"Well ——"

Now he thought he must be a fool reading huge meanings into trifles. But the impression persisted. He gave an order to the waitress, who removed the tea-tray and disappeared into the arbor. Betty had taken a cigarette out of her handbag; but, when he tried to light it for her, the cigarette slipped out of her fingers, and rolled on the table.

"Oh, damn," she whispered. Now he was looking into her eyes from a short distance away; they seemed the eyes of a slightly older, wiser woman. They were hazel eyes, the whites very clear against a sun-tanned face. The heavy lids blinked.

"I want to know what's wrong," Dermot said.

"There's nothing wrong," said Betty, shaking her head. "Only — I wanted to talk to you. I'm afraid I've got to leave here."

"When?"

"Tonight."

Dermot sat up. It seemed to him that there was a stranger sitting across from him, and that all his plans were toppling.

"If you must, you must," he said. "But I've got to go myself at the beginning of the week. I thought we were going to leave together."

"I can't. Very shortly" — she spoke with some intensity — "I hope I can explain to you what a beast I am. All I can tell you now is that it's not altogether safe for me to be here."

"Safe? In this place?"

Betty was not listening. She was wearing white, as he always remembered afterwards, with a white handbag. Again she had opened this handbag, and was going through it in something of a hurry.

"Derry." She spoke sharply. "You haven't seen my compact, have you? The white ivory one with the red band?" She looked round. "It didn't fall out when I opened my handbag before?"

"No, I don't think so. I didn't see it."

"I must have left it back in my room. Please excuse me. I'll be back in half a tick."

And she got to her feet, snapped shut the catch of the handbag.

Dermot also got up. It would not be fair to say that he exploded. He was a mild-mannered man who arrived at all emotions with difficulty. But in the past few minutes he felt that a door had opened on a world he could not understand.

"Look here, Betty," he said. "I don't know what's got into you; but I insist on knowing. If there's anything wrong, just tell me and we'll put it right. If ——"

"I'll be back in a moment," she assured him.

And, disregarding the hand he put out, she hurried back through the arbor.

Dermot sat down heavily, and stared after her. A veiled sun had turned the sky to grey, making dingy the cloths of the little tables on the lawn. The cloths fluttered under a faint breeze.

He contemplated the arbor, which was a very special sort of arbor. Monsieur Gant, the proprietor of the Hotel Suchard, had imported it from Italy and was very proud of it. Stretching back a full twenty yards to the rear terrace of the hotel, it made a sort of tunnel composed of tough interlaced vines which in summer were heavy with purplish-pink blossom. A line of tables ran beside it, with lights from above. Inside the arbor, at night, Chinese lanterns hung from the roof. It was one of the romantic features of the hotel. But at the moment — cramped, unlighted, hooded with thick foliage — it was a tunnel which suggested unpleasant images.

"A good place for a murder," Betty had once laughed.

Andrew Dermot could hear his watch ticking. He wished she would come back.

He lit a cigarette and smoked it to a stump; but she had not returned. He got to his feet, stamping on the chilling grass. For the first time he glanced across the tea-table at Betty's empty chair. It was a wicker chair. And, lying on the seat in plain view, was a white ivory compact with a red band.

So that was it! She had been too much upset to notice the compact, of course. She was probably still searching her room for it.

He picked up the compact and went after her.

Inside the arbor it was almost dark, but chinks and glimmers of light flickered through interlaced vines and showed him an arched tunnel some ten feet high, with a floor of packed sand. There was a stagnant smell of dying blossom; the Judas tree, did they call it? Obscurely, he was relieved to find the gnat-stung arbor empty. He hurried along its length to the arch of light at the end, and emerged on a red-tiled terrace where there were more tables under the windows.

"Good eefening, Mr. Dermot," said an affable voice.

Dermot checked his rush.

He almost stumbled over Dr. Henrik Vanderver of the Sylvanian Embassy, who was sitting near the arbor, smoking a cigar with relish, and looking at him through thick-lensed spectacles.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Dr. Vanderver, laughing uproariously and for no apparent reason; as was his custom.

"Good evening, Dr. Vanderver," said Dermot. His uneasiness had gone; he felt again a nerve-ridden fool. "Sorry to barge into you like that. Is Miss Weatherill down yet?"

Dr. Vanderver was proud of his English.

"Down?" he repeated, drawing down his eyebrows as though to illustrate.

"From her room, I mean."

"De young lady," said Vanderver, "iss with you. I have seen her go through dere" — he pointed to the arbor — "fifteen, twenty minutes ago."

"Yes, I know. But she came back here to get a compact."

Vanderver was now anxious about his English.

"Please?" he prompted, cupping his hand behind his ear.

"I said she came back here to get a compact. You know. This kind of thing." Dermot held it up. "She walked back through the arbor ——"

"My friend," said Vanderver with sudden passion, "I do not know if I have understood you. Nobody has come back through this arbor while I am sitting here."

"But that's impossible."

"Please?"

Dermot thought he saw the explanation. "You mean you haven't been sitting here all the time?"

"My friend," said Vanderver, taking out a watch and shaking it, "I am sitting here one hour more — more! — where I sit always and smoke my cigar before I dress. Yes?"

"Well, Doctor?"

"I have seen the young lady go through, yes. But I have not seen her come back. I haf not seen nobody. In all dat time the only liffing soul I see on this terrace is the maid which gather up your tea-tray and bring it back here."

The terrace, always dark in the shadow of the arbor, was growing more dusky.

"Dr. Vanderver, listen to me." Dermot spoke coldly and sharply; he found Vanderver's thick-lensed spectacles turning on him with hypnotic effect. "That is not what I mean. I remember the maid going back through the arbor with the tray. But Miss Weatherill was with mé then. I mean later. L-a-t-e-r, several minutes later. You saw Miss Weatherill come out through here about ten minutes ago, didn't you?"

"No."

"But you must have! I saw her go into the arbor on my side, and I never took my eyes off the entrance. She isn't in the arbor now; see for yourself. She must have come out here."

"So!" said Vanderver, tapping the table with magnificent dignity. "Now I tell *you* something. I do not know

what you think has happened to the young lady. Perhaps de goblins ketch her, yes? Perhaps she dissolved to electrons and bust, yes?" Dark blood suffused his face. "Now I will haf no more of this. I settle it. I tell you." He thrust out his thick neck. "Nobody," he said flatly, "hass come back through this arbor at all."

By nine o'clock that night, terror had come to the Hotel Suchard.

Until then Monsieur Gant, the manager, had refrained from summoning the police. At first Monsieur Gant appeared to think that everybody was joking. He only began to gesticulate, and to run from room to room, when it became clear that Betty Weatherill was not to be found either in the hotel or in the grounds. If the testimony were to be believed — and neither Dermot nor Vanderver would retract one word — then Betty Weatherill had simply walked into the arbor, and there had vanished like a puff of smoke.

It was certain that she had not left the arbor by (say) getting out through the vines. The vines grew up from the ground in a matted tangle like a wire cage, so trained round their posts from floor to arch that it would be impossible to penetrate them without cutting. And nowhere were they disturbed in any way. There was not — as one romantic under-porter suggested — an underground passage out of the tunnel. It was equally certain that Betty could not have been hiding in the arbor when Dermot walked through it. There was no place there to hide in.

This became only too clear when the Chinese lanterns were lighted in the greenish tunnel, and Monsieur Gant stood on a stepladder to shake frantically at the vine-walls — with half the domestic staff twittering behind him. This was a family matter, in which everybody took part.

Alys Marchand, in fact, was the backstairs-heroine of the occasion. Alys was the plump waitress who had been sent to fetch fresh tea and sandwiches not fifteen minutes before Betty's disappearance, but who had not brought them back because of a disagreement with the cook as to what hours constituted feev-o'clock-tay.

Apart from Dermot, Alys had been the last person to see Betty Weatherill in the flesh. Alys had passed unscathed through the arbor. To Monsieur Gant she described, with a wealth of gesture, how she had taken the order for tea and sandwiches from Monsieur Dermot. She showed how she had picked up the big tray, whisking a cloth over its debris like a conjuror. A pink-cheeked brunette, very neat in her black frock and apron, she illustrated how she had walked back through the arbor towards the hotel.

Had she seen Dr. Vanderver on this occasion?

She had.

Where was he?

At the little table on the terrace. He was smoking a cigar, and sharpening a big horn-handled knife on a small whetstone block he carried in his

pocket.

"That," interposed Vanderver, in excellent French, "is a damned lie."

It was very warm in the arbor, under the line of Chinese lanterns. Vanderver stood against the wall. He seemed less bovine when he spoke French. But a small bead of perspiration had appeared on his forehead, up by the large vein near the temple; and the expression of his eyes behind the thick spectacles turned Andrew Dermot cold.

"It is true as I tell you," shrieked Alys, turning round her dark eyes. "I told my sister Clothilde, and Gina and Odette too, when I went to the kitchen. He thrusts it into his pocket — quick, so! — when he sees me."

"There are many uses for knives," said Monsieur Gant, hastily and nervously. "At the same time, perhaps it would be as well to telephone the police. You are an advocate, Monsieur Dermot. You agree?"

Dermot did agree.

He had been keeping tight hold of his nerves. In fact, he found the cold reason of his profession returning to him; and it was he who directed matters. Instead of bringing back the nightmare, this practical situation steadied him. He saw the issue clearly now. It became even more clear when there arrived, amid a squad of plainclothes men, none other than Monsieur Lespinasse, the *juge d'instruction.*

After examining the arbor, M. Lespinasse faced them all in the manager's office. He was a long, lean, melancholy man with hollow cheeks, and the Legion of Honor in his buttonhole. He had hard uncomfortable eyes, which stared down at them.

"You understand," said Lespinasse, "we appear to have here a miracle. Now I am a realist. I do not believe in miracles."

"That is good," said Dermot grimly, in his careful French. "You have perhaps formed a theory?"

"A certainty," said Lespinasse.

The hard uncomfortable eyes turned on Dermot.

"From our examination," said Lespinasse, "it is certain that Mlle. Weatherill did not leave the arbor by any secret means. You, monsieur, tell one story." He looked at Vanderver. "You, monsieur, tell another." He looked back at Dermot. "It is therefore evident that one of you must be telling a lie."

Vanderver protested at this.

"I remind you," Vanderver growled, with a significant look, "that it will be unwise for you to make mistakes. As an acting representative of His Majesty the King of Sylvania, I enjoy immunities. I enjoy privileges ——"

"Diplomatic privileges," said Monsieur Lespinasse. "That is no concern of mine. My concern is that you do not break the civil law."

"I have broken no law!" said Vanderver, purple in the face. "I have told no lie!"

The *juge d'instruction* held up his hand.

"And I tell you in return," he said sharply, "that either your story or Monsieur Dermot's must be untrue.

Either the young lady never went into the arbor, in which case Monsieur Dermot is telling a falsehood. Or else she did go in, and for some reason you choose to deny that you saw her come out. In which case ——" Again he held up his hand. "It is only fair to warn you, Dr. Vanderver, that Miss Weatherill told me you might try to kill her."

They could hear a clock ticking in the overcrowded room.

"Kill?" said Vanderver.

"That is what I said."

"But I did not know her!"

"Evidently she knew you," answered M. Lespinasse. His sallow face was alive with bitterness; he fingered the rosette in his buttonhole. Then he took a step forward. "Miss Weatherill several times came to me at the prefecture of police. She told me of your — murderous activities in the past. I did not choose to believe her. It was too much of a responsibility. Responsibility! Now this happens, and I must take the responsibility for it at least. One more question, if you please. What have you to say to the maid's story of the horn-handled knife?"

Vanderver's voice was hoarse. "I never owned such a knife. I never saw one. I call you a son of ——"

"It will not be necessary to finish," said the *juge d'instruction*. "On the contrary, *we* shall finish." He snapped his fingers, and one of the plain-clothes men brought into the room an object wrapped in a newspaper.

"Our search of the arbor," continued M. Lespinasse, "was perhaps more thorough than that of Monsieur Gant. This was found buried in the sand floor only a few feet away from where monsieur was sitting."

There were more than damp stains of sand on the bright, wafer-thin blade in the newspaper; there were others. Monsieur Lespinasse pointed to them.

"Human blood," he said.

At eleven o'clock Andrew Dermot was able to get out of the room.

They told him afterwards that he had made an admirable witness; that his replies had been calm, curt, and to the point; and that he had even given sound advice on details of legal procedure, contrasting those of England with those of the present country.

He did not remember this. He knew only that he must get out into the air and stop himself from thinking of Betty.

He stood on the front terrace of the hotel, as far removed as possible from the arbor in whose floor the knife had been buried. Half a mile away the lights of the principal street in the town, the Promenade des Francais, twinkled with deathly pallor. A cool wind swept the terrace.

They took Vanderver down the front steps and bundled him into a car. There was a chain round Vanderver's wrists; his legs shook so that they had to push him up into the car. The car roared away, with a puff of smoke from the exhaust — carbon monoxide, which meant death — and only the *juge d'instruction* remained behind searching Vanderver's room

for some clue as to why a sudden, meaningless murder had been done at dusk beside a commonplace hotel.

Andrew Dermot put his hands to his temples, pressing hard.

Well, that was that.

He sat down on the terrace. The little round tables had red tops, and the color did not please him, but he remained. He ordered brandy, which he could not taste. The brandy was brought to him by the same underporter who had suggested an underground passage in the arbor, and who, agog, seemed to want to entertain him with speculations about motives for murder. Dermot chased him away.

But if Betty had to go — "go" was hardly the word for that — where was the sense in it? Why? Why? Vanderver was presumably not a homicidal maniac. Besides, all Dermot's legal instincts were bewildered by so clumsy a crime. If Vanderver were guilty, why had he from the first persisted in that unnecessary lie of saying Betty had never come out of the arbor? Why hadn't he simply faded away, never professing to have seen anything at all? Why thrust himself at that entrance as though determined to ensure suspicion for himself?

What Dermot had not permitted himself to wonder was where Betty herself might be.

But suppose Vanderver had been telling the truth?

Nonsense! Vanderver could not be telling the truth. People do not vanish like soap-bubbles out of guarded tunnels.

Presently they would be turning out the lights here on this windy, deserted terrace. The Hotel Suchard was ready, in any case, to close its doors for the winter; it would close its doors very early tonight. Behind him, in lighted windows, glowed the lounge, the smoking-room, the dining-room where he had first seen Betty. The head porter, his footsteps rapping on hardwood, darkened first the dining-room and then the lounge. Dermot would have to go upstairs to his room and try to sleep.

Getting to his feet, he walked through the thick-carpeted hall. But he could not help it. He must have one more look at the arbor.

It was veritable tunnel now: a black shape inside which, for twenty yards, Chinese lanterns glowed against the roof. The sand was torn where the knife had been dug out. Near that patch, two shovels had been propped against the wall in readiness for deeper excavations next morning. It was when he noted those preparations, and realized what they meant, that Dermot's mind turned black; he had reached his lowest depth.

He was so obsessed by it that he did not, at first, hear footfalls on the tiled terrace. He turned round. Two persons had come out to join him — but they came by different windows, and they stopped short and stared at each other as much as they stared at him.

One of these persons was M. Lespinasse, the *juge d'instruction.*

The other was Betty Weatherill.

"And now, mademoiselle," roared Lespinasse, "perhaps you will be good enough to explain the meaning of this ridiculous and indefensible trick?"

M. Lespinasse, his cheek-bones even more formidable, was carrying a briefcase and a valise. He let both fall to the floor.

"I had to do it," said Betty, addressing Dermot. "I *had* to do it, my dear."

She was not smiling at him. Dermot felt that presently, in the sheer relief of nerves, they would both be shouting with laughter. At the moment he only knew that she was there, and that he could touch her.

"One moment," said Lespinasse, coldly interrupting what was going on. "You do well, Monsieur Dermot, to demand an explanation ——"

"But I don't. So long as she's ——"

"—— of this affair." The *juge d'instruction* raised his voice. "I can now tell you, in fact I came downstairs to tell you, *how* Miss Weatherill played this trick. What I do not know is why she did it."

Betty whirled round. "You know how?"

"I know, mademoiselle," snapped the other, "that you planned this foolishness and carried it out with the assistance of Alys Marchand, who deserves a formidable stroke of the boot behind for her part in the affair. When I found Alys ten minutes ago capering round her room waving a packet of thousand-franc notes, her behavior seemed to call for some explanation." He looked grim. "Alys was very shortly persuaded to give one."

Then he turned to Dermot.

"Let me indicate what happened, and you shall confirm it! Miss Weatherill asked you to meet her here, even specifying the table you were to occupy, and said she would arrive after tea?"

"Yes," said Dermot.

"At half-past five she came through the arbor — first making certain that Dr. Vanderver was on the terrace in the place he always occupied, every day, to smoke a cigar at that hour?"

"I —— yes."

"Miss Weatherill was easily persuaded to have a fresh cup of tea?"

"Well, I asked her to."

"The waitress, Alys, was then pottering round for no apparent reason among otherwise deserted tables?"

"She was."

"You gave the order to Alys," said Monsieur Lespinasse grimly. "She picked up your tray — a big tray — whisking over it a large cloth to cover the dishes? Just as we later saw her do?"

"I admit it."

"Alys then walked away from you through the arbor. As she did so," leered Lespinasse, so intent that he made a face, "Miss Weatherill distracted your attention by getting a light for her cigarette. And kept your attention fixed on herself by dropping the cigarette, and pretending an agitation she did not feel."

Dermot gave a quick look at Betty. Whatever else this might be, it was not a hoax or a joke. Betty's face was white.

"Miss Weatherill held your attention," said Lespinasse, "so that Alys could slip back out of the arbor unnoticed. *Alys did not really go through the arbor at all!* Carrying the tray, she merely darted round the side of the arbor and returned unseen to the hotel by another way.

"Miss Weatherill was then ready to play the rest of the comedy. 'Discovering' the loss of her compact, *she* enters the arbor. Halfway up, in the darkness, is lying a stage-property these two have already left there. This is another tray: like the first, and covered with a cloth. But this cloth does not cover dishes. It covers ——"

Monsieur Lespinasse broke off.

He looked flustered and dishevelled, but in his wicked eye there was a gleam of admiration.

"Monsieur Dermot, I tell you a psychological truth. The one person in this world whose features nobody can remember are those of a waitress. You see her at close range; yet you do not see her. Should you doubt this, the next time in your abominable London you go into a Lyons or an A.B.C., try calling for your bill in a hurry and see if you can identify the particular young lady who served you with a cup of tea. I know it. So did Miss Weatherill.

"She was already wearing a thin black frock under her white one. The tray in the arbor contained the other properties by which a blonde is changed into a brunette, white stockings and shoes change to black, a tanned complexion is heightened to a vivid ruddiness. It was the clumsiest possible disguise because it needed to be no more. Dr. Vanderver never glanced twice at the black-clad figure in cap and apron who walked out of the arbor carrying a tray. He saw no black wig; he saw no false complexion; he saw nothing. In his mind there registered, 'waitress-has-passed': no more. Thus Miss Weatherill, inexpertly got up as Alys, passed safely through the dense shadow which the arbor casts on the terrace — carrying before her the tray whose cloth neatly hid the discarded white dress, stockings, and shoes."

The *juge d'instruction* drew a deep, whistling breath.

"Very well!" he said. "But what I wish to know is: *why?*"

"You don't see it even yet?" asked Betty.

"My deepest apologies," said Lespinasse, "if I am dense. But I do not see it. You cannot have liked cutting yourself so that you might get real blood to put on the knife you buried. But why? How does all this nonsense help us, when Dr. Vanderver has committed no crime?"

"Because he's Embassy," answered Betty simply.

"Mademoiselle?"

"He has diplomatic immunity," said Betty. "The government can't search him; can't even touch him. And so, you see, I had to get him arrested by the *civil* authorities so that his papers could be searched."

She turned to Dermot.

"Derry, I'm sorry," she went on. "That is, I'm sorry I'm not quite the candid-camera schoolmistress burbling to high heaven that I pretended to be. But I want to be just that. I want to enjoy myself. For the first time in all my life, I've enjoyed myself in the last month. What I mean is: I want to be with you, that's all. So, now that I'm chucking the beastly job ——"

Monsieur Lespinasse swore softly. After remaining rigid for a moment, he picked up the brief-case and the valise he had dropped. Both were in green leather stamped in gold with the royal arms of Sylvania.

"—— and of course," Betty was saying almost wildly, "the fellow's name wasn't 'Dr. Vanderver,' and he's no more a neutral than I am. Only he'd got that job on forged credentials, and he was safe. So I had to keep telling the *juge d'instruction* I suspected him of being a murderer. His real name is Karl Heinrich von Arnheim; and when Sir George — you know to whom I refer, Monsieur Lespinasse — asked me to go after him ——"

Monsieur Lespinasse could not break the lock of the brief-case. So he opened a wicked-looking knife of his own to slit the leather; and so he found the secret.

"The English," he said, "are not bad." He waved the knife, which glittered against the light from the windows. "Dr. Vanderver will not, I think, leave the police station after all." He swept Betty Weatherill a profound bow. "The complete plans," he added, "of the underground fortifications whose fall would break the whole line of defense along this front."

The editorial introduction to John Dickson Carr's "Strictly Diplomatic" treated that story strictly from a detective-story viewpoint. Now we bring you Irwin Shaw's "The Priest" and in comparing the two stories, we must readjust our sights, both critically and sociologically.

Both tales are of the secret service: Carr's obviously so, and Shaw's in the sense that its agents, while not official, are nevertheless authentic — they belong to that heroic division of G-2 known as the underground. The Carr story is pre-war; the Shaw story is of, by, and for the War to End War. The technical emphasis in the Carr story is on plot and ingenuity of plot — with the resulting and inevitable artificialization of realism. The Shaw story makes no fetish of plot per se; *indeed, the plot of "The Priest" is remarkably simple — two "ordinary" incidents in the lives of two patriots. Shaw's technical emphasis is therefore literary: on character and emotion — with the resulting and inevitable intensification of realism.*

Mr. Carr's purpose is wholly to entertain — and please do not scoff at that: sheer entertainment can be a high purpose too, especially during wartime when overworked nerves need the sedative of "escape" literature. But Mr. Shaw's purpose is still higher, and we must acknowledge that superior aim. "The Priest" will not "entertain" you; but it will stir your grey cells and quicken your heart. It will make you think and it will make you feel; it will make you realize that there is *one justification for war. War is not mass insanity if through that war men of good will find good will, if through that war brothers find a brotherhood of man, if through that war we all find peace on earth. Mr. Shaw's story is a weapon in that war — it is subtle, penetrating propaganda to destroy once and forever the barriers of race, color, and creed.*

In that sense, both critical and sociological, Mr. Shaw proves that the secret service story has come of age, has grown up, has taken its place as serious literature . . .

Irwin Shaw is that wonderfully talented young writer who brought to the American stage such fine plays as BURY THE DEAD *and* THE GENTLE PEOPLE, *and whose short stories in magazines like "The New Yorker," "Story," and "Esquire," have been such rich contributions to our modern technique of "hardboiled understatement."*

THE PRIEST[1]

by IRWIN SHAW

THE priest walked leisurely across the Besançon bridge. The Doubs flowed swiftly past, springlike and ruffled and green, carrying with it a bright mountain breeze through the sunny valley. The priest was round

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and small, and his dark, tanned face was rosy and cheerful in the pleasant morning as he walked with little steps next to the stone balustrade, keeping off to the side as a tank marked with the black cross rumbled past a wagonload of cabbages into town. Two young blond paratroopers, with their caps off, were leaning on the balustrade, staring quietly into the rushing water, their hair blowing in the wind, and the priest stopped next to them and stood by their side, looking east to the mountains.

"Very pretty morning," the priest said, smiling.

"Excuse us, Father," one of the paratroopers said haltingly, "we do not speak French. We speak only German."

The priest shrugged, smiled, patted one of the boys, in a fatherly gesture, on the shoulder. "*Guten Tag*," he said, moving off.

"*Auf Wiedersehn* Father," the boy said, standing up straight. He was almost a foot taller than the priest and he seemed very young — seventeen, eighteen, perhaps — standing there with his hair blowing over his unlined, rather pale face.

The priest moved on, his small, scuffed, dusty shoes making a little mincing pattern under the swinging, worn folds of his cassock. He walked slowly along the busy street, pleased with the morning traffic, nodding agreeably at the housewives with their net shopping bags stuffed with vegetables. He stopped in front of one of the shops which was used as an art gallery, his dark, round face grave with judgment, and looked at a local painter's water color of the Besançon cathedral.

In the same window, by the same artist, there were three plump, long-legged nudes lying in abandoned positions on rugs and sofas, and the priest glanced rather hastily at the pink and fleshy confections. A little grin played around the corner of his mouth as he turned away from the window and continued up the street.

He crossed the cobbled square at the end of the street, and, holding the skirts of his cassock, skipped nimbly and goodnaturedly to dodge a large German Army truck that was rumbling through, and, a little out of breath, and smiling, walked to a table on the open terrace of the large café that stood under the new foliage of the trees along one side of the square. The man sitting at the table stood up as the priest approached.

"Good morning, Father," he said, holding a chair for the priest and smiling with pleasure.

"Good morning, my son." The priest sat down, smiling at him but sighing, too, as a fat man does at sudden changes of position.

The man seated himself beside the priest, so that they both could look out over the square and enjoy the fresh bustle of the spring morning. He was a large, slender man, with weary dark eyes and a sharp mouth, and he was dressed in faded workman's clothes, with old, washed oil and grease stains evident here and

there in the worn cloth.

"I hope," said the priest, "I didn't keep you waiting long."

"I just arrived," the man said.

The waiter trotted to their table. "*Messieurs*," he said.

"White wine for me," said the priest.

"Two," said the other man.

The waiter trotted off.

The man in workman's clothes surveyed the priest fondly but with amusement. "Solomon," he said, "you're getting fatter every week."

The priest sighed. "Flesh is the curse of man. I live on cabbage and skimmed milk and I walk a hundred kilometres a week up and down mountain roads and I grow more and more like a pin cushion. Still, Maurice, in a way it has its points. Everyone expects a priest to be fat."

"That's true," said Maurice.

The waiter came back with the two glasses of white wine and the saucers. "*Messieurs*," he said, serving them. He trotted off.

The priest looked after him, noticing that there was no one at the nearby tables. "All right, Maurice," he said.

Maurice sipped his wine. "In Marcel Artois's barn, in the hayloft . . ."

"Yes," said the priest.

"On the road to Epinal."

"I know the house." The priest sipped his drink, nodding absently, his eyes squinted a little, looking out over the square.

"Two Sten guns with a thousand rounds of ammunition."

"Well," said the priest.

"Three Enfield rifles with two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition. A Luger and six grenades. How many men does Philip have with him?"

"Ten."

"Does that include you?"

The priest nodded. "That includes me."

"The difficulty with the child," Maurice said loudly as two German lieutenants passed, "is that he refuses to recognize the authority of his mother."

"I will come by Wednesday afternoon," the priest said clearly, "and attempt to reason with him."

"There will be a gasoline convoy passing the crossroads two miles north of Epinal around eleven o'clock tomorrow night," said Maurice. "Ordinarily the convoys are lightly guarded in this area, and there is brush right down to the roadside, and they stop at the crossroads for a minute or two to wait for stragglers. Tell Philip I suggest that that is the most profitable place."

"I'll tell him," said the priest.

"However, he understands," Maurice said, "that it is his business and I am merely offering suggestions."

"I'll tell him," said the priest.

"*Messieurs?*" The waiter was standing over them, questioning.

"Nothing more for me, thank you," said the priest.

Maurice put down the money for the drinks and the waiter cleared away the glasses and the saucers.

"Gasoline trucks," said Maurice,

"make a very satisfactory target. They have a tendency to blow up."

"Philip will be pleased." The priest nodded again, with a trace of amusement in his dark eyes.

"Tell Philip I pray that God smiles upon the enterprise," said Maurice very seriously.

The priest smiled a little. "I will pass on yours and God's good wishes."

Maurice turned and stared soberly at the priest for the first time. "Solomon," he said softly, "I think you are taking too much of a risk."

The priest grinned. "Again," he said, "the old song."

"But to pretend to be a priest." Maurice shook his head. "You're always on the verge of being discovered. Any curé with his eyes half open — any sudden or unexpected situation . . ."

Solomon looked around him, his eyes crinkled. "I know this will offend your deep religious sensibilities, Maurice," he said, "but it is amazing how little people expect of the servants of the Church. And priests are always rambling around poking their noses into other people's business; they make perfect messengers for the underground. If we could really get the holy men of France into the movement, we would have a system of intelligence better than any telephone network."

"The Church has its own spiritual problems," Maurice said bleakly.

"Forgive me." Solomon stretched out his hand and touched Maurice's arm. "I mean no offense."

"It still strikes me as dangerous," Maurice said.

Solomon shook his head. "Look at me," he said.

Maurice stared at him. "Well?"

"In every magazine," Solomon said, "on every wall, there are pictures of criminals against Germany who look just like me — Jews, swarthy, with thick lips and hooked noses. Why, Maurice," Solomon said, grinning, "I could make a fortune as a photographer's model in Berlin."

Maurice chuckled. "I must admit —"

"But dressed like this —" Solomon shrugged. "A priest is expected to look like anything at all in the world. Anyway, I've got away with it for three years now. I couldn't conduct mass, but I tell my beads in public, and I carry a breviary and read a little Latin, and I got a smattering of the sacraments from Father Morand before they killed him, and my papers look more authentic than a monastery full of Benedictine brothers, and the cassock is very handy when it comes to hiding my pistol."

Maurice stood up, smiling. "You always win this argument. Still, it gives me a chill every time I see you pass a church."

"I promise to unfrock myself," Solomon said, "ten minutes after the Germans are out of France."

"Well," said Maurice, "I must get back to work." They shook hands. "Goodbye, Father."

"I promise to do nothing to disgrace the cloth," Solomon said gravely.

"God be with you, my son."

Solomon sat at the table in the playful, sunny wind, watching Maurice cross the square. Maurice had a square, upright way of walking, and, knowing him, Solomon felt that by his walk Maurice betrayed himself to all the world — honest, righteous, devoid of subservience or fear. Each time, after their meetings, when they said goodbye, Solomon was moved by worriment and sorrow for his friend and a bitter sense that they would not meet again. The trick was, in their business, to feel nothing — no affection, no sympathy, no regrets for the dead and dying. But fighting beside men in this obscure war, with your lives on the tips of one another's tongues a hundred times a day, with your life dependent every moment on their rectitude and sacrifice, you found yourself loving the good ones better than a wife or a son, and then the trick, of course, did not work.

Solomon sighed and stood up heavily, pulling his cassock down. He started back across the terrace, but at that moment a canvas-covered Army truck drove up and soldiers jumped out.

A young lieutenant said loudly, "Nobody will move, if you please. All the patrons of this establishment will come with me, if you please."

Solomon looked at the corner to make sure that Maurice had disappeared, and then sat down, sighing like a fat man, waiting for the Germans to reach him.

The interior of the truck was dark and crowded with some twenty patrons of the café. An odor of fear hung over the twenty heads, and people attempted to remain frigid and remote from neighbors pressing on all sides.

"This is a formidable nuisance," one gentleman said in a loud voice, looking angrily at the impassive guard at the rear of the truck. "I have a very important business engagement at one o'clock. And I have a pass signed personally by General Meister himself, who is a personal acquaintance of mine."

"I have a personal request," a voice from somewhere near the front of the truck cut into the semi-gloom. "Please keep personally quiet."

"I will remember that voice," said the personal acquaintance of General Meister threateningly.

Solomon wriggled a little on his bench and his two neighbors looked at him sharply.

"Excuse me," he said apologetically. "A fat man finds it difficult to be comfortable in his clothes." He put his hands under his cassock, through the side slits, and pulled at his belt.

"What's the matter?" a man across the aisle muttered. "The priest wearing a corset?"

Two or three of the men tittered sourly.

"Excuse me again," Solomon said, lifting himself a little from the narrow wooden bench, under which there were some tow chains loosely stowed.

"Only the priests," said one neighbor loudly, "still remain uncomfortably fat in France."

Solomon sat back once more, sighing, a tiny smile on his lips in the darkness. Below him, hidden by the chains, lay the small pistol he had contrived to loosen from his belt and drop there.

"What did you have for dinner last night, Father?" his neighbor asked unpleasantly. "A whole stuffed duck?"

"God be with you, my son," Solomon said serenely, as the truck rattled into the courtyard of Gestapo headquarters.

Solomon was sleeping when they came to his cell and opened the door. It was near dawn, and dark and cold, and he woke shivering when the two S.S. men drew back the bolt and shone the beam of the electric lantern in his face as he lay on the wooden bench that served as a bed.

"You," one of the jailers said. "Get up."

Solomon sat up, rubbing the ruffled thin hair on the top of his head, still half caught in the sharp darkness in the vague, delicious dream he'd been having, in which he had been eating a large dinner in a warm, sunny café in Marseille. A warm, peppery soup and lobster with a tomato sauce . . .

"Well," he said, blinking, struggling with the old, familiar cold knot of fear at the sight of the black uniforms, "well, gentlemen."

"Get up."

Solomon stood up.

"Are you dressed?" The man with the lantern played it up and down the ragged cassock.

"Yes." Solomon swallowed and felt himself shiver, thin waves of cold trembling from his groin upward, finally tightening the skin on his forehead and around his ears in little spasms.

"This way," said the man with the flashlight.

Between the two S.S. men, Solomon walked out of the cell and down a stone corridor, his knees hurting as though the act of walking was a shocking and unnatural activity. Too bad, too bad, Solomon thought, licking the corners of his lips dryly, as he followed the dark figure along the dim stone. He had thought that he was going to get away with it. His papers had been in perfect order, excellently forged, and they had searched him only perfunctorily and questioned him hardly at all, and had even been slightly apologetic, or as apologetic as you could ever expect a German to be. When he had dropped off to his cold sleep, he had really thought they would release him in the morning. Well, he thought wryly, there are several kinds of release.

The S.S. men stopped in front of a door.

"There's a man in there who's going to be shot in a few minutes," the man carrying the lantern said. "He wants the last rites of the Church. Ordinarily we are not so agreeable, but" — with a small grin in the weak light — "since we had the Church so handy

this morning, we saw no harm in letting him make his soul comfortable. I myself am a Catholic and I understand that a man, before he . . . At any rate, you have fifteen minutes." He swung the door open and put his lantern down on the floor inside the cell.

Solomon walked slowly in and stood still as the door closed behind him. The lantern diffused a thin, pale light along the floor, leaving the corners and walls of the cell in heavy darkness. A man was standing with his back to the door, his head lost in the shadows in the bare room. He turned when the sound of the Germans at the door had ceased.

"Father," he said softly but mechanically, as though he had rehearsed the speech, "I am very glad you came. I have lived by the Church all my life and I believe in the life everlasting and I wish to make my peace with God in accordance with the sacraments before facing judgment." The voice was bruised and muffled in the shadowy room, as though it came from a throat and lips that had been sorely torn and battered, but Solomon recognized it.

"We have fifteen minutes, my son," he said, trying to control the sorrow in his own throat. He stepped forward so that Maurice could see his face.

Maurice slowly lifted his eyes to look at Solomon. His lips were puffed and cut and three teeth were missing, with the blood still coming from the sockets. He held his hands stiffly in front of him. They were torn and swollen.

"The Germans told me," Maurice said evenly, "that I was lucky to be killed on just this night, being a good Catholic. They happened to have a priest here and they were releasing him in the morning. Shall we begin, Father?"

"Are you sure?" Solomon could not keep his voice from trembling.

"Yes, Father," said Maurice, staring at the door of the cell, behind which the Germans might or might not be listening.

Solomon sat on the small three-legged stool in the center of the room, and stiffly, with the pale light making his ruined face look clotted and grotesque, Maurice kneeled before him.

The jail was absolutely quiet and Solomon could hear the breath whistling brokenly through Maurice's smashed nose. Solomon closed his eyes, trying to remember some scraps of what he had learned from Father Morand before the Germans killed him.

"Son, I will hear your confession now," he said, surprised at the clarity and steadiness of his own voice.

Maurice bowed his head at Solomon's knee. "Forgive me, Father," he said "for my sins." Then, in the quiet night, he confessed. He confessed to the sin of doubt, the sins of anger and murder, the sins of envy and desire, the sin of despair. Kneeling rigidly, his wounded hands resting for support on Solomon's knees, he spoke soberly and clearly, his voice swelling occasionally in the stone room, loud enough to be heard through the open grating of the oak door, if anyone

vere listening there.

As the voice went on, Solomon remembered another man he had talked with, played another game with, before death. It was when he was a boy of fourteen and a neighbor was dying and too weak to leave the house, and Solomon had gone every afternoon and played chess with the dying man in the sickroom. The man had once been fat and red of face, but now his skin was yellow and old and hung in loose folds from his bones. He was an avid player and loved to win, and occasionally cheated, moving pieces surreptitiously and taking back moves, falling back to his pillows in exhausted triumph after the game was over. Solomon had played with him on the day of his death, and at the funeral had watched with dry eyes as the coffin was lowered, the mourners and the cold earth and stone crosses of the cemetery somehow mixed in his mind with bishops taking pawns and black wooden knights held in a yellow hand advancing over red squares. Ever since then, death and chess had lain in troubled confusion in his mind — funerals and ivory, flowers and squares, tears and pawns tumbled in a box, mingling in obscure, painful symbols in his brain. As he regarded his friend, kneeling before him, he felt as though he were betraying him in this double game of priest and chessman, and he wrenched at his will to focus all his pity and affection on the dying man. He put his hand out humbly and touched his friend. The Jews did it differently, he thought. They went into death hot and guilty, as to a roaring battle in a dark, bloody, doubtful abyss, intercession with their wrathy, fitful God not to be hoped for. He thought of the times he had seen Maurice coldly skirt death, and the times he had seen him wash his child's face, and of the times he had seen Maurice kill, with a rather abstracted, calm, regretful air, and of the times he had seen him walk side by side with his wife, dressed for Sunday, on the road to church.

As the voice went on in the cold stone room, Solomon thought of the times he had looked at Maurice's slender, strained face and known deep in his heart that this man was going to die before their business came to an end. You felt that about yourself from time to time, and often about others, and you took a drink or you got into an argument and tried to forget it, but he had been sure of Maurice. Solomon was not a religious man and he doubted that God would condemn Maurice because he had been shriven by a Jew, but he looked closely at Maurice to see if the orthodox Catholic soul, so obedient to the ordered sacraments and hierarchy, was suffering at the deception. But Maurice's face and voice were calm and clear, as though he were being granted absolution for all his earthly deeds by the Bishop of Rome himself.

Finally the droning, broken voice stopped in the cold cell. Somewhere down the corridor there was the chilly clank of steel, and a young German voice singing the mournful words of

"Lili Marlene," the sorrowing, sentimental melody hanging cloyingly on the stale, condemned, frozen air. Solomon stared at the austere, destroyed face of his friend. If there were only some way of giving him one word to carry with him to the final wall, one word to tell him — you are loved, you will not be forgotten, we do not believe the shallow coffin and the quick limepit are the end, we will mention your name later in the century. As his hands groped in a small, lost gesture before him, there was the sound of steps outside the door and the fiddling with the lock. He blindly ruffled the pages of his breviary and read a scrap of Latin for the absolution, and, as the door swung open, made vague, wandering motions with his hands, from some dim memory of another deathbed.

Maurice stood up as the Germans came in. "I am very happy, Father," he said courteously as the Germans bound his hands, "that you were here tonight. I hope it has not interfered too much with your business in these parts."

Solomon stared at the Germans, knowing that Maurice was telling him he had not broken, that he had told the Germans nothing, that no plans were invalidated by his death.

"It has not interfered, son," he said. He stood up and followed them out to the corridor and watched Maurice walk away between the Germans, the familiar walk unchanged by the prison, or the cords on his wrist, or the knowledge that the wall was waiting. Maurice walked away as he had walked away from the terrace of the café, the lean shoulders set square and upright, betraying himself to all the world.

We have been particularly fortunate in discovering "new" Mr. Campion stories — stories by Margery Allingham which have never before been published in the United States — that is, until they appeared in EQMM. You'll recall "The Question Mark" (issue of Fall 1941), "The Definite Article" (November 1942), "Safe as Houses" (March 1944), "A Matter of Form" (January 1945), and "The Meaning of the Act" (May 1945). And now "The Magic Hat" — the sixth Mr. Campion story to make its American début in EQMM.

Are you fearful that we have run out of new Campion adventures, scraped the last one from the bottom of our bibliographic barrel? After all, let's be reasonable: six "discoveries" by so famous a detective-story writer as Margery Allingham are enough to satisfy even a gourmand. Yet it would be a sad issue indeed if we were now compelled to describe "The Magic Hat" as the last of EQMM's new Campions.

But don't lose faith, dear reader. The research resources of your Editor have passed, and will continue to pass, many a manhunting miracle. Yes, there are more new Campions to come. They are already signed, sealed, and delivered, already scheduled for early issues. Four more Margery Allingham stories that have not previously appeared in the United States — one straight crime story and three new Campions . . .

The Case of the Magic Hat offers as witty and refreshing a criminological coup as even the most rabid Campion fan could expect. It's all about a little black onyx hat, less than half an inch high, which contains truly magical properties — a tiny Aladdin's Lamp, in 20th Century London, whose genie works strange social and gastronomic miracles. There is also an Allingham character who is "a collector's piece." Indeed, the whole delightful story is just that — "a collector's piece."

THE MAGIC HAT

by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

MR. CAMPION received the hat as a sentimental tribute. Mrs. Wynyard pressed it into his hand at her farewell party at the Braganza on the night before she sailed home to New York.

"I want you to have it," she said, her curly white head held on one side and her plump hand resting lightly on the sleeve of his tail coat. "It's exclusive. I got it from old Wolfgarten in one of those cute little streets off Bond Street, and he gave me his solemn word by everything he feels to be holy that it's quite u-nique. There's not another one in the world, and I want you to keep it to remind you of me and Mr. Honeyball and the grand times we've had this trip."

Hubert Wynyard, who was so good-humored that he let his wife call him anything, even "Mr. Honey-

ball," winked at Campion across his glass.

"So you know," he said. "Don't worry about a speech of thanks. Time's short. Where's that confounded wine waiter?"

So Campion pocketed the hat, which was less than half an inch high and made of onyx, with a cunningly carved agate where the opening for the head should have been, and thought no more about it.

He found it again next time he put on full war paint, which was for the first night of Lorimer's *Carry Over* at the Sovereign Theatre. The occasion was so smart that he was beginning to feel that "sticky" might be the term for it when the curtain descended on the second act and someone touched him on the shoulder. It turned out to be Peter Herrick, looking a trifle pink and disconcerted, which was unusual in one normally so very elegantly at ease.

"I say, old man, I need a spot of support," he muttered. "Can you come?"

There was a note of genuine supplication in the plea, and Campion excused himself from his party and joined him.

"What's up? Going to start a fight?"

His whisper was respectfully amused as they pressed their way through the noisy, perfumed crowd in the corridor.

"I hope not. As a matter of fact that's what I'm trying to avoid. It's social support I need."

Peter had edged into a convenient corner between a gilt settee and an enormous basket of hydrangeas. He was a trifle red about the ears and his vivid blue eyes, which lent his young face most of its charm, were laughing but embarrassed.

"I suddenly caught sight of you," he said, "and I realized you were probably the one man in the world of whom one could ask such a damn silly thing and not get cut for the rest of one's life. Come and back me up like a good bloke. You couldn't look like a duke or something, could you?"

"I don't see why not." Mr. Campion's lean face took on an even more vacant expression. "What's the idea? Whom do I impress?"

"You'll see." Peter was grim. "I'm suspect, old boy. I'm not the thing. Not — er — quite *it*, don't you know. I think someone's spread it around that my old man's a bobby."

Campion's eyebrows appeared above his horn-rimmed spectacles and he began to laugh. Major Herrick was well known to him as one of the Assistant Commissioners and one of the more poker-backed of his acquaintances, while Peter's worst enemy, if he had one, which seemed unlikely, could scarcely accuse him of being unpresentable. The whole situation seemed to Campion to have the elements of humor and he said so, delicately.

"But also very charming," he added cheerfully. "All olde worlde and young-man-what-are-your-intentions. Must you bother about the woman? There *is* a woman, I take it?"

Peter shot a revealing glance at him.

"Ah," he said, "but you wait until you see her. I met her on a boat and then I lost her. Now I've found her again at last, and there's this insane old father and the incredible tick of a fellow they're touting around with them. Come on, old boy, do your stuff. I'm out of my depth altogether. Prudence is embarrassed, and the other two have to be seen to be believed."

A trifle under two minutes later Campion was inclined to agree with half the final statement. Old Mr. Thomas K. Burns was not unbelievable, Norman Whitman was. As for Prudence Burns, he took one look at her slender redheaded loveliness and was prepared to sympathize with any enthusiasm which Peter might evince. The girl was a raving beauty of the modern type. She sat on her gold chair in Box B and smiled up at him with humor and intelligence as well as embarrassment in her brown eyes.

Her escorts were far less pleasant to meet. Old Mr. Burns was a plain man in every sense of the word who had made an enormous amount of money in South Africa. He was in the midst of recounting these two obvious facts to Campion immediately after their introduction when a warning frown from the third member of his party silenced him as though a hand had been placed over his mouth, leaving him deflated. He turned helplessly, an appealing flicker in his small grey eyes.

"This 'ere — I should say, this gentleman is Mr. Norman Whitman," he said, and paused for the name to take effect.

Entirely because he felt it was expected of him, Campion looked interested, while Norman Whitman favored him with a supercilious stare. Campion was puzzled. He saw a plumpish, consequential little person with sleek hair and a pale face in which the eyeglass was a definite mistake. He was well dressed, not to say natty, and from the toes of his shoes to the highlight on his prominent white forehead he was polished until he shone. His voice, which was high, was so carefully modulated as to sound affected, and altogether he exuded an atmosphere of conceit and self-importance which was quite insufferable.

"I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before," he said, making the announcement sound like an accusation. "Not very good acting, is it? I'm afraid poor Emily is a sad disappointment."

Campion had thought that Dame Emily Storm's performance was well up to its usual standard of polished perfection, and said so.

"She always says she's very nervous on first nights," he added.

"Oh, do you know her?" There was real excitement and hero-worship in Prudence Burns's inquiry, and a quality of youthful *naïveté* in her eagerness which made Campion like her.

"My dear child, not the *stage!*" Norman Whitman shook an admonishing finger at the girl and she stared at him blankly, as did they all save old Mr. Burns, who said somewhat hurriedly, "I should think not. Not

likely," and assumed a virtuous expression which was patently false and ill suited to his round, red face.

The incredible Norman leaned over the side of the box.

"Isn't that the Countess?" he exclaimed suddenly. "Is it? Why, of course. Yes, it is. You must all excuse me a moment. I really must go and say 'Hello.'"

He bustled off and Mr. Burns moved into his place and looked down at the frothing pool of clothes and their owners in the stalls below. There was something almost pathetic in his interest, a quality of small-boyishness which Campion found disarming. Peter was less sympathetic. He looked scandalized and crossed over to the girl at once. It seemed only charitable to give him a moment or so, and Campion gallantly concentrated on the father.

Mr. Burns glanced up at him and looked away again.

"He's not there yet," he said and hesitated, adding abruptly because of his embarrassment, "Do you see her?"

"Who?"

"The Countess," said Mr. Burns, lowering his voice to a respectful whisper.

Campion became a little embarrassed also. His fingers deep in his pockets found the onyx hat, and he began to play with it, taking it out and letting it roll idly in his hand. He was standing up in the box, a little behind the old man, who seemed in danger of falling out altogether in his eagerness.

"There he is." Mr. Burns's voice rose in his excitement. "That's her, is it? You don't recognize her, do you?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't," said Campion helplessly as he glanced at the large lady in the crimson cloak who had paused to speak to Norman Whitman in the crowd below. Mr. Burns nodded gloomily as though he had feared as much, and Campion was aware that both he and Peter had lost caste. Having stared his fill, the old man straightened himself and stepped back.

"Better not let him catch us," he remarked, and coughed explosively but a trifle too late to cover the ill-advised statement. For the first time he was able to give Campion his attention.

"You're in business, I suppose?" he inquired, regarding him morosely.

The tall thin man in the horn-rimmed spectacles grinned unhappily. The *bourgeois gentilhomme* is an age-old character who moves some people to laughter, but others are apt to find his wistful gaucherie a little dispiriting, and Campion was of the latter category. He was so anxious not to hurt in any way that he hesitated over his answer.

"Not exactly," he said, casually, and flicked the little hat into the air, catching it again and rolling it over between his fingers. The gesture was so idle that he was scarcely aware that he had made it, so that Mr. Burns's reaction came as a complete surprise to him.

All he saw at first was that the old man's eyes were positively bulging and

that there were pale patches in the mottled crimson of his cheeks. The next moment Prudence's father's entire attitude towards his new acquaintance underwent a complete change. His depression vanished and he became more than merely friendly. Within two minutes he had offered Campion a cigar, told him his hotel, begged him to visit him, and imparted a tip for the Stock Exchange which his somewhat startled visitor happened to know was a good one. Even the young people, who were engrossed in themselves, were aware of the change of front. Indeed, Campion felt that the entire theatre must notice it. Old Mr. Burns was not subtle.

In the midst of his expansiveness he glanced at Peter and, returning to Campion, jerked his head at the young man.

"Known him long?" he inquired with husky confiding.

"A great many years," Campion assured him.

"Oh, he's all right then, is he?" The red face was very serious.

"He's one of my best friends." Campion had no intention of sounding severe, but the question was bewildering and in spite of himself the words came coldly.

Mr. Burns took a rebuke. "That's all right then," he said, sighing. "To tell you the honest truth, I'm not exactly in my place yet. A bit out of touch."

He glanced up shyly to see how this confidence had been received and, noting that Campion remained affable if blank, added in a conspiratorial whisper: "You've no idea what a weight off my mind that is."

Campion began to feel that the weight on his own mind was considerable, and he was on the point of launching out into a minor campaign of discreet inquiry when the curtain bell rang and he was forced to rejoin his own party. Mr. Burns let him go with great reluctance but consoled himself a little when Peter accepted his invitation to remain.

Campion hurried down the corridor in a state of complete mystification. He was used to being a success but not a riot, and the single startled glance which Peter had turned upon him at parting made him laugh whenever he thought of it, but he was thankful he had not been pressed for an explanation.

On the stairs he passed Norman Whitman. The little man was bustling back to his seat and puffing consequentially as he hurried. He glanced at Campion and nodded to him.

"She spared me a word, the dear thing," he said, as if the intelligence was good news of the highest importance, and trotted on out of sight. Campion glanced after him and somewhere in the far depths of his memory something stirred, only to be lost again immediately.

There are few things more irritating than an elusive impression that one has seen someone or something before, and as he went on down the staircase and re-entered the now darkened auditorium Campion walked

slowly, his forehead wrinkled. Somewhere; sometime had he seen that plump little figure waddling along; but where and when escaped him utterly. It was most tantalizing.

He did not see Peter again that evening, but the following morning the boy telephoned.

"I say," the young voice sounded enthusiastic over the wire, "that was pretty sensational, wasn't it? How did you do it?"

"Did it last?" Campion inquired cautiously.

"Rather! We're all going off to the races this morning. I'm more than grateful to you. I knew you were remarkable in many ways but I wasn't prepared for a miracle. I'm still bewildered. Do you realize that I'd had the cold shoulder with icicles on it until you arrived? But now I'm the old man's white-headed boy. What did you say?"

With pardonable weakness, Campion was loath to cast down his laurels.

"Nothing much," he said truthfully. "I talked through my hat a bit, you know."

"I have no doubt you did, old boy," Peter agreed laughing, "but what did you actually say? Hang it all, you've altered the man's entire attitude."

"I scarcely spoke," said Campion, regretting that this exactitude was hardly convincing. "How about the 'gentleman friend'? Did you cut much ice with him?"

"No." Peter's tone carried unutterable contempt. "I'm afraid I scarcely noticed the little twirp. I say, you might let me know how to work the oracle."

Since he had no idea at all and could therefore hardly be helpful, Campion thought it best to change the subject.

"A very pretty girl," he ventured.

Peter rose to the bait like a salmon to a fly.

"Amazing," he said warmly. "I don't mind telling you I'm not coherent on the subject."

It was nearly ten minutes later when Campion was at last allowed to hang up the receiver and he re-settled himself, grinning. Peter had underestimated himself.

Thinking over the entire incident, Campion was inclined to wash his hands of the whole affair, putting it down as one of those odd things that do sometimes occur. There are degrees of oddness, however, and the next time the onyx hat came under his serious consideration it was in circumstances which could hardly be disregarded.

The following Wednesday was the seventeenth and on the seventeenth of September, whenever he was in London, Campion took his Aunt Eva to dinner after the Dahlia Show. This was one of those family fixtures which begin as a graceful gesture in commemoration of past favors in the way of timely financial assistance in mid-term, and may very well end as awful responsibilities; but Aunt Eva might easily have been worse. She was a spry little old lady in brown

velvet and bangles, and her mind was almost entirely devoted to horticulture, whereas, of course, it might easily have been Pekinese or other people's love affairs.

It was a time-honored arrangement between them that she should choose the restaurant and, because of her preference for flower names, they sometimes dined well and sometimes appallingly, which was why Campion was not particularly astonished when he arrived at her hotel to find her all set, in garnets and gold galloon, to visit the Gillyflower.

"I warn you it may be expensive," she said, settling herself in the taxi, "but I remembered poor Marchant left you all that money in the spring, so I dare say you can afford it. Don't hesitate to mention it, my dear boy, if you'd rather not."

"Darling, I can't think of a place in which I should enjoy seeing you more," he assured her, and spoke with a certain amount of truth, for the Gillyflower was an exotic bloom and he was interested to see what she would make of it.

He had visited the place once himself about three months before, just after it opened, and had found it flashy, exorbitant and badly staffed, but there had been an air of ultra-smart sophistication about it which he thought might possibly strike a new note after the homely sobriety of the Manor House dining room.

They found the place noisy but not crowded. It did not yet exude the cold depression of failure, but neither was there the cheerful blare of assured success. Aunt Eva was able to choose a table with an excellent view of the floral display round the band platform, although it only gave her an oblique angle on the cabaret. All the same the meal was not one of their triumphs. The staff still left much to be desired and the food, although quite extraordinarily pretentious, was certainly not cooked by a master.

The quality of the service began to irritate Campion about halfway through the meal. A dirty plate, a forgotten order, a leaking ice-pail, two delays, and impossibly cold coffee reduced him by slow stages to a state of politely repressed irritation, and he was relieved that Aunt Eva was too happily engrossed in her subject for the evening, which appeared to be the merits of ground bones as a fertilizer, to notice the many defects in the meal.

However, what with one thing and another it was a trying experience for Campion, and while he was waiting patiently for the second brew of coffee and the wine waiter his fingers encountered the onyx hat and he took it out and began to play with it, rolling it over and over upon the table cloth.

The first thing that happened was that the waiter spilt the coffee. Campion drew back wearily and looked up to receive his second surprise. He was prepared for some sort of apology but not for abnegation. The unfortunate man was green. He grovelled. He all but wept, and from that moment the

Gillyflower appeared to belong to Mr. Campion.

The change was astounding. The head waiter appeared at his elbow in solicitious friendliness, myrmidons arrived on all sides showering little attentions like so many sallow amorelli, Aunt Eva received a bouquet of Lady Forteviot roses, and Campion was tempted with a Napoleon *fine* from a bottle which certainly looked as though it had seen Paris, if not the siege. There was no doubt at all about their sudden rise to importance as guests of the Gillyflower and Campion's eyes grew thoughtful behind his spectacles as he turned the charm over and over.

"That's a nice little hat," remarked Aunt Eva, smiling over her roses.

"Isn't it?" said Campion. "A smart little hat, not to say clever."

Just how clever it was, however, lay as yet unrevealed. That surprise came later when the lady went off to collect her old-fashioned sables and Campion glanced down at a bill for three pounds, seventeen shillings and one penny. On his nod of acceptance the waiter took the bill away. There was no charge, of course, he said, and seemed hurt that the guest should suggest it. "But naturally," no charge at all.

Campion gaped at the man, who smiled at him with bland satisfaction and expressed the pious hope that he had enjoyed the meal. Campion was taking out his notecase in stolid defiance when the *maître d'hôtel*, round as a football and sleek as a seal, appeared to corroborate the first man's story.

"No charge, sir," he said. "No, no, no charge. If only you had telephoned we should have been so happy to reserve you a better table."

Campion looked down at the onyx hat which sat, prim and shining, on the edge of an ashtray. The man followed his glance and beamed.

"You are satisfied?" he inquired.

Campion flicked the trinket with his forefinger and a memory bringing enlightenment in its train blazed up suddenly in his mind.

"That pays the waiter, does it?" he said.

And then they both laughed; but Campion laughed all the way home.

It was over a fortnight later when he received a visit from Peter Herrick. That young man was in an indignant mood.

"I say, I was glad you 'phoned," he said, coming into the study in the Piccadilly flat like a small electric storm. "I was just making up my mind to come down on you for another spot of help when you rang. Your success with old man Burns was so sensational that I was going to risk a second appeal. You wouldn't care to be the complete hero and have another go, would you?"

His host, who was mixing the drinks, looked round from the cocktail cabinet and grinned.

"My influence wore off, did it?" he said. "I wondered if it might."

Peter sat down. "It weakened," he admitted. "It's that unspeakable little

toot Whitman, you know. He's got an idiotic line in pseudo smart-set talk that gets the old boy all of a flutter. When we're alone he's perfectly happy, apart from the fact that he wants to talk about you still, which is curious — forgive me, but you know what I mean."

He broke off to laugh at himself.

"I'm an ass," he said. "The whole truth of the matter — and you may be astounded to hear it, for I'm completely bewildered by it myself — the truth is that I'm nuts about Prudence, Campion, absolutely nuts. I want her to marry me, and she's dead keen on the idea, which is another staggering piece of luck, and, logically speaking, everything ought to be pretty good. However, the old boy is completely taken in by Whitman. Whitman sells him the most fantastic hints on etiquette and he falls for it every time."

Campion looked sympathetic.

"Old Burns has an idea that Whitman is some sort of social capture, I take it?" he ventured.

"That's it, I'm afraid." Peter was embarrassed. "It's ludicrous, of course, and very uncomfortable, especially as the old lad himself is quite all right, really. Apart from this fantastic snob complex he's a darned interesting, shrewd old chap. Whitman is simply taking advantage of his pet weakness. Prudence says her old man has always had a touch of it, but it's got worse since he retired and settled down to enjoy his cash. Still, for Prudence's sake I'd put up with Whitman if it wasn't for this last piece of cheek. He's had the impudence to suggest that he might marry her himself."

"Has he, by George?" said Campion. "That's sailing near the wind, isn't it?"

"I thought so." Peter spoke with feeling. "Unfortunately the old man is half sold on the idea. He's anxious for Prudence to be happy, of course, for he's dead set on doing his duty and that sort of thing, but you can see that the idea of the socialite son-in-law is going over big. What is so infuriating is that he's being taken in. Whitman is about as bogus as they go. He's quite sincere, I expect, but look at him! What is he? A wretched little tufthunter with no more brains than that soda-water syphon. Wasn't that your impression?"

"Since you press me, no," said Mr. Campion judicially. "No, old boy, I'm sorry, but it wasn't. I think you underestimate him. However, that's beside the point. What do I do now? Have you anything in mind?"

"Well ——" Peter was evidently leading up to a delicate subject with some trepidation. "I may as well make a clean breast of it. Old Burns wants to take Prudence, Whitman and myself out to a meal tonight to 'talk things over.' It went through my mind that if I had the infernal cheek to ask you to join the party you might be able to do your celebrated heart-softening act once again. The old boy will be tickled to death, of course. He's worried my life out to get hold of you again. But I do see that it's a

ghastly imposition from your point of view." He paused unhappily. "It's the limit," he said. "The ultimate outside edge. But she's grown so darned important to me that I'm forgetting the ordinary decencies."

"My dear chap, not at all. I think it might be an extremely jolly gathering." Campion sounded positively enthusiastic. "There's only one thing, though," he hurried on, while his visitor eyed him in astonishment, "you don't think you could fix it so that we went either to the Gillyflower or the Maison Grecque?"

The other man sat up, his eyes wide with suspicion. "Why on earth do you suggest that?"

Campion evaded his glance.

"They're the only two places in London at which one can eat, aren't they?" he murmured idiotically.

"Look here, Campion, what do you know about all this business?" Peter was scrambling out of his chair. "You might have been imitating Whitman, except that he's got an extra half-dozen perfectly appalling places of the same type on his list."

"Half a dozen others, has he?" Campion seemed impressed. "What a thorough bird he is."

"Thorough?" said Peter. "I thought he was off his head."

"Oh, dear me, no. He's an intelligent chap. I thought that the first time I saw him. You'll fix it then, will you? Either the Gillyflower or the Maison Grecque."

The younger man stretched out his hand for the telephone.

"I'll get on to the old man this minute before you can change your mind," he announced. "Don't say I didn't warn you it might be a trying party. You're an astonishing chap, aren't you? I didn't know you'd ever seen Whitman before I introduced him. Where do you keep all this information?"

"Under my little hat," said Campion innocently. "All under my remarkable little hat."

The first thirty-five minutes of Mr. Thomas Burns's little dinner party at the Maison Grecque amply justified Peter Herrick's worst fears. The restaurant itself was a trifle more pretentious than the Gillyflower, and on this occasion the service was even more ostentatiously attentive than that which had distinguished the latter half of Aunt Eva's night out. Mr. Burns himself was considerably subdued by the fuss accorded him and frequently fingered his tight evening collar in a wistful fashion which made his desire to take it off as clear as if he had announced it in so many words.

Campion, glancing round the table, decided that Prudence was embarrassed by the avowed object of the gathering, but there was a line of determination in her firm mouth and an expression in her eyes when she glanced at Peter which made him like her.

Mr. Herrick was frankly distrait and unhelpful, while Campion did his gallant best with the conversation.

The only person in the party who

seemed both to experience no discomfort himself and to be capable of ignoring it in his fellows was Mr. Norman Whitman. All through the over-elaborate meal he sat bored and superior, smiling superciliously at Campion's conversational efforts and only opening his own mouth to murmur an occasional comment on some celebrity whom he saw, or thought he saw, among the neighboring diners.

Campion, who made a hobby of what he was pleased to call "tick-fancying," could hardly refrain from the open gloat. The man was a collector's piece. His pallid shining forehead could express "refaned distaste" with more downright vulgarity than seemed possible on a single surface and he revealed a line in "host deflation" which had to be heard and seen to be believed.

It soon became clear to everybody that Mr. Burns's hope of a "little friendly chat about love and courtship" was doomed, and the young people were openly relieved. Mr. Burns himself was depressed and Norman remained aloof but condescending.

Towards the end of the meal, however, the host brightened. A childlike gleam of anticipation came into his eyes, and Campion caught him glancing towards him once or twice with disarming eagerness. Moreover, every now and again he felt in his waistcoat pocket and at last, when coffee was served and Peter had carried Prudence off on to the dance floor, he could deny himself no longer but took a small onyx hat out of its hiding place and let it roll over and over in his plump palm.

Norman Whitman frowned at him warningly, but the Burns blood was up and the old man ignored his mentor. He was watching Campion with the same shy delight and triumph which is displayed by the child who suddenly produces a new toy as good as the other boy's.

Campion did not look at Norman Whitman. He stretched out his hand.

"That's very attractive, isn't it?" he said taking up the charm.

The old man laughed. "It's quite genuine," he said. "It's the real McCoy, isn't it?"

Still Campion did not glance at the third man, who was watching the incident with a face as innocent of expression as a ball of wool.

"I think so." Campion spoke softly and frowned. It seemed such a shame.

"I think so, too." The old man chuckled over the words. "Waiter, bring my bill!"

It did not work.

After five minutes of such unbearable embarrassment and chagrin that Champion could have wept for him, Mr. Burns had to face that indubitable fact.

He rolled the hat, he placed it black and shining in the midst of the white table cloth, he waved it frantically beneath the waiter's nose, but the wooden face did not change and the man remained polite but immovable as a rock while the bill stayed folded on the table.

There came a moment — it was nicely timed — when both Mr. Burns and Mr. Campion looked at Norman Whitman. It was a steady inspection which lasted for some little time. The fat man did not change color. His boiled eyes remained blank and his expression reserved. After a while, however, the silence became unendurable and he rose with a conciliatory laugh.

"I'll see the manager for you, Burns," he murmured. "You must forgive these fellows. They have to be very careful."

If the implied insult was unmistakable it was also a master-stroke, and the old man, whose eyes had been slowly narrowing, permitted himself a gleam of hope.

All the same he did not speak. He and Campion sat in silence watching the consequential figure bustling across the room, to disappear finally behind the bank of flowers which masked the exit.

After allowing his host due time for meditation, Campion leaned back in his chair and took out his own onyx hat, which he placed on the table beside the other. They were identical; two little toppers exact in every detail.

"I had mine given me," Campion observed.

Burns raised his eyes from the two trinkets and stared.

"Given you?" he said. "Some gift. I thought I had a fair enough bank roll, but I couldn't afford to give presents like that."

The lean man in the horn-rimmed spectacles looked apologetic.

"A very charming American and her husband wanted to give me a little keepsake to remind me of their visit here," he said. "They bought this at Wolfgarten's in Cellini Street. He told them it was exclusive and unique, but then he has his own definition of the term. 'Unique' to Wolfgarten means one for London and one for New York. He may have charged them about a fiver. I — er — I thought I'd better tell you."

Mr. Burns was sitting up stiffly, his face blank and his small eyes grown hard. Suddenly he swung round in his chair and gazed at the bank of flowers. Campion put out a gently restraining hand.

"Hold on," he said. "It's entirely up to you. I've taken the liberty of arranging it so that you can have him if you want him. At this moment, I imagine, our Norman is in the manager's office asking why the devil the arrangement which he made here has been ignored. You see, three weeks ago he opened an account of twenty pounds each at quite a number of restaurants on the understanding that anyone who displayed a small onyx top hat, which he showed them, should be taken without question to be his personal representative. It was a curious request, but after all the personal token, the signet ring and so on, has served this sort of purpose from time immemorial, and the restaurants didn't stand to lose anything while each held his twenty pounds."

Mr. Burns swallowed. "Go on," he said.

"Well," Campion was even more diffident, "just now I'm afraid the manager may be explaining to Whitman that the particular twenty pounds which he invested here has been used up. Doubtless he is bringing bills to prove it. I've been eating here and at the Gillyflower until my little hat wouldn't do its trick any more, and I fear I must owe our Norman quite a considerable sum. However, that's beside the point. What is important is that the house detective is sitting in the manager's office. Now the story which he will hear from Mr. Whitman is a perfectly innocent if eccentric one. But should he subsequently get a rather different tale from you — as he certainly has from me — well, it won't be toppers and tails and bogus countesses for our Norman for some time, will it? I'm so sorry to bring it out like this, but it seemed the only satisfactory and safe way if you should decide to prosecute."

The old man sat perfectly still for some moments. He made a stolid, powerful figure, his shoulders bowed and his head, with its thatch of thick grey hair, thrust forward as his eyes dwelt upon the two hats. After a while he glanced up and caught Campion's eye. There was a moment of mutual understanding and then, to the young man's intense relief, they both laughed.

Mr. Burns laughed for rather a long time for one who has been suddenly confronted with unpleasant news, and Campion was growing a trifle apprehensive when the older man pulled himself together and picked up his own hat.

"Five thousand pounds," he said, looking at it. "I thought it was a darned sight too cheap to be sound."

"Too cheap for what?"

"Free food for life at all the best restaurants in London for as many guests up to six as I cared to bring," said the old man calmly. "Wait a minute. I'm not so daft as I look. It was a good story. Norman's a smart fellow. He went to work very carefully. I'd known him about six weeks before he brought me in here one night, and I don't mind admitting that he impressed me with his way of doing things."

He paused and looked at Campion shyly. "I'm not what you might call a social swell," he said. "No, no, don't be nice about it; I'm a fool but not a damned fool. I came over here with plenty of money and plenty of time. I meant to get in with the right lot and learn all the tricks and the refinements that I'd read about, and I got just about what I was asking for. Norman looked all right to me. Obviously I was wrong. Anyway, he taught me one or two useful things about the clothes to wear and so on, and then we came in here and he did his act with his damn-fool hat.

"I was impressed. These stiffs of waiters always get me flustered, and when I saw it all go off so smoothly I was attracted. It seemed to be so easy,

so dignified and gentlemanly. No money passing and so on. Well, I asked him about it, and he pretended he didn't want to tell me. But I'm a tenacious sort of chap, and presently out it came. It was a most ingenious spiel. This hat represented the Top Hat Club, he said, a club so exclusive that only the very best people in the land belonged to it . . . royalty and so on. He also explained that, like all these very superior affairs, it was practically secret because the restaurant only entered into the arrangement if they were certain they were getting only the very best people."

He broke off and grinned sheepishly.

"Well, you can guess the rest," he said. "It seemed quite reasonable the way he told it, and the business side of it was sound. If you can buy an annuity for life why shouldn't you buy a meal ticket, providing your honesty is guaranteed and they know you're not the sort of chap to make money on it by hiring it out? Oh, I'm the mug all right, but he had luck. I happened to see your hat, you see. I didn't mention it to him, of course, because he didn't seem to like you and I didn't want him getting jealous."

"He was going to get you elected to this club, I take it?"

"That's about it, son. Five thousand quid entrance fee. It seemed cheap. I'm fifty-six and I may go on eating in restaurants for another twenty years. But what about you? When did you come into this?"

Campion told his story frankly. He felt it was the very least he could do with those bright eyes watching him suspiciously.

"I remember Norman," he said. "He came back to me. It took me a tremendous time, but after my first free meal at the Gillyflower the whole thing suddenly became as clear as mud. I don't want to depress you, but I'm afraid we've stumbled on the great forefather of all confidence tricks. Years and years ago, just after I came down from Cambridge, I went to Canada, and right out in the wilds I came upon a stock company in an awful little one-eyed town. They were real old barnstormers, the last in the world I should think, and they gave a four-hour program, comprising a melodrama, a farce and a variety show all at one sitting. The farce was one of those traditional country tales which are handed down for generations and have no set form. The actors invent the dialogue as they go along. Well, the standard was frightful, of course, but there was one fat young man who played villains who was at least funny. He had a ridiculous walk, for one thing, and when I saw Whitman bolting down the corridor to your box he reminded me of something. Then of course when I saw the top hat at the dinner table it all came roaring back to me . . . What's the matter?"

Mr. Burns was gazing at him, an incredulous expression growing in his eyes as recollection struggled to life.

"*Touch 'At Pays Waiter!*" he ejaculated, thumping the table with an enormous fist. "Good Lord! My old

grandfather told me that story out in South Africa before I was breeched. I remember it! 'Touch 'At Pays Waiter,' the story of the poor silly bumpkin who was persuaded to exchange his cow for a magic hat. Good lord! Before I was breeched!"

Campion hesitated. "What about Norman?" he suggested. "What do you want to do? There may be a certain amount of publicity and——"

He broke off. The old man was not listening. He sat slumped in his chair, his eyes fixed on the far distance. Presently he began to laugh. He laughed so much that the tears ran down his face and he grew purple and breathless.

"Campion," he began weakly, when he had regained comparative coherence, "Campion, do you recall the end of that story?"

His guest frowned. "No," he said at last. "No, I'm sorry, I'm afraid I don't. It's gone completely. What was it?"

Mr. Burns struggled for air.

"The bumpkin didn't pay," he gasped. "The bumpkin ate the meal and didn't part with the cow. That is what I've done! This was the final try-out. I was supposed to part with the cash tonight. I've got the check already made out here in my wallet. I haven't parted and you've eaten his forty quid.

They were still looking at each other when the young people returned. Prudence regarded them with mild astonishment.

"You two seem to be making a lot of noise," she remarked. "What are you talking about?"

Mr. Burns winked at his companion.

"What would you call it? The Hat Trick?" he suggested.

Campion hesitated. "Hardly cricket," he said.

. . . Our Christmas tale this year is another visit with the Great Cham of literature, the Sage of Fleet Street, the jovial, Jovian Dr. Johnson. "The Stolen Christmas Box" is an 18th century detective story complete with waits and mummers and Yuletide jollification — and complicated by love and larceny.

A note from the author tells us that the story is laid at Streatham, the home of Dr. Sam: Johnson's famous blue-stocking friend, Mrs. Thrale. Bozzy, that fortunate familiar of the sagacious Samuel, did not like Mrs. Thrale; he considered her his rival for "the great man." So we are cautioned to take Boswell's portrait of Mrs. Thrale with a grain of salt. Add salt also to the criminal conceits attributed to that Christmas Eve at Streatham; the crime, the clues, and the conclusions are pure invention à la de la Torre. However, the final and most incredible detail of all — the flight of the clergyman — is a matter of recorded history.

. . . In "The Stolen Christmas Box" Dr. Johnson proves his prowess as a cipherologist. At one point he reels off the names of earlier cryptographers — Polybius, Julius Africanus, Philo Mechanicus, Theodorus Bibliander, Johannes Walchius — all of whom were actual persons. Reference is made also to a "new book of cyphers" in the possession of Mrs. Thrale's husband. This too is fact. The "new book of cyphers" was undoubtedly Philip Thicknesse's A TREATISE ON THE ART OF DECYPHERING, AND OF WRITING IN CYPHER, *published by W. Brown in London in 1772 — two years before the apocryphal events of "The Stolen Christmas Box." But it should be noted that virtually everything in the 1772 "book of cyphers" is to be found in John Wilkins's earlier classic titled* MERCURY: OR THE SECRET AND SWIFT MESSENGER, SHEWING HOW A MAN MAY WITH PRIVACY AND SPEED COMMUNICATE HIS THOUGHTS TO A FRIEND AT A DISTANCE, *published in London more than a century before — in 1641.*

It is interesting to compare the 18th century cryptanalysis of Dr. Johnson with that of more recent masters of secret writing. For example, take the matter of frequency of letters in the English language. In 1774 Dr. Johnson (supposedly) used the following order for the ten most common English letters: e, o, a, i, d, h, n, r, s, t. Sixty-nine years later, Edgar Allan Poe wrote "The Gold-Bug" (first appearance in "The Dollar Newspaper," Philadelphia, June 21 and 28, 1843) and used this succession of characters: e, a, o, i, d, h, n, r, s, t. Except for the transposition of the letters o and a, the orders of frequency are the same. Since Dr. Johnson utilized the sequence given by Philip Thicknesse, and since Poe's is almost identical, it is fairly safe to deduce that Poe was familiar with and indebted to Thicknesse's treatise.

One hundred and twenty-nine years after Dr. Johnson's fictional feat (sixty years after Poe's) Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" (first appearances in "The Strand," December 1903 and "Collier's," December 5, 1903). In this Sherlock Holmes story Doyle listed the predominant letters as: e, t, a, o, i, n, s, h, r, d. The sequence, you will note, has changed radically, but Doyle's order of frequency is closer to the modern cryptographic formula than either Johnson's or Poe's. The currently accepted letter-frequency is e, t, o, a, n, i, r, s, h — memorized conveniently as etoan irsh *— according to Laurence Dwight Smith's* CRYPTOGRAPHY: THE SCIENCE OF SECRET WRITING, *published by W. W. Norton & Co., New York, in 1943. Mr. Smith's "selected bibliography" (page 156 of his book) mentions neither Thicknesse nor John Wilkins — indeed, no "early" treatises at all; the twelve recommended reference books are all 20th century publications with the single exception of Johann Ludwig Klüber's* KRYPTOGRAPHIK, *published by J. G. Cotta, Tübingen, in 1809 — a far cry from the romantic sources of Dr. Johnson and Poe.*

. . . And so, to get back to our mutton and to quote Miss de la Torre again, "Dr. Sam: Johnson continues on his merry way." Further deeds of deduction, further records of ratiocination (18th century style), are either complete in the files or in process of gestation. The stubborn old coot, in the author's own phrase, has already solved the case of "The Flying Highwayman" (fascinating!) but he insists on other tales of 'tecting being chronicled first. There are, in piquant prospect, the affair of "The Missing Servant Wench" (mysterious!); the strange proceedings at Strawberry hill, tentatively titled "The Black Stone of Dr. Dee" (delightful!); and the tantalizing tidbit concerning Patience Wright, the American spy — "A toast, Boswell, to THE woman!"

But for the time being we must be content with "The Stolen Christmas Box" and the old sailorman who whittled on his own wooden leg.

. . . Merry Xmas!

THE STOLEN CHRISTMAS BOX

(as related by James Boswell, Christmas, 1774)
by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

THE disappearance of little Fanny Plumbe's Christmas box was but a prelude to a greater and more daring theft; and was itself heralded by cer-

tain uneasy signs and tokens. Of these was the strange cypher message which Mrs. Thrale intercepted; while I myself was never easy in my mind after seeing the old sailorman with the very particular wooden leg.

Dr. Sam: Johnson and I passed him on Streatham common as we approached the estate of the Thrales, there to spend our Christmas. He sat on a stone hard by the gates in the unseasonable sunshine, and whittled. He wore the neckerchief and loose pantaloons of a sea-faring man. He had a wind-beaten, heavy, lowering face, and a burly, stooped frame. His stump stuck out straight before him, the pantaloon drooping from it. That on which he whittled was his own wooden leg.

'Twas a very particular wooden leg. The cradle that accommodated his stump was high-pooped and arabesqued about like a man-of-war's bow with carvings, upon the embellishment of which he was at the moment engaged. Into the butt was screwed a cylindrical post of half the bigness of my wrist, turned in a lathe and wickedly shod with iron.

As the carriage passed him at an easy pace, I stared down upon him. He extended his greasy flapped hat, and my venerable companion dropped into it a gratuity.

We found the Thrale household pernitious dumpish, for all it was nigh onto Christmas. The tall, silent brewmaster Thrale greeted us with his usual cold courtesy, his diminutive rattle of a wife with her usual peacock screeches of delight. Of the party also were Thrale's grenadier of a sister, a strapping virago born to support the robes of a lady Mayoress, and well on her way to that honour on the coat-tails of her husband, Alderman Plumbe. Plumbe topped his brother-in-law in height and doubled him in girth. His features were knobby and his temper choleric. He scowled upon his children, Master Ralph, a lubber of fourteen, and Miss Fanny, a year older.

Master Ralph was rapidly shooting to his parents' height, but unable to keep pace in solidity. He continually closed his short upper lip over his long upper teeth, which as continually protruded again. He bowed and grinned and twisted his wrists in our honour.

Miss Fanny executed her duty curtsey with downcast eyes. Her person was tall and agreeably rounded, and sensibility played in red and white upon her cheek, playing the while, I own it, on the sensitive strings of my heart. Indeed, I could have been a knight-errant for Miss Fanny, had not I found below-stairs the veriest little witch of a serving wench, pretty Sally, she who . . . but I digress.

Among the company circulated learned Dr. Thomas, the schoolmaster, assiduously pouring oil, as became a clergyman, on waters that were soon revealed to be troubled. Miss Fanny was in a fit of the sullens ('twas of a lover dismissed, I gathered so much), and Mrs. Plumbe was clean out of humour, and the Alderman alternately coaxing and shouting.

In an ill moment the latter conceived the idea of bribing Miss out of her pouts, and accordingly he fetches out the young lady's Christmas box, four days too soon, and bestows it upon her then and there; a step which he was bitterly to regret before the week was out.

"O Lud!" screamed Mrs. Thrale, "O Lud, 'tis a very Canopus!"

" 'Tis indeed," said Dr. Sam: Johnson, "a star of the first magnitude."

'Twas a handsome jewel, though to my eyes scarce suitable for so young a lady — an intaglio artfully cut, and set with a diamond needlessly great, whether for the brooch or for the childish bosom 'twas designed to adorn.

"Sure," screeched Mrs. Thrale in her usual reckless taste, "such a size it is, it cannot be the right gem. Say, is't not paste?"

"Paste!" cried the Alderman, purpling to his wattles, "I assure you, ma'am, 'tis a gem of the first water, such that any goldsmith in the city will give you £200 for."

Ralph Plumbe sucked a front tooth; his prominent eyes goggled. Pretty Sally, the serving maid, passing with the tea tray, stared with open mouth. Little Dr. Thomas joined his fingertips, and seemed to ejaculate a pious word to himself. The Alderman pinned the gem in his daughter's bosom, a task in which I longed to assist him. She bestowed upon him a radiant smile, like sun through clouds.

Her fickle heart was bought. She yielded up to him, with a pretty grace, those love-letters for which she had previously contested, and the footman carried them over the way that very afternoon to poor jilted Jack Rice, while Miss Fanny preened it with her jewel like a peacock.

'Twas a day or two later that I made one in a stroll about the Streatham grounds. Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale beguiled our perambulation in discourse with learned Dr. Thomas about Welsh antiquities. Master Ralph Plumbe, ennuied by the disquisition, threw stones alternately at rooks and at Belle, the black-and-tawny spaniel bitch.

Coming by the kitchen garden we marked curvesome Sally, in her blue gown and trim apron, skimming along under the wall. She passed us under full sail, with the slightest of running curtseys. Mrs. Thrale caught her sleeve.

"Pray, whither away so fast?"

"Only to the kitchen, ma'am."

Our sharp little hostess pounced. "What have you in your hand?"

"Nothing, ma'am."

Mrs. Thrale, for all she is small, has a strong man's hand. She forced open the girl's plump fingers and extracted a folded billet.

"So, miss. You carry *billets doux*."

"No, ma'am. I found it, if you please, ma'am," cried the girl earnestly.

"Ho ho," cried hobbledehoy Master Ralph, " 'tis one of Fan's, I'll wager."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Thrale curtly, and unfolded the billet.

I craned my neck. 'Twas the oddest

missive (save one) that I have ever seen. 'Twas all writ in an alphabet of but two letters:

aababbabbaaaabaaba ababbabbabbaaaabaaba
abbaa'abbabbaabaaabaabaaab baabaaabaa
aabbbaaaaaabaabaabaaabaa ababa'aabaaaaaaabaabb
abbabbaabbabaaa 'ababa'aaaaabaabbabbaaaabaa
abaaabaaaaaabaa baabaaabaa
aabbaaaaaabaaaaaabbaabaa aabbbaaaaaabaqaabbaaaabaa
aaaaaabaaaabaabaabaabaaabaa aabababaaabaaaaaabaabbaabaaba
baaabaaaaaabaabaabaabaaabaa ababaabaaabaaba

Learned Dr. Thomas scanned the strange lines.

"'Tis some unknown, primordial tongue, I make no doubt."

"'Tis the talk of sheep!" I cried, "Baabaaabaa!"

"No, sir; 'tis cypher," said Dr. Sam: Johnson.

"Good lack," screeched Mrs. Thrale, "'tis a French plot, I'll be bound, against our peace."

"No, ma'am," I hazarded, half in earnest, "'tis some imprisoned damsel, takes this means to beg release."

"Pfoh," said Mrs. Thrale, "ever the ruling passion, eh, Mr. Boswell?"

"To what end," demanded Dr. Johnson, "do we stand disputing here, when we might be reading the straight of the message?"

"My husband has the new book of cyphers," cried Mrs. Thrale, "I will fetch it at once."

She sailed off, pretty Sally forgotten; who put her finger to her eye and stood stock-still in the path, until, perceiving how eagerly I followed where Dr. Johnson and the cypher led, she flounced off with dry eyes.

Dr. Johnson made for the drawing-room, and we streamed after him. Seating himself by the window, he peered at the strange paper. Dr. Thomas, Ralph Plumbe, and I peered with him, and Fanny came from the mirror, where we had surprised her preening, to peer too.

As Dr. Johnson smoothed the billet, I threw up my hands.

"What can be done with this!" I exclaimed. "We are to find out the 24 letters of the alphabet, and in this whole message we find but two symbols."

"What man can encypher, man can decypher," replied Dr. Johnson sententiously, "more especially when the encypherer is one of the inmates of Streatham, and the decypherer is Sam: Johnson. But see where our hostess comes."

She came empty-handed. The new book of cyphers was not to be found.

"Then," said Dr. Johnson, "we must make do with what we have in our heads. Let us examine this billet and see what it has to say to us."

We hung over his shoulder, Mrs. Thrale, Dr. Thomas, the Plumbe children, and I.

"Now, ma'am," began Dr. Johnson, addressing Mrs. Thrale, not ill-pleased to display his learning, "you must know that cyphers have engaged the attention of the learned since the remotest antiquity. I need but name Polybius, Julius Africanus, Philo Mechanicus, Theodorus Bibliander, Johannes Walchius, and our own English Aristotle, Francis Bacon —"

"Oh, good lack, sir," cried little Fanny with a wriggle, "what does the paper say?"

"In good time, miss," replied the philosopher with a frown, "we have here 330 characters, all either a or b; writ in 16 groups on a page from a pocket book, with a fair-mended quill. 'Tis notable that the writer wrote his letters in clusters of five, never more, never less; you may see between every group the little nodule of ink where the pen rested. Let us mark the divisions."

With his pen he did so. I watched the lines march:

aabab/abbab/baaaa/baaba ababb/abbab/baaaa/baaba
abbaa'/abbab/baaba/aabaa/baaab /baaba/aabaa
aabbb/aaaaa/ababa/ababa/aabaa . . . . .

"We now perceive," said Dr. Johnson as his pen flicked, "that we have to do, not with a correspondence of letter for letter, but for groups of letters. We have before us, in short, Mr. Boswell, the famous bi-literal cypher of the learned Francis Bacon; as set forth, I make no doubt, in Thrale's missing book of cyphers."

Mrs. Thrale clapped her hands. "Now we shall understand it. Depend upon it, 'tis in French."

"Alas," said Dr. Johnson, "I do not carry the key in my head; but I shall make shift to reconstruct it. 'Tis many years since I was a corrector of the press; but the printer's case still remains in my mind to set me right on the frequencies of the letters in English.

"You will find," he went on calmly, "e occurs the oftenest; next o, then a, then i. Next: d, h, n, r, s, t; then the others, in what order I forget; but with these we may make shift."

By this calculation the learned philosopher determined the combination aabaa to represent e; when a strange fact transpired. Of the sixteen groups, representing perhaps the sixteen words of the message, nine ended with that combination! Dr. Johnson considered this in conjunction with the little marks like apostrophes, and glowered at Mrs. Thrale.

"Can it be French after all?"

In fine, it was; for proceeding partly by trial and errour, and partly by his memory of the cypher's system, the learned philosopher made shift to reconstruct the key, and soon the message began to emerge:

"*Fort mort n'otes te* —"

" 'Tis poetick!" screeched Mrs. Thrale, " 'Strong death snatch thee not away!' Alack, this is a *billet doux* after all, a *lettre d'amour* to some enamoured fair!"

"Oh, ay?" commented the philosopher drily, penning the message:

"*Fort mort n'otes te halle l'eau oui l'aune ire te garde haine aille firent salle lit.*"

" 'Tis little enough poetick," I muttered, translating the strange hodge-podge: " 'Strong death snatch thee not away — market — the water, yes — the alder — anger — keep thee hatred — let him go — they made room — bed.' "

"O lud, here's a waspish message," cried Fanny.

"Yet what's this of a market, water, and an alder tree?"

"There's an alder tree," cried Ralph with a toothy inspiration, "by the

kitchen pump!"

Infected by his excitement, we all ran thither. There was the water, sure enough, in the old pump by the kitchen garden, and drooping its branches over it, not an alder, but a hoary old willow, whose hollow trunk knew the domesticities of generations of owls. There was nothing of any note in the vicinity.

This strange adventure made us none the easier; the less, as we encountered, at his ease on the bench by the kitchen door, the one-legged sailorman. He pulled his forelock surlily, but did not stir. His very particular wooden leg was strapped in its place, and the iron-shod stump was sunk deep in the mud of the door-yard. Belle snapped at it, and had a kick in the ribs for her pains.

The adventure of the cypher much disquieted the Alderman, who incontinently decreed that Miss Fanny's brilliant must be made secure in Thrale's strong-box. Now was repeated the contest of pouts against Papa; Miss Fanny moped, and would not be pleased. At last by a treaty the difficulty was accommodated. Let the Alderman make the gem secure today, and Miss Fanny might wear it in honour of the twelve days of Christmas, to begin at dusk on Christmas Eve precisely.

Christmas Eve came all too slowly, but it came at last. We were all in holiday guise, I in my bloom-coloured breeches, Dr. Thomas in a large new grizzle wig, Ralph in peach-colour brocade with silk stockings on his skinny shanks. Even Dr. Sam: Johnson honoured the occasion in his attire, with his snuff-colour coat and gold buttons, and a freshly-powdered wig provided by the care of Mr. Thrale.

The ladies coruscated. Mrs. Alderman Plumbe billowed in flame-colour sattin. Mrs. Thrale had a handsome gown in the classick stile, with great sleeves, and gems in her hair. Miss Fanny wore a silken gown, of the tender shade appropriately called maiden's blush; 'twas cut low, and her brooch gleamed at her bosom. Even Belle the spaniel was adorned with a great riband, tied on with care by the white hand of Miss Fanny.

'Twas Thrale's care to uphold the old customs, and play the 'squire; while at the same time he had a maccaroni's contempt for the lower orders. 'Twas decreed, therefore, that we should have our Christmas games in the library on the lower floor, while the servants might have their merrymaking in the servants' hall, and the strolling rusticks had perforce to receive their Christmas gratuities without-outside.

We supped upon Christmas furmety, a dish of wheat cakes seethed in milk with rich spices. I relished it well, and did equal justice to the noble minced pyes served up with it.

Supper done, we trooped to the library. Impeded by an armful of green stuff, Dr. Johnson came last, edging his way to the door. On the threshold, as he sought to manoeuvre the unmanageable branches through, the

crookedest one fairly lifted his fresh-powdered Christmas wig from his head, and as he clutched at it with a start, precipitated it in a cloud of white onto the floor. I relieved him of his awkward burden, and good-humoredly he recovered his head-covering and clapped it back in its place, all awry.

In the library all was bustle. It was my part to wreath the mantel with green. Pretty Miss Fanny lighted the Christmas candles, looking the prettier in their glow, her sparkling eyes rivalling the brilliant at her breast. Thrale ignited the mighty "Yule clog."

Dr. Johnson was in great expansion of soul, saluting his hostess gallantly under the mistletoe bough, and expatiating on the old Christmas games of his boyhood.

"Do but be patient, Dr. Johnson, we'll shew you them all," cried Thrale with unwonted vivacity. He was busied over a huge bowl. In it heated wine mingled its fumes with orange peel and spices, while whole roasted apples by the fire were ready to set abob in it. 'Twas the old-time *wassail bowl;* though Dr. Johnson persisted in referring to its contents, in his Lichfield accent, as *poonch.*

"Here we come a-wassailing among
the leaves so green,
Here we come a-wandering, so fair to
be seen . . ."

The notes of the song crept up on us gradually, coming from the direction of the common, till by the time the second verse began, the singers stood in the gravel path before the library windows; which we within threw up, the better to hear their song:

"We are not daily beggars, that beg
from door to door,
But we are your neighbours' children,
whom you have seen before . . ."

Past all doubt, so they were. The servants had crowded to the door-step in the mild night, and merry greetings were interchanged as they found friends among the waits. A light snow was drifting down. The rusticks were fancifully adorned with ribands, and carried greens stuck in their hats; they carried lanthorns on poles, and sang to the somewhat dubious accompaniment of an ancient serpent and a small kit fiddle. In the ring of listening faces I spied the surly visage of the one-legged sailor. Belle the spaniel spied her enemy too. She escaped from the arms of Miss Fanny, eluded the groom at the house-door, and dashed out into the mud to snap at his heel. She came back with a satisfied swagger, the more as she had succeeded in untying her riband and befouling it in the mud. Miss Fanny admonished her, and restored the adornment.

"Now here's to the maid in the lily-
white smock
Who slipped to the door and pulled
back the lock,
Who slipped to the door and pulled
back the pin
For to let those merry wassailers walk
in."

There was no suiting the action to

the word. Thrale passed the cup out at window, keeping the lower orders still withoutside. The waits wiped their mouths on their sleeves, and sang themselves off:

"Wassail, wassail all over the town,
Our bread it is white and our ale it is brown,
Our bowl it is made of the green maple tree —
In our wassailing bowl we'll drink unto thee!"

Next the mummers came marching. Like the waits, they had been recruited from the lads about Streatham. Though every man was disguised in fantastick habiliments, among them the canine instinct of Belle unerringly found out her friends. His own mother would not have recognized the *Doctor*, he presenting to the world but a high-bridged nose and a forest of whiskers; but Belle licked his hand, the while he acknowledged the attention by scratching her ear and making her riband straight. She fawned upon *St. George* (by which, "'Tis the butcher's boy!" discovered Mrs. Thrale) and put muddy foot-marks on the breeches of the *Old Man*, before her attentions were repelled. She came back with her tongue out and her riband, once again, a-trail. Miss Fanny, defeated, neglected to restore it. She crowded with the rest of the company in the window as the link-boys lifted their torches, and upon the snowy sward the rusticks of Streatham played the famous mumming play of *St. George and the Dragon.*

"Pray, sir, take notice," said the pleased Dr. Johnson, "is not this a relique of great antiquity, the hieratic proceedings of yonder sorcerous *Doctor* with his magick pill? Pray, my man —" out at window to the *Doctor*, "how do you understand these doings?"

"Nor I don't, sir," replied the player huskily, and carried on his part to a chorus of laughter from within.

"And God bless this good company," concluded *St. George* piously. He caught the heavy purse that Thrale threw him, weighed it, and added in his own voice, "God bless ye, sir."

The guests added their largesse. Plumbe hurled a piece of gold; Dr. Johnson and I scattered silver; even withered little Dr. Thomas must needs add his half-crown. 'Twas scarce worth the trouble he went to, first to fumble in his capacious pocket for the destined coin, then to wrap it in a leaf from his pocket book, finally to aim it precisely into the hands of *St. George*. His heart was better than his marksmanship; his shot went wide, and a scramble ensued.

"God bless all here," chorused the rusticks, and made off with their torches as we within closed the windows and clustered about the fire. Then the bowl was set ablaze, and we adventured our fingers at *snapdragon*, catching at the burning raisins with merry cries.

"Fan, my love," said the Alderman suddenly, "where is thy Christmas box?"

Everybody looked at the flushed

girl, standing with a burned finger-tip between her pink lips like a baby.

"The man," she half-whispered, "the man, Papa, he looked at it so, while the mummers played, I was affrighted, and slipped it into a place of safety."

She indicated an exquisite little French enamel vase.

" 'Tis here, Papa."

The Alderman snatched the vase and turned it up. 'Twas empty. Miss Fanny's Christmas box was gone.

The Alderman turned purple.

"The servants —" he roared.

"Pray, Mr. Plumbe, calm yourself," said Dr. Johnson, "we must look for Miss Fanny's diamond within this room."

He pointed, first to the snow now lightly veiling the ground beneath the window, then to the splotch of powder on the threshold. In neither was there any mark of boot or shoe.

But, though the choleric Alderman turned out the chamber, and though every one present submitted to the most thorough of searches, though Plumbe even sifted out the ashes of the Yule clog, little Fanny's Christmas box was not to be found.

"This is worse than Jack Rice a thousand times," sniggered her brother in my ear.

It was so. Poor pretty Fanny could only sob.

" 'Tis a mean thief," cried Dr. Johnson in noble indignation, "that robs a child, and be sure I'll find him out."

'Twas enough to mar the merriment of Christmas Day. Little Fanny kept her chamber, being there admonished by good Dr. Thomas. The lout Ralph wandered about idly, teizing Belle until the indignant spaniel nipped him soundly; upon which he retired into the sulks. The Alderman and his lady were not to be seen. The master and mistress of the house were busied doing honour to the day. I was by when they dispensed their Christmas beef upon the doorstep; pretty Sally handed the trenchers about, and there in the crowd of rusticks, stolidly champing brawn, I saw the one-legged sailor. He seemed quite at home.

Dr. Johnson roamed restlessly from room to room.

BOSWELL: "Pray, sir, what do you seek so earnestly?"

JOHNSON: "Sir, a French dictionary."

BOSWELL: "To what end?"

JOHNSON: "To read yonder cypher aright; for sure 'tis the key to tell us whither Fanny's brilliant has flown."

BOSWELL: "Why, sir, the words are plain; 'tis but the interpretation that eludes us."

JOHNSON: "No, sir, the words are *not* plain; the words are somehow to be transposed. Now, sir, could I but find a French dictionary printed in *two* columns, 'twould go hard but we should find, in the *second* column, the words we seek, jig-by-jole with the meaningless words we now have."

Upon this I joined the search; but in twenty-four hours we advanced no further in reading the cypher.

After dinner the next day I came upon Dr. Johnson conning it over

by the fire, muttering the words to himself:

"*Te halle l'eau oui l'aune ire te garde haine . . .*"

I was scarce attending. An idea had occurred to me.

"Yonder hollow willow near the garden —" I began.

"How?" cried Dr. Johnson, starting up.

"The hollow willow near the garden —"

"You have it, Bozzy!" cried my companion in excitement, "Te hollow willown ear te gard en."

So strange was the accent and inflection with which my revered friend repeated my words, that I could only stare.

"Read it!" he cried, "Read it aloud!"

He thrust the decyphered message under my nose. I read it off with my best French accent, acquired in my elegant grand tour.

"Can't you see," cried Dr. Johnson, "when you speak it, the words are English — the hollow willow near the garden! 'Twill be the miscreants' post-office, 'tis clear to me now. See, they had cause to distrust the maid who was go-between."

He pointed to the last words: *ailel firent salle lit* — I fear Sally.

"How did you do it, Bozzy?"

"I, sir? Trust me, 'twas the furthest thing from my mind. It had come into my head, perhaps by the alder was meant the hollow willow —"

"No, sir," returned Dr. Johnson, "there came into your mind, a *picture* of the hollow willow, because you heard, without knowing that you heard, the words I uttered; and when you spoke the words, I recognized that *you were repeating mine*. But come, sir; let us investigate this thieves' post-office."

He fairly ran out at the door.

Coming suddenly about the corner of the house, we surprized the sailorman standing under the wall of the kitchen garden; and I could have sworn that I caught the swirl of a skirt where the wall turned. As we came up, the one-legged man finished knotting something into his neckerchief, and made off with astonishing speed. He stumped his way across the common in the direction of the ale-house on the other side.

"Shall we not catch him up?" I cried.

"In good time," replied my friend. "First we must call for the post."

Accordingly we lingered to sound the hollow tree. Save for some grubs and beetles, and a quantity of feathers, it was empty.

Our fortune was better when we passed under the wall where the one-legged man had stood. There we picked up the second of the strange messages that came under our eyes at Streatham.

'Twas a strip of paper, scarce an inch wide and some 12 inches long. Along both its edges someone had made chicken-tracks with a pen. One end was roughly torn away. Search as we might, the missing fragment was not to be found. At last we repaired to the house.

In the library we encountered Mrs. Thrale, in philosophical discourse with Dr. Thomas. She looked at the strange piece of paper, and gave a screech.

" 'Tis Ogam!"

"Ogam?"

"I know it well, 'tis the antique writing of the Irish," said Dr. Thomas, scanning the paper with interest. "You must understand, sir, that the untutored savages of Ireland, knowing nothing of pen and paper, had perforce to contrive some way of incising letters upon wood, stone, horn, and the like. They hit upon a system of scratching lines on the edges of these objects, as perpendicular or oblique, and grouped to represent the various letters. Thus it was said of many a deceased Irish hero, 'They dug the grave and they raised the stone and they carved his name in Ogam.' "

"Why, this is a learned jewel-thief. Pray, Dr. Thomas, translate these triangles and dashes."

"Alack, sir, I cannot do it extempore. I must first have my books."

"*You*, ma'am," says Dr. Johnson to the volatile matron, "*You* are mighty familiar with Ogam, pray read it off for us."

"O Lud, sir, not I; I am none of your antiquarians."

"Why, so. Then must I extract the meaning by myself. 'Twill be no harder than the biliteral cypher."

But try as he would, the strange marks[1] on the edges of the paper would not yield to the theory of the printer's case. At last he leaned back.

"Let us begin afresh."

"No, sir," I begged, "let us have our tea. I am no Spartan boy, to labour while a fox is gnawing my vitals."

"Spartan!" cried my companion, "You have earned your tea, Mr. Boswell. Do but answer me one question first, we may begin afresh and I think proceed in the right direction. Pray, what shape is this paper?"

"Sir, long and flat."

Dr. Johnson dangled it by one end. "No, sir, 'tis helical."

Indeed as it dangled it coiled itself into a helix.

"Let us restore it to its proper shape," said Dr. Johnson. "Pray, Mr. Boswell, fetch me the besom."

I looked a question, but my sagacious friend said nothing further, and I went in search of the pretty housemaid and her besoms. After an interlude of knight-errantry, which taught me somewhat about women, but naught at all about our puzzle, I returned with such brooms as the house afforded.

I found my learned friend surrounded by stocks and staves, thick and thin, long and short. Around them, one after one, he was coiling the strange paper as a friseur curls hair about his finger. The results left him

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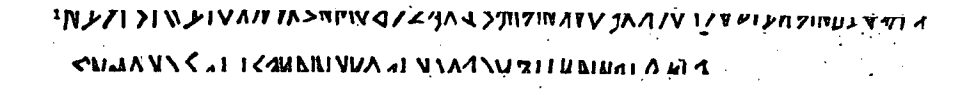
[1] 

but ill satisfied.

"Could I but recall it to mind," he muttered, "there is a thing missing that is germane to this puzzle; but now 'tis gone from my memory."

"Why, sir," said I, "we are to question the one-legged sailorman."

"Well remembered, Mr. Boswell." He stuffed the coiled paper into his capacious pocket. "Come, let us be off."

I bade farewell to my tea as I followed him. We found the publick room of the Three Crowns nigh empty, its only occupants being the idling tapster, and two men drinking in the ingle; but one of them was the man we sought. His companion was a likely-looking youth with a high-bridged nose, who pledged him in nappy ale.

"Good day, friend," Dr. Johnson accosted the maimed sailor.

The fresh-faced lad rose quietly, pulled a respectful forelock, and made off. Dr. Johnson looked at the sailorman's tankard, now empty, and signed to the tapster.

Not that the sailorman's tongue wanted loosening. Previous potations had already done the business. He was all too ready to spin his yarn.

"Nine sea fights I come through," he cried, "and lost my peg in the end, *mort dieu*, in Quiberon Bay."

He dealt his wooden member a mighty thump with the again emptied tankard. My worthy friend, ever ready to relieve the lot of the unfortunate, once more signed to the tapster. As the can was filling, he animadverted upon the wretchedness of a sea-life.

"I marvel, sir, that any man will be a sailor, who has contrivance enough to get himself into a gaol; for being in a ship is being in gaol with the chance of being drowned."

"Ah," said the peg-legged sailor mournfully, and buried his nose in his pot.

My friend pressed upon him a gratuity in recognition of his perils passed. The sailorman accepted of it with protestations of gratitude.

" 'Tis nothing, sir," replied my kindly friend. "Do you but gratify my whim, I'll call myself overpaid."

"How, whim?" says the sailorman.

"I've a whim," says Johnson, "to borrow your wooden leg for a matter of half an hour."

I stared with open mouth, but the sailorman showed no flicker of surprise. He unstrapped the contrivance immediately and put it in my friend's hand.

"Pray, Bozzy," said Dr. Johnson, "see that our worthy friend here lacks for nothing until I come again."

Before I could out a question he had withdrawn, the unstrapped peg in his hand. I was left to the company of the tapster and the loquacious sailorman. He insisted upon telling me how he had made his peg himself, and how it had often been admired for its artistry.

"Here's this young fellow now," he rattled on, gesturing vaguely across the common, "he thinks it a rarity, and but this morning he had it of me for an hour at a time."

This statement but doubled my puzzlement. What in the world could a two-legged man want with a peg-leg? Surely my learned friend was not intending to personate the one-legged sailorman? Had the high-nosed youth done so? I tried to recall the glimpse I had had of the one-legged beggar by the kitchen garden.

When Dr. Johnson returned, he returned in his own guise. We left the sailorman, by this time snorting with vinous stertorousness in the corner of the ingle, and walked across the common back to the house.

"Pray, sir, what success? Did you find the diamond?"

"Find the diamond? No, sir, I did not find the diamond; but I know where it is, and I know how to lay the thief by the heels."

He dug from his pocket the strange strip of paper. Between the lines of Ogam he had penned the message:

"£140 tonight 12 a clock ye oak nighest ye 3 crowns"

"What shall this signify?"

"Nay, Bozzy, 'tis plain. But here comes our friend Dr. Thomas. Pray, not a word more."

I was seething with curiosity as we supped at the Thrale's sumptuous table. The talk turned, willy-nilly, to the strange way in which the Christmas gem had been spirited from the library. Dr. Johnson admitted himself baffled. He was in a depression from which he could not be wooed even by the blandishments of the spaniel Belle, who, spurred by hunger, begged eagerly for scraps; until a new larceny, committed against himself, restored him to good humour.

It must be said that Dr. Sam: Johnson is scarce a dainty feeder. He is a valiant trencherman, and stows away vast quantities of his favourite comestibles.

"Ma'am," says he upon this occasion, unbuttoning the middle button of his capacious vest and picking a capon wing in his fingers, "Ma'am, where the dinner is ill gotten, the family is somehow grossly wrong; there is poverty, Ma'am, or there is stupidity; for a man seldom thinks more earnestly of anything than of his dinner, and if he cannot get that well done, he should be suspected of inaccuracy in other things."

"Oh," says Mrs. Thrale, not knowing how to take this, but willing to turn it against him, "did you never, then, sir, huff your wife about your meat?"

"Why, yes," replied he, taking a second wing in his fingers, "but then she huffed me worse, for she said one day as I was going to say grace, 'Nay, hold,' says she, 'and do not make a farce of thanking God for a dinner which you will presently protest to be uneatable.' "

At this there was a general laugh; under cover of which Belle the spaniel, tempted beyond endurance, reared boldly up, snatched the capon wing from the philosopher's fingers, and ran out of door with it.

"Fie, Belle," cried out Mrs. Thrale, "you used to be upon honour!"

"Ay," replied the doctor with his

great Olympian laugh, "but here has been a *bad influence* lately!"

Not another word would he say, but devoted himself to a mighty veal pye with plums and sugar.

Yet when we rose from the table, he sought out the guilty Belle and plied her with dainties.

"'Tis a worthy canine, Bozzy," cried he to me, "for she has told me, not only *how* Miss Fanny's diamond was spirited from the library, but by *whose* contrivance. Between the good Belle, and yonder strange paper of Ogam, I now know *where* the conspirators shall meet, and *when*, and *who* they are, and *what* their object is; to prevent which, I shall make one at the rendezvous. Do you but join me, you shall see all made plain."

I was eager to do so. Muffled in greatcoats, we crossed the common and took up our station under the great oak a stone's cast from the Three Crowns. As the wind rattled the dry branches over our heads, I was minded of other vigils we had shared and other miscreants we had laid by the heels.

The darkness was profound. Across the common we saw window after window darken in the Thrale house as the occupants blew out their candles. Then I became aware of motion in the darkness, and towards us, stealing along the path, came a muffled shape, utterly without noise, flitting along like a creature of the night. For a moment we stood rigid, not breathing; then Dr. Johnson stepped forward and collared the advancing figure. It gave a startled squeak, and was silent. Dr. Johnson pulled the hat from the brow. In the starlight I stared at the face thus revealed.

'Twas Dr. Thomas! I beheld with horror his awful confusion at being detected. Confronted, he made no attempt at evasion.

"Alas, Dr. Johnson, 'tis I alone am guilty! But pray, how have you smoaked me?"

"Ogam," says Dr. Johnson, looking sourly upon the clergyman. "Trust me, you knew that was no Ogam. Ogam is incised on *both edges of a right angle*, not scribbled on paper."

"That is so, sir. You have been too sharp for me. I will confess all. 'Tis my fatal passion for Welsh antiquities. I have pawned the very vestments of my office to procure them. I took Miss Fanny's gem, I confess it, and flung it from the window wrapped in a leaf from my pocket-book."

"I see it!" I exclaimed, "'Twas thrown at hazard, and the one-legged sailor carried it thence hid in the hollow of his wooden leg."

"Nothing of the kind," said Dr. Johnson, "the role of the sailor and his wooden leg was quite other. But say, how much had you for the gem?"

"Two hundred pounds," replied the fallen clergyman. "Two hundred pounds! The price of my honour! Alas," he cried in a transport of remorse, falling on his knees and holding up his hands to Heaven, "had I, when I stood at those crossroads, gone another way, had I but heeded the voice within me which cried, *Turn aside, turn aside, lest thou fall into the hands*

of thine enemy, had I but gone swiftly upon the strait way, then in truth we might at the grave's end have met together in the hereafter . . ."

Dr. Johnson heard this piteous avowal unmoved, but not so I. 'Twas a solemn sight to see the unfortunate man wring his hands and cry out with anguish, turning up his eyes to Heaven. Suddenly, however, his eyes fixed eagerly upon the darkened inn. In the same instant Dr. Johnson whirled, and ran, swiftly for all his bulk, to where a light coach was just getting in motion. I heard the harness jingle, and then the startled snort of a horse as my fearless friend seized the near animal by the bit and forced it to a halt.

"So," he cried angrily, "you'll meet them hereafter, at *Gravesend!* Never a whit. Come down, sir! Come down, miss!"

For a moment there was only the jingle of harness as the nervous horses pranced. Then a figure stepped to earth, a tall young man muffled to his high-bridged nose in a heavy cape, and lifted down after him the cloaked figure of —

Miss Fanny Plumbe!

"Pray, Dr. Johnson," she said statelily, "why do you hinder us? What wrong have we done?"

"You have diddled your father, and all of us," replied my companion sternly, "sending Bacon's cypher to Jack Rice here with those letters you gave up so meekly — once you had the diamond that you might turn into journey-money."

The chit's composure was wonderful.

"Why, sir," she owned with a smile, "you gave me a turn when you decyphered my last message by the hand of Sally; whom indeed, Mr. Boswell —" turning to me, "I no longer dared trust when she became so great with you. But confess, Dr. Johnson, my French held you off, after all, until I was able to convey a new cypher to Jack by the hand of the sailorman."

"And Dr. Thomas was your accomplice in making away with the gem?" I cried in uncontrollable curiosity.

"Be not so gullible, Bozzy," cried my companion impatiently, "trust me, Dr. Thomas knew never a word of the matter until Miss here opened her mind to him in their close conference on Christmas Day. 'Twas the hussy herself that conveyed her diamond to her lover, that he might turn it into money for their elopement."

"Nay, how? For she never left the room."

"But *Belle* did — and carried with her the diamond, affixed to her riband by the hand of Miss Fanny. Out flies the dog to greet her friend the neighbour lad in his mummer's disguise; who apprised of the scheme, caresses his canine friend and removes the brilliant in the same operation."

"That is so, sir," said Jack Rice.

"Surely," said Miss Fanny, "surely I did no wrong, to convey my jewel to the man I mean to wed."

"That's as may be," said my friend, unrelenting, "but now, Miss, do you accompany us back to the house, for there'll be no elopement this night."

"Pray, sir," said Dr. Thomas earnestly, "be mollified. The lad is a good lad, and will have a competence when once he turns twenty-one; and I have engaged to make one in their flight and bless their union, which the surly Alderman opposes out of mere ill nature."

"To this I cannot be a party," began my authoritarian friend. The little clergyman was fumbling in his pocket. He brought forth, not a weapon, but a prayer-book.

"Do you, John, take this woman . . ." he began suddenly.

"Hold, hold!" cried Dr. Johnson.

"I do," cried the lad in a ringing voice.

"And do you, Fanny . . ."

Jack Rice pulled a seal-ring from his finger.

"I do," whispered the girl.

"Then I pronounce you man and wife."

The ring hung loose on the girl's slim finger, but it stayed on.

"You are witnesses, Dr. Johnson, Mr. Boswell," cried the little clergyman. "Will not you salute the bride?"

Dr. Johnson lifted his great shoulders in concession.

"I wish you joy, my dear."

As the coach with its strangely-assorted trio of honeymooners receded in the distance: "Pray, Dr. Johnson," said I, "resolve me one thing. If the message was not Ogam, what was it?"

JOHNSON: "Simple English."

BOSWELL: "How can this be?"

JOHNSON: "The triangles and scratches along the edges of yonder paper were halved lines of writing, and had only to be laid together to be read off."

BOSWELL: "Yet how are the top and bottom of a single strip of paper to be laid together?"

JOHNSON: "The Spartans, of whom you yourself reminded me, did it by means of a staff or *scytale*, around which the strip is wound, edge to edge, both for writing and for reading."

BOSWELL: "Hence your search for a staff or broomstick."

JOHNSON: "Yes sir. Now it went in my mind, yonder one-legged man had a strange wooden leg, which did not taper as they usually do, but was straight up and down like a post. Was he perhaps both the emissary and the key? At the cost of a half-crown I had it of him — carried it out of his sight that he might not babble of my proceedings — and read the communication with ease."

BOSWELL: "This is most notable, sir. I will make sure to record it this very night."

JOHNSON: "Pray, Mr. Boswell, spare me that; for though the play-acting clergyman with his two hundred pounds and his Welsh antiquities failed to deceive me, yet 'tis cold truth that under my nose a green boy has conspired with a school-girl to steal first a diamond and then the lass herself; so let's hear no more on't."

"Q"

When W. Somerset Maugham was in China, he took notes of whatever he saw that excited his interest. Instead of elaborating the notes into a full-length narrative, Mr. Maugham decided to publish them as a collection of anecdotes. The resulting book was ON A CHINESE SCREEN *(1922).*

Ray Long, who at that time was editor of "Cosmopolitan," read ON A CHINESE SCREEN *and commissioned Mr. Maugham to write another series of sketches, impressions, and vignettes — or what we now call "short short stories." These appeared regularly in "Cosmopolitan" between 1924 and 1929.*

"The Dream" is one of those "little" stories. It tells how Mr. Maugham met a Russian of vast paunch in a railway-station restaurant in Vladivostok and how, while waiting for the trans-Siberian train, the Russian proved himself a curiously sardonic dinner companion . . .

To your Editor "The Dream" is more than a mere anecdote. Within the narrow confines of only 1500 words it has the pattern — beginning, middle, and end — that Mr. Maugham's technical artistry has imposed on it. This design, for all Mr. Maugham's deliberate brevity, is complete and strangely satisfying — a between-courses wine of delicate bouquet and delicious flavor.

THE DREAM

by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

IT CHANCED that in August, 1917, the work upon which I was then engaged obliged me to go from New York to Petrograd and I was instructed for safety's sake to travel by way of Vladivostok. I landed there in the morning and passed an idle day as best I could. The trans-Siberian train was due to start, so far as I remember, at about nine in the evening. I dined at the station restaurant by myself.

It was crowded and I shared a small table with a man whose appearance entertained me. He was a Russian, a tall fellow, but amazingly stout, and he had so vast a paunch that he was obliged to sit well away from the table. His hands, small for his size, were buried in rolls of fat. His hair, long, dark and thin, was brushed carefully across his crown in order to conceal his baldness, and his huge sallow face, with its enormous double chin, clean-shaven, gave you an impression of indecent nakedness. His nose was small, a funny little button upon that mass of flesh, and his black shining eyes were small too. But he had a large, red and sensual mouth. He was dressed neatly enough in a black suit. It was not shabby or worn, but untidy and sloppy; I felt pretty sure that it had been neither pressed nor brushed since he had had it.

The service was bad and it was almost impossible to attract the attention of a waiter. We soon got into conversation. The Russian spoke good and fluent English. His accent was marked but not tiresome. He asked me many questions about myself and my plans, which — my occupation at the time making caution necessary — I answered with a show of frankness but with dissimulation. I told him I was a journalist. He asked me whether I wrote fiction and when I confessed that in my leisure moments I did he began to talk of the later Russian novelists. He spoke intelligently and it was plain that he was a man of education.

By this time we had persuaded the waiter to bring us some cabbage soup and my acquaintance pulled a small bottle of vodka from his pocket which he invited me to share. I do not know whether it was this or the natural loquaciousness of his race which made him communicative, but presently he told me unasked a good deal about himself. He was of noble birth, it appeared, a lawyer by profession, and a radical. Some trouble with the authorities had made it necessary for him to be much abroad, but now he was on his way home. Business had detained him at Vladivostok, but he expected to start for Moscow in a week and if I went there he would be charmed to see me.

"Are you married?" he asked me.

I did not see what business it was of his, but I told him that I was. He sighed a little.

"I am a widower," he said. "My wife was a Swiss, a native of Geneva. She was a very cultivated woman and she spoke English and German and Italian perfectly. French, of course, was her native language. Her Russian was much above the average for a foreigner. She had scarcely the trace of an accent."

He called a waiter who was passing with a tray full of dishes and asked him, I suppose — for then I knew hardly any Russian — how much longer we were going to wait for the next course. The waiter, with a rapid but presumably reassuring exclamation, hurried on, and my friend sighed.

"Since the revolution the waiting in restaurants has become abominable."

He lighted his twentieth cigaret and I, looking at my watch, wondered whether I should get a square meal before it was time for me to start.

"My wife was a very remarkable woman," he continued. "She taught languages at one of the best schools for the daughters of noblemen in Petrograd. She was, however, of a jealous temperament and unfortunately she loved me to distraction."

It was difficult for me to keep a straight face. He was one of the ugliest men I had ever seen. There is sometimes a certain charm in the rubicund and jovial fat man, but this saturnine obesity was repulsive.

"I do not pretend that I was faithful to her. She was small and thin and she had a bad complexion. She made me constant scenes. She was a woman

who suffered from a fury of possession and she could not bear me to be attracted to anyone but her. She was jealous not only of the women I knew, but of my friends, my cat and my books. On one occasion she gave away in my absence a coat of mine merely because I liked none of my coats so well. But I am of an equable temperament. I will not deny that she bored me, but I accepted her acrimonious disposition as an act of God and no more thought of rebelling against it than I would against bad weather or a cold in the head. I denied her accusations as long as it was possible to deny them and when it was impossible I shrugged my shoulders and smoked a cigaret.

"I led my own life. Sometimes, indeed, I wondered whether it was passionate love she felt for me or passionate hate. It seemed to me that love and hate were very near allied.

"So we might have continued to the end of the chapter if one night a very curious thing had not happened. I was awakened by a piercing scream from my wife. Startled, I asked her what was the matter. She told me that she had had a fearful nightmare; she had dreamed that I was trying to kill her. We lived at the top of a large house and the well round which the stairs climbed was broad. She had dreamed that just as we had arrived at our own floor I had caught hold of her and attempted to throw her over the balusters. It was six stories to the stone floor at the bottom and it meant certain death.

"She was much shaken. I did my best to soothe her. But next morning, and for two or three days after, she referred to the subject again and notwithstanding my laughter I saw that it dwelt in her mind. I could not help thinking of it either, for this dream showed me something that I had never suspected. She thought I hated her, she thought I would gladly be rid of her, she knew of course that she was insufferable and at some time or other the idea had occurred to her that I was capable of murdering her. The thoughts of men are incalculable and ideas enter our minds which we should be ashamed to confess. Sometimes I had wished that she might run away with a lover, sometimes that a painless and sudden death might give me my freedom; but never, never had the idea come to me that I might deliberately rid myself of an intolerable burden.

"The dream made an extraordinary impression upon both of us. It frightened my wife and she became for a little less bitter and more tolerant. But when I walked up the stairs to our apartment it was impossible for me not to look over the balusters and reflect how easy it would be to do what she had dreamed. The balusters were dangerously low. A quick gesture and the thing was done.

"It was hard to put the thought out of my mind.

"Then some months later my wife awakened me one night. I was very tired and I was exasperated. She was white and trembling. She had had

the dream again. She burst into tears and asked me if I hated her. I swore by all the saints of the Russian calendar that I loved her. At last she went to sleep. It was more than I could do. I lay awake. I seemed to see her falling down the well of the stairs and I heard her shriek and the thud as she struck the stone floor. I could not help shivering."

The Russian stopped and beads of sweat stood on his forehead. He had told the story well and fluently so that I had listened with attention. There was still some vodka in the bottle; he poured it out and swallowed it at a gulp.

"And how did your wife eventually die?" I asked after a pause.

He took out a dirty handkerchief and wiped his forehead.

"By an extraordinary coincidence she was found late one night at the bottom of the stairs with her neck broken."

"Who found her?"

"She was found by one of the lodgers who came in shortly after the catastrophe."

"And where were you?"

I cannot describe the look he gave me of malicious cunning. His little black eyes sparkled.

"I was spending the evening with a friend of mine. I did not come in till an hour later."

At that moment the waiter brought us the dish of meat which we had ordered and the Russian fell upon it with good appetite. He shoveled the food into his mouth in enormous mouthfuls.

I was taken aback. Had he really been telling me in this hardly veiled manner that he had murdered his wife? That obese and sluggish man did not look like a murderer; I could not believe that he would have had the courage. Or was he making a sardonic joke at my expense?

In a few minutes it was time for me to go and catch my train. I left him and I have not seen him since. But I have never been able to make up my mind whether he was serious or jesting.

Another detectival dossier to tease your wits — this time with the all-revealing clue omitted deliberately and with malice aforethought!

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

EXQUISITELY attired and swinging a cane with a jaunty air, the plump little man with the egg-shaped head might say: "But look you, *mon amis*, it is no problem at all. It is self-evident, a fact for all to see. You say that man is a detective unique, unsurpassed, the greatest that ever lived. That there was never anyone like him and never will be. *Eh, bien*, what more is to be said? When one is unique, one knows it. I am modest. The man you describe is me.

"You say that method and order were his passion. And why not? You would have him rushing to and fro like the willy and the nilly, is it not? Of the energy he must be full, gathering up the cigarette end and the fallen match, always prostrating himself on the dusty road and seeking the marks of tires through a little glass. Tchah! I tell you it is not so. The true clues are within. All that matters is method and order.

"The facts arrange themselves neatly, each in its proper place. Those of importance we put on one side; those of no importance — pouf! Then one has only to reason, to reflect. And to study the psychology of crime. It is true that I approach such problems with an exact science, a mathematical precision. Me, I know everything!" Then he might lean back in his chair, almost purring with self-satisfaction, gently puff at one of the tiny Russian cigarettes he affected, and go on:

"One cannot be interested in crime without being interested in psychology. It is not the mere act of killing; it is what lies behind that appeals to the expert. One sees with the eyes of the mind. When I am puzzled, I build card houses. The employment requires precision of the fingers, and with precision of the fingers goes precision of the brain. And suddenly the affair marches, is it not so?

"It is true that I have the habit of being always right — but I do not boast of it. My life has been a long succession of successes. I once had a failure, back in 1893 — the affair of the box of chocolates — but of this I will say nothing. Many times I have retired and each time I have said, in all generosity, let the young men have a chance. They may possibly do something credible. I doubt it, but they may. But each time, like the stage favorite who gives the world a dozen farewells, I have been attracted by some subtle problem that only I could solve.

"I had won international fame in a

foreign police force, but following the first World War, I found that my powers were stronger than ever and I then began my second career — that of a private inquiry agent in England. I have solved many baffling and fascinating problems. Ah, *monsieur*, I have lived!

"It is true that I can speak the exact, idiomatic English. But, *mon amis*, to speak the broken English is an enormous asset. It leads people to despise you. They say — bah, a foreigner, he can't even speak English properly. It is not my policy to terrify people; instead, I invite their gentle ridicule. Does not that give one furiously to think?

"Also, I boast. A Latin has a truer appreciation of his own powers. If he is clever, he sees no reason for concealing the fact. But an Englishman believes that a fellow who thinks as much of himself as that cannot be worth much. So, you see, I put people off their guard. And besides, it has become a habit.

"I find it a good sign when a case is obscure. If a thing is clear as daylight — *eh, bien*, mistrust it. Someone has made it so. They call me the human oyster, say that I love being mysterious, that I never will part with a piece of information until the last possible moment. Well, what would you? The wise man does not commit himself. And besides, at the last moment I spring — like a panther — and *mon dieu*, the consternation!"

With a sigh the little man might twirl his immense rigidly waxed mustaches and cease speaking. He might then take a sip of thick, sweet chocolate, his favorite beverage. Then, pluming himself like a bird, he would thrust out his chest, assume an air of mock modesty, and say: "I am the greatest detective in the world."

Have you "guessed who" this great man is? If not, turn to page 110.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACTS OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AND MARCH 3, 1933

of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, published bimonthly at Concord, N. H., for October 1, 1945

State of New York, County of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared Joseph W. Ferman, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business manager are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Managing Editor*, Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., New York; *Business Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York.

2. That the owners are: The American Mercury, Inc.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.; Mildred Falk, 570 Lexington Ave., N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

J. W. Ferman, *Business Manager.*

Sworn to and subscribed before me, this 17th day of September, 1945.

[Seal] Gertrude J. Huebner, *Notary Public.*
(My commission expires March 30, 1946.)

"It is impossible to measure the skill of a criminal until he has been caught. Pure chance has saved many a bungler from the gallows. Similarly, pure chance has hanged many a murderer who has successfully outwitted the organized intellect and resources of society. And the Department of Dead Ends was really nothing else than a device for allowing pure chance to operate."

What you have just read is actually the opening paragraph of Roy Vickers's "The Parrot's Beak" — lifted from its original position at the beginning of the story and transformed into a prefatory comment. This latter purpose it serves both tersely and informatively. How better describe the function and methods of the Department of Dead Ends? How better introduce this fifth story in EQMM's brilliant series of "inverted" detective tales?

Now, continue the story in which "the plum fell right into the Department of Dead Ends' open mouth."

THE PARROT'S BEAK

by ROY VICKERS

FLORENCE HORNBY was, in sporting parlance, another fox who had got away from hounds. No amount of cleverness on the part of the detectives, no amount of thoroughness of police organization, could have convicted her of the murder of her husband.

Her case has another unusual feature in that she, like the Marchioness of Roucester and Jarrow, was another of the very few women murderers in England to use firearms.

Further, like so many male murderers, she made her victim help to set the stage — to put himself just where she wanted him to be found by the police.

Percy Hornby was the son of a timber merchant of Barking. His mother died when he was fourteen. The family had lived on a very modest scale, although the father was making a small fortune. Percy had attended the board school (as it was in those days) and had been considered a very backward pupil.

A year after his mother's death his father suddenly dropped the habits of a lifetime and bought a large house at Richmond-on-Thames, with a garden of three acres that ran down to the river. It was a home singularly ill-suited to their requirements. An elderly, slatternly woman, their general servant, migrated with them from

Barking. No further attempt was made to educate Percy, who seems to have spent the next four years idling in the garden, depending for companionship upon errand boys who came to the back door.

When he was eighteen his father died, leaving his son an estate valued at £80,000, unprotected by anything in the nature of a trust. A guardian had been appointed who seems to have been content to leave Percy in the charge of the elderly slattern.

At twenty-one Percy came into his property, which merely meant that every time he went to the solicitor, who had been his guardian, to ask for money, it was given without question.

Percy did not, as might be supposed, "paint the town red." He was probably too undeveloped for that, having the tastes and mental outlook of a boy of twelve. He merely led a disorderly life — in the literal sense of the word — that is, a life without any kind of order.

He would feed when the elderly slattern, now a confirmed drunkard, happened to think of getting a meal ready. He would sleep when he felt sleepy, rarely going to bed for the purpose. He would keep a number of gold sovereigns in a drawer in the dining room and when money was wanted, there it was. If it was not there, it would merely mean that he must get the slattern to tidy him up and then go to ask his solicitor for more.

At any hour of the day or night a casual stranger might have come upon him in the big dining room, stacked with the heavy furniture that had been bought with the house from the previous owner. Grouped about him would be a dozen or more of the young wastrels of the town. On the long mahogany table would be a vast litter of dirty and broken plates. On the mantel-piece, the sideboard, the chairs were innumerable glasses, and on the floor, countless empty bottles.

As a matter of fact, a casual stranger — a woman — did come upon such a scene as this — at three o'clock in the afternoon. She was a canvasser for an insurance company; she had heard about him and had called in the hope of selling him insurance.

For the rest, she was thirty-five, rather more than moderately good-looking, her somewhat stern face softened by big, hazel eyes. She might even have been considered a bit of a beauty, but for the fact that when you looked at her again you saw that the white of her left eye was speckled with pigment.

She stood in the huge French window, a little confused, while the hobbledehoys guffawed. But the confusion did not last long. She must have grasped the full situation almost at a glance and with it came an iron determination to seize her chance.

The iron determination was so effective that in six weeks she had married Percy Hornby.

She did not find it necessary to deceive Percy at the outset. She told him truthfully that her name was Florence Hornbeck (an odd echo of the name she was about to assume),

that she was a widow and that she had lived in America for some years.

Nor did Percy deceive her. He gave a truthful, if muddled, account of himself and his fortune, insofar as he understood either, which was not far. Of course, the facts about himself did not matter. As to the facts about the fortune, Florence seems to have been unaccountably careless. She did no more than verify the story of his inheritance by inspecting the will at Somerset House.

She did not interview his solicitor until the day after the wedding. (They seem to have dispensed with the formality of a honeymoon.) Then she learned that the fortune of £80,000 had shrunk, by a process she imperfectly understood, to an approximate value of £7000, yielding an income for the two of them about the size of that which Florence had earned as an insurance agent.

She promptly asked her late manager to recommend a solicitor whom she could trust to investigate the conduct of her husband's affairs. The inquiry resulted in a report to the effect that there had been no fraud. Two companies had gone bankrupt, two or three parcels of shares had proved valueless — and so on. There was, in short, no hope.

At this stage, ignoring subsequent events, she presents a picture of a brave woman making the best of a bad job. She dismissed the elderly slattern and set to work to make her husband and his house presentable.

Among many little improvements in the house was the installation of a telephone in the hall, with an extension to the "best bedroom" — which latter Florence does not seem to have regarded as an extravagance.

Under the régime of the elderly slattern Percy's health had deteriorated. Florence took him to Harley Street to be overhauled and devoted the next three months to the task of building him up.

She made him take rowing lessons and saw to it that he put in regular practice. She encouraged him in other manly sports. She bought him a shotgun and cartridges and urged him to practise in the garden — also a target pistol, but in these directions Percy showed no ambition.

At the end of three months she decided that it was time to resume consideration of their financial affairs.

From the first she had taken control of expenditure — we are given to understand at his request. True, he signed the checks, but she kept the check book.

It was his wish, we are told, that they should each make a will in the other's favor. After all, he still had the remnant of a fortune (now very little more than £6000) and the freehold of his house. Florence, for her part, had vaguely "a little property."

The next step in financial prudence was to insure his life for £15,000. This presented no difficulty. Thanks to his wife's care he was now bronzed and in excellent condition and passed easily as a first-class risk.

Florence developed a positive en-

thusiasm for insurance. She insured, as it were, everything she could lay hands on — in particular, a collection of old miniature portraits that had been acquired with the furniture. We find correspondence with two leading insurance companies each of which declared that the miniatures were artistically valueless. Finally, she insured them with a small company for £400 — against fire and theft.

And here it must be admitted that Florence was no financial genius. Out of a gross income of £300 she was spending £225 on insurance alone.

It is difficult to draw any clear impression of their brief married life — the woman of thirty-five and the half-idiot boy of twenty-one, alone in that great white elephant of a house except for the intermittent presence of one general servant.

One incident only stands out during the next four months. Percy contracted a mild form of pneumonia and Florence nursed him. Suddenly the doctor, for no stated reason, refused to go on with the case and made it clear that unless the patient were taken at once to a hospital, there might well be trouble.

What the doctor saw we do not know. We can be reasonably certain that he could prove nothing from the fact that he did not try to do so. But we may guess that he suspected her of helping the disease.

Within a fortnight Percy was home again and in a week or so regained his normal health. Then it was that Florence broke it to him that they were desperately poor. They could no longer afford to keep even the one general servant, who must be given immediate notice.

Percy did not mind — until he was made to realize that he would have to do the housework. Florence did such cooking as there was — Percy did everything else. Florence, he discovered was very particular. She wanted the whole house to be kept clean.

For six weeks he endured a state of virtual slavery. It did not occur to his feeble intelligence that his work had not previously been done by the general servant — nor by anyone else. Just as he approached breaking point, Florence propounded her scheme.

"Percy. These miniatures are insured for £400. If burglars were to steal them we should get the £400 — and then we could have a servant and you wouldn't have to do any more housework."

"I wish a burglar would steal them."

"I see what you mean — you mean we might *pretend* the place has been burgled. We could burgle it ourselves — and throw the stuff in the river — and get the money."

"Cor, Florence, that's a good 'un! Let's do it tonight as soon as it's dark."

"Not tonight — but soon. It will have to be done very, very carefully. If you want me to help you with this clever idea of yours, Percy, you must promise to do everything I tell you."

On the chosen night, Florence, wearing a pair of Percy's boots, stole a boat from its moorings by Richmond Bridge, rowed until she was in line

with the house, then tied up.

Percy was waiting for her in hiding near the water's edge. He gave her a sack containing the miniatures and numerous other small articles "stolen" from the little safe in the dining room.

She put the sack in the boat, whereupon he walked back to the house, entering it by the dining room window. In Percy's simple mind the sack was already at the bottom of the river by the time he arrived — for that was a part of what he believed to be the program.

Actually the sack was carried by Florence to the middle of the lawn and left there — to suggest, on the following morning, booty dropped by burglars in their haste to escape. Florence, you see had no real intention of taking all this trouble for the paltry £400 insurance of the miniatures.

She had worn Percy's boots in order to provide man-size footprints. When she rejoined her husband she took off her boots; then, without bustle or flurry, she proceeded to clean and polish them.

Then, leaving the door of the safe open, they went upstairs, undressed, and got into bed. Almost as soon as they had done this, Florence reached for the telephone and put an urgent call through to the Richmond police station, some mile and a quarter distant.

"Is that the police?" she cried. "Oh, I think burglars are in our house downstairs! Wait a minute! My husband will speak to you."

"I'm sure I hear burglars," said Percy, carefully repeating the lines in which she had rehearsed him. "I'm going down to see. I have a pistol to protect myself, but will you please come along at once?"

Percy then put on his dressing gown (one of the many little refinements in his personal life introduced by Florence), took up the target pistol, previously loaded and placed ready to his hand, and went downstairs.

"Wait till I come and give the word," cautioned Florence.

As soon as he had left the room, she slipped on a pair of gloves and dragged from under the bed an old cabin trunk that had been hers long before she had met Percy. From the trunk she took an old double-barreled shotgun — not, be it noted, the shotgun she had bought for Percy, which was in its place behind the cupboard in the "morning room."

Then she hurried downstairs.

Percy was waiting for her in the dining room, a candle in one hand, the target pistol in the other.

"Now!"

Percy, as previously arranged, fired the target pistol at the wall near the safe — as if he had aimed at a burglar and missed. As soon as he had done this, Florence slipped in front of him, let go the two barrels of the shotgun, and blew his brains out.

Then she extracted the cartridge cases, dropped the gun on the floor near the safe, and hurried back to her bedroom. She locked the door, removed the key and put it, with the empty cartridge cases, in her dressing

gown pocket. It was a duplicate key. The other key had been previously placed in Percy's dressing gown pocket.

Finally, in a well-simulated state of hysteria, she rang the police station again, told them that she had heard guns being fired downstairs and feared the worst, that she could not get out of her bedroom because her husband had locked her in for safety. Would the police, in pity's name, hurry up?

From the first, the case was watertight. When the police arrived they released Florence with the key taken from the dead man's pocket. They did not know, that night, that the deceased was heavily insured in his wife's favor. By the time they heard this, Florence, we know, had contrived to get rid of the duplicate key and the spent cartridge cases.

If the police ever held the theory of her guilt they were compelled to drop it as there was not the tiniest particle of evidence against her. Florence had staged a burglary and had had the good sense to "act" it so that it was complete in all its objective traces.

Every new line, in fact, brought them back to the burglary. The safe had not been forced, but opened with a key. How had the burglars obtained a key? Investigation showed that some three weeks previously Percy had lost his bunch of keys. But as the prudent Florence had insured them, they had been returned by the insurance company. While they had been lying about, a burglar might have taken an impression.

The shotgun was the most valuable piece of evidence. Trace the shotgun and you have traced the murderer. And at first sight the shotgun seemed remarkably easy to trace.

It was about thirty years old and, when new, had been very expensive. It bore the name of a well-known London gunsmith — and a number. Further, on the stock there was a deep jagged scratch making the rough outline of a parrot's beak. Further still, on the butt end were the engraved initials "R. O."

The makers were able to say that it had been supplied to a West Country landowner. Following this up, the police learned that, shortly after the purchase, the landowner had given it to his gamekeeper. The gun was next heard of as being sold by an itinerant market dealer in Exeter to a farmer named Odlum who sold it back to the same dealer a year later. It was bought again on the same day by a man unknown to the dealer. This last transaction was twenty years old and after that the gun became untraceable.

Had it been bought by a man who kept it for twenty years and then himself turned burglar? A shotgun was not part of the normal burglar's outfit. Further, the burglar-murderer knew that the gun was untraceable, but feared that the cartridges might not be — for he had had the clear-headedness to take the empty cases with him. . . . A nice little logical tangle that led nowhere.

Organization did its best. A de-

scription of the gun was circulated in all the papers, but without result. And so, in due course, the dossier and the shotgun were sent to the Department of Dead Ends.

Florence collected the insurance and when probate had been granted, sold the house at Richmond. With one thing and another she came out of her brief marriage some £20,000 the richer.

She went to live in a residential hotel in Kensington while, to occupy her leisure, she opened a one-room office in the city as an independent insurance broker — an enterprise she did not take too seriously. But the business brought her in touch with a fairly wealthy broker who came to live in the same hotel. He seems to have shown a certain resistance to Florence's charms for, a year after he had installed himself at the hotel, they were still spoken of merely as friends.

Whether she would eventually have brought him to the point of marriage can never be known. The ceremony had certainly not taken place when they went to Harrogate together — where the detectives came to arrest her for the murder of her husband two years previously.

It is no reflection on Florence's skill as a murderess to say that she failed to guess that, some twenty months after her crime, Mr. John Wodderspoon, an American citizen, staying with English friends at Sevenoaks in Kent, might himself become mixed up in a burglary.

Mr. Wodderspoon, in defense of his host's property, had rushed upon a couple of burglars and had been knocked unconscious for his pains. And in a rather unusual manner. For they had begun by menacing him with a shotgun. And when he had refused to be menaced, they had clubbed him with the butt, giving him a very bad concussion.

He was not permanently injured; but nearly four months had passed before the doctor allowed him to make the short journey to London at the request of the officials of Scotland Yard.

Burglars — shotgun! A most unusual combination. And the combination had occurred twice within two years. Tarrant, however, assumed a logical connection and promptly assumed that the burglars who had assaulted Wodderspoon were the burglars who had killed Percy Hornby.

To Tarrant Mr. Wodderspoon described them as "hoboes," which was not in itself very helpful. He was, in fact, of no use at all, but Tarrant was too polite to tell him so. He was, too, inattentive, obviously seeing Scotland Yard as a tourist, and thoroughly enjoying it. His eye kept straying to the shotgun. As it had been in that room for nearly two years before Wodderspoon had even landed in England, Tarrant did not expect him to be able to throw any light on it.

But here Tarrant was wrong. Here, in short, he was presented with a victory he had done nothing to earn.

"Say, that's remarkable, officer! I guess I've seen that gun before. There's the parrot's beak on the stock that was made by my own mule when my

friend dropped it. Look in the butt end and you'll find the initials "R. O." If the regulations permit, I'd like to ask you what that gun is doing here."

We have, of course, no exact record of the actual words used, but the conversation must have flowed somewhat on these lines.

"You know the owner of this gun, Mr. Wodderspoon?"

"Sure! He was my friend — Ralph Hornbeck of Milton, Ohio. He bought the gun from a secondhand store when he was touring in Britain. The poor fellow thought the world of that gun."

"Do you know — ?"

"You'll excuse me, officer, but it's a painful subject. My friend shot himself with that gun. He tied string round the trigger and took both barrels. I'm not saying it was done on account of his wife, mind. She was of British birth — and I dare say she had no fault, bar that of being twenty years younger than her husband. Anyway, she wasn't too popular. She collected the $20,000 insurance and moved on."

Inevitably, in some form or another, Tarrant must have asked:

"Did any suspicion fall on the wife?"

"No. It was suicide right enough. He locked his wife in the bedroom before he did it. She heard the gun go off and rang the sheriff from the telephone at her bedside. The sheriff had to take the key out of the dead man's pocket to let her out of the bedroom."

Then, of course:

"Could you identify that woman if you were to see her now, Mr. Wodderspoon?"

"I guess so. But it's a good many years ago — wait, she had little specks of color in the white of her left eye."

Answer to "Guess Who?"

Yes, of course, dapper little Hercule Poirot himself, that world famous detective who is the hero of some twenty volumes from the gifted pen of Agatha Christie. [EDITOR'S NOTE: Reference to Poirot's "little grey cells" was the clue deliberately omitted — that would have made it *too* easy!]

Watch for a Poirot story in the next issue. This tale is the second MODERN LABOR OF HERCULES: The Hydra of Lernea or *The Case of the Gossipers*. Like the other modern labors of Hercules it has never been included in any of Agatha Christie's published books.

At the end of an editorial preface in our March 1945 issue, we wrote: "If you think you have talent, if you have something to say, if you have the will and the patience and the consuming desire to be a detective-story writer, you'll find EQMM's editorial door always open — wide open."

A surprisingly large number of would-be writers took up the challenge. Every submission was personally considered by your Editor. Naturally most of them were returned — but never without a personal note of encouragement and/or criticism whenever the story deserved either or both.

One manuscript had the following letter attached to it, addressed to Ellery Queen: "Accepting your statement as to the width of your editorial doors to both young and old, I submit the enclosed story. As to its merits, that you will decide. I have no further comment but to tell you that the method of murder is wholely [sic] original, and that J. D. C.'s plots are unmolested. (signed) L. T."

J. D. C. could stand only for John Dickson Carr. So it was apparent from the outset that a new writer was patterning his work after that of Mr. Carr. But was the new writer young or old? A glance through the manuscript revealed significant clues: imperfect punctuation; very faulty spelling; corrections in a decidedly youthful handwriting. A reading of the manuscript left your Editor dazed — but not too dazed to prevent him from dashing off a special delivery letter to the author, offering to buy the story as the first of a new series about a brand-new detective.

Ensuing correspondence confirmed your Editor's deductions. The author, Leonard Thompson, is (at the time of this writing) 16 years old!

"Squeeze Play" is an absolutely remarkable piece of work to have been written by a 16-year-old boy. Its basic plot idea is a "honey"; to the best of your Editor's knowledge it is, as the youthful author claimed, "wholely original." And its originality is completely worthy of comparison with John Dickson Carr's. Further, in William S. Gray, criminal lawyer, Leonard Thompson has projected an incredibly mature character; Bill Gray is a tough old bird, but he's not cardboard — he has three solid dimensions.

True, there are many things about the story that are frankly derivative — as Leonard Thompson himself will be the first to admit. The characterization owes a large debt to the hardboiledism of the Hammett school; yet Bill Gray stands on his own feet, with tough qualities all his own. The main plot device, refreshingly original as it is, could never have been born in Leonard Thompson's brain without an intensive study beforehand of the John Dickson Carr "impossible-crime" technique; but while young Thompson has pursued and perceived, he has not purloined; he has absorbed, not abstracted, and finally striking out on his own, he has struck with astonishing impact.

There are obvious faults too in his style and construction — it would be

twice the miracle if there weren't! He inclines to be repetitious, both in form and content; loose in construction; too reportorial in exposition. But these are immaturities that no teen-age writer could be expected to hurdle in his first story. They will disappear with practise and perseverance. Infinitely more important are Master Thompson's virtues — his daring plot conception, his sinewy characterizations, his enormous promise . . .

When EQMM was launched four years ago, we promised you the best detective short stories ever written or to be written. To achieve this double-barreled objective, we had already built the largest collection of books of detective-crime shorts in the world — from which to give you the cream of the past. In this connection, Anthony Boucher, detective-story critic for the "San Francisco Chronicle," wrote in his column of May 27, 1945: "Only a scholar like Queen with a library like Queen's could equal his amazing finds in unheard of-and excellent reprint material." To bring you the finest new detective shorts, we offer the highest prices being paid by any detective-story magazine for original manuscripts. In this connection, we have discovered that our double-barreled objective is in reality triple-barreled. The third goal is one that has grown upon us, and only now do we realize its tremendous importance for the future. For, in bringing you the best new stories, it is not enough to bring you the work of well-established writers — like Agatha Christie, Craig Rice, John Dickson Carr, T. S. Stribling. Any editor with passion and perception can do that. There is the further duty, both to our readers and to the genre itself, to discover new writers — the unknowns of today who will be the great of tomorrow; to give them encouragement, help, and most important of all, a début in print.

Only now are we beginning to understand the full responsibility of far-sighted editorship. Only when we read what a new writer like Leonard Thompson thinks about EQMM do we appreciate how crucially editors carry the detective-story burden of the future. Young Leonard wrote: "I can truthfully say that I would never have attempted writing if it weren't for your editorial policy . . . You have made a valuable contribution to the future of the detective story by providing me and many others with an opportunity to prove ourselves — for which I shall be eternally grateful."

SQUEEZE PLAY

by LEONARD THOMPSON

She brushed past the mop-woman, and walked through the open doorway. The outer office was messed with books and loose papers. A few

whiskey bottles lay in a corner. There was no bulb in the light socket, and the worn shade sieved the sunlight. The air was thick with dust.

She saw a man sleeping, his head bent in his arms, on the desk in the inner office. An empty bottle lay next to his arm.

She shook his shoulders.

He lifted his head, mumbled insensibly, then dropped it again.

"Mr. Gray!"

He quickly jerked his head up, blinking blood-shot eyes at her. His crumpled black suit, once expensive, was soiled with liquor stains. Hair shaggy, eyes red, mouth open stupidly, he looked a good fifty, although he was only nearing forty.

"I — huh?" He rubbed his eyes.

"You're William Gray, the criminal lawyer?"

He stared at her, then laughed.

"Yeah, I'm Bill Gray, the *brilliant* criminal lawyer. Won't you seat yourself in my luxurious office?"

He waved his dirty hands at the shabby office.

"I suppose you're a sob writer who came to see how fate treated poor old Bill Gray?"

She shook her head.

He fumbled in his coat and murmured: "I — ah — seem to be out of cigarettes. You haven't . . ."

She handed him a silver cigarette case. He clicked it open and put a cigarette between his dry lips. She snapped a lighter and touched the flame to it. He sighed and relaxed.

"Well, what do you want? Material to write a tragic novel? Or are you here to force me to evacuate my impressive suite of offices?"

"I want you to take a case."

He slowly pulled the cigarette from his mouth, twitching his lips.

"You're crazy. I'm washed up. Don't you read the newspapers? Bill Gray is a bum, a confirmed alcoholic; his brain is shot."

"Other lawyers have told me it's hopeless. I went to a former associate of yours; he laughed and sent me to you."

"You must have known he was joking. Why did you come?"

She lit a cigarette. "I've heard of you. You've acquitted hopeless men when other lawyers turned them down. I don't know what happened to you, and it's none of my business. But I do know you were one of the smartest lawyers in the country, and I believe you can still work your little miracles. And you're my last hope."

He ran his tongue over his lips.

"Murder?"

She nodded.

He slowly shook his head, blinking.

"Don't waste your time with me. I haven't been in a courtroom in two years. I'd feel lost, and — I'd be laughed at."

"You've been laughed at before."

"Yes, but then I could laugh back."

She squirmed in the chair, and paused before speaking.

"Take the case, and I'll give you ten thousand dollars."

He lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"You're really desperate, aren't

you?"

"Accept the case, and you'll find out why."

"No, not even ten thousand dollars could get me back in court. I've lost my — knack."

She dropped her cigarette on the floor, and squashed it with a twist of her foot. "Very well, I'll compromise. Investigate the case, and if you don't want to take it, you don't have to. If you do, I'll pay you a weekly salary of a hundred dollars, plus expenses."

"That," he said, "is foolish." He ran his hands through his graying hair, and yawned. "All right, I'll do it, on condition that I can drop the case whenever I want to. As a retainer you've got to buy me dinner. I'm broke. Is it a deal?" He grinned.

She stood up.

"Where do we eat?"

Looking much better, and regaining his professional voice, Gray sipped the last of his coffee. "Now that I've extorted a meal from you, I'd like to hear the details."

She lit another cigarette, frowned and said: "I'm no story teller, so I'll begin with the basic fact. My husband is going to be tried before the Superior Court for the murder of a Dr. Lane. He is — was a psychiatrist. He had been treating me for a neurotic condition and my husband became jealous. He claimed that the treatment was longer than necessary, and made an appointment himself for ten o'clock in the morning. He was let into the anteroom, and the doctor's assistant went into her office. Remembering something, she went back to the anteroom. My husband was standing in the center of the floor, a revolver in his hand. She rushed past him and into the doctor's office. Dr. Lane was slumped over his desk with a bullet hole in his head, dead."

"Then what happened?"

"My husband mumbled that he didn't do it, or words to that effect. The doctor's assistant called the police. They asked questions, and found out that my husband was the first visitor of the day, that only he and Dr. Lane were in the two rooms, and concluded that my husband had come there with the intention of killing Lane. They arrested him."

Gray pushed aside his coffee cup. "And your husband's version?"

"He claimed that he was placidly sitting in a chair in the anteroom when he heard a swosh, then something like a grunt. He ran into the office, saw that Lane was dead, and while running through the anteroom to inform the assistant, saw a gun lying on the thick Persian rug. He picked it up and Miss Williams — the assistant — came in at that moment. He knew that it looked bad and told her that he didn't do it. When the police arrived, he told them what I've just told you."

"Is he guilty?"

"If he isn't, you've got to prove it. If he is, you've got to get him out of it."

He fingered a cheap ring, nodding. "All right, now let's unravel this

thing. This Miss Williams is willing to swear that your husband was alone in the anteroom, and that the doctor was alone in his office? Is she the only witness the state has?"

"No, or I suppose it wouldn't be so bad. There's a male secretary and a hospital goods supplier. He was delivering some goods and was in the outer office."

"Wait a minute. I want to get this straight. In direct order, if I wanted to visit the doctor's office, I'd first have to pass through the outer office, then through the anteroom, and from there into his office?"

"Yes, that's the sequence."

"And how many doors in the anteroom, and in the doctor's office?"

"Two in the anteroom, one from the outer office and one into the doctor's office. There's only one in his office, the door connecting it with the anteroom."

He frowned. "That's bad. Continue."

"Well, this hospital goods dealer was in the outer office when my husband arrived, and was there when Miss Williams forgot something and went back to find my husband with the gun in his hands."

"So there are three witnesses: the goods dealer, the male secretary, and Miss Williams?"

"Yes. Their evidence proved that my husband was alone with Dr. Lane, and when the police arrived there was no one in the offices except the people I've mentioned. So no one hid in the office and shot Lane."

"In other words, your husband was *the only person* who could have shot Lane."

She nodded.

"How about windows? Is his office on the ground floor?"

"That was what my husband used as a defense. The three rooms are on the ground floor of his private home. It was a warm May day and the only window was open. My husband was sitting with his back to it, and he claimed that someone must have shot through it into the doctor's office."

"Give me a more detailed description of the window's position with respect to the door."

"Well, if you were standing in the doorway, leading from the outer office, the window would be in the center of the wall to your right and the door into Lane's office would be directly in front of you."

"In what position was the doctor's desk?"

"Diagonally to the left, in the far corner. But the door was stuck in a right-angled position, and it opens into the anteroom to the right."

He drew a rough diagram on the tablecloth. "That means if some one *did* shoot from the window into Lane's office, the bullet would have to pass *through the door.*"

"Yes, but there were no holes in the door. And the windows in the office were locked and unbroken."

He grinned. "I can see why no other lawyer would touch it. It's flatly impossible *for anyone but your husband to have committed the crime.*"

"Are you going to investigate?"

"Who represented him at the preliminary hearing?"

"His lawyers. But they refused to become involved in the actual trial."

"I'll have to talk to them."

"You . . . but are you taking the case?"

"I'm definitely taking the case. Is he in custody?"

"Yes, after the indictment the police grabbed him and refused bail."

"I've been wondering why you haven't told me your name."

She sighed. "I must have forgotten. It's Marlowe. Louise Marlowe. My husband is Niles Marlowe."

"Not the detective story author?"

She nodded.

He frowned, but dropped the subject. "Has he signed any statements?"

"No, his lawyers told him to say nothing, but to deny his guilt."

"When will the trial take place?"

"In a week."

He scowled and ground his cigarette in the plate.

"That was a dirty trick. Offering me a hundred a week, when you knew I'd have only one week."

She said nothing, half-shutting her eyelids.

"I've only a week to prepare the case. I'll need a lot of money, and today. I'll need assistants, and private detectives. And I don't want you to tell anyone that you've hired me. I'll see your husband before the trial. Probably the day before it starts."

"Isn't that — unusual? Aren't you supposed to spend time rehearsing him or something?"

"This is an unusual case. Leave me to my own business. You'd better be ready to pay fines. I'm liable to be fined for contempt of court more than once."

She didn't question him, merely nodding. He stood up.

"Write out a check for five thousand dollars, and it better not bounce. Here's a little warning. *You're* not my client, your husband is. I'm not going to spare anyone to save him, not even you."

She removed a check book from her purse, and made out the check.

"No," he said, "G-r-a-y. Not e-y."

She crumpled the paper and threw it away, writing on a clean blank. Tearing it from the book, she handed it to him. The waitress sauntered over to their table, and Mrs. Marlowe paid the bill.

"Now what are you going to do?"

He grinned. "Buy a pack of cigarettes."

The courtroom was crowded, and everyone, from the steam fitter in the first row, to the prosecutor nervously glancing at the clock, was wondering who the defense counsel would turn out to be. The only hint available was the story of a jailer who claimed that a "bum" had paid a visit to the accused the day before, claiming that he was attorney for the defense.

As the bailiff lazily opened the large windows to relieve the heat, the doors to the hall opened. All eyes turned to the man strutting energetically up

the aisle towards the bench.

Gray's appearance was far from that of a bum's. An expensive, light gray suit, a white rose in the lapel, a dark blue tie, a twenty-dollar white shirt — all gave the illusion of a wealthy broker. He brushed past the surprised Mrs. Marlowe and seated himself next to his client.

District Attorney Abbott, acting prosecutor, approached Gray's table.

"I've seen you somewhere before?"

"The name is Gray. William S. Gray."

Abbott gripped the table with a pudgy hand. "*You're* William Gray? But Gray was a young man. . . . Oh, sorry, Gray. Guess I didn't remember your face."

Gray removed a thermos bottle from his brief case, and stood it on the table.

"Alcohol," he said, "changes a man."

Abbott hesitated, fumbling with a watch chain. "Gray, you must be crazy. Marlowe here is the only one who *could* have killed Lane. If you're staging a comeback, you've picked a hell of a case. It's open and shut."

The door to the judge's chambers opened, and Abbott took his seat.

Judge Thompson was old enough to look dignified, but young enough to be feared. He glanced at the standing attendance, eyes lingering on Gray's smiling face. He picked his *pince nez* up from the bench, and adjusted them.

"For the benefit of the court recorder, will the attorney for the defendant please announce his name."

"William S. Gray."

With a slight lift of his bushy eyebrows the judge seated himself.

The preliminaries through, Abbott was delivering his introductory summation to the jury.

". . . There can be no question of self-defense; the defendant showed no mercy, as the state will prove. . . ."

Gray turned to his client and said in a loud whisper:

"Did you ever write anything *that* bad?"

Someone tittered.

Abbott hesitated, but decided to ignore it. He ended with: "The evidence will show that Niles Marlowe was the only possible human being who could have murdered Dr. Lane."

The first witness for the state was called. Miss Mary Williams was sworn in, and Abbott, his hands in his pockets, asked: "You were the assistant of Dr. James Lane, the psychiatrist?"

"Yes, sir. I was with him four years."

"Will you explain to the court the events of May the fifteenth, nineteen forty-two, in Dr. Lane's offices."

Gray jumped to his feet. "Objection. Mr. Abbott cannot ask her to 'explain' the events. She can only narrate them."

Judge Thompson nodded, turning to Abbott.

"You will rephrase the question."

Abbott grunted, shrugging his shoulders. "Very well, will you *narrate* the events?"

"Well, Dr. Lane had told me the

day before that he was expecting a man at ten o'clock in the morning. That was the usual time for the first appointment of the day. At nine fifty-five, Mr. Marlowe rang the bell and was shown into the anteroom."

"Will you please indicate the room on this floor plan."

She pointed to it.

"What did you tell the defendant?"

"I told him that Dr. Lane was busy and that he would call him into his office when he finished looking over some case records."

"Was the defendant the first visitor of the day?"

"Yes."

"Was he alone in the anteroom?"

"Yes."

"And was Dr. Lane alone in his office?"

"Yes."

"Was the door connecting these two rooms open?"

"Yes, sir. It was stuck."

"Do you mean at right angles to the wall?"

"Yes."

"After showing the accused to the anteroom, what did you do?"

"I left him sitting there and went into the outer office, shutting the door behind me. A hospital goods dealer had come to deliver some supplies, and I went out to the driveway to check the goods in the truck."

"Was the goods dealer in the outer office when Mr. Marlowe entered?"

"Yes."

He told her to continue.

"As I approached the truck, I recalled that Dr. Lane hadn't given me the money to pay for the goods, and I went back into the outer office. Intending to enter the anteroom, I opened the door."

"What did you see?"

"Mr. Marlowe was standing with his back towards me, a revolver in his hands."

"What did you do?"

"I knew something had happened, so I ran past him into the doctor's office. Dr. Lane was sitting at his desk, his head bent forward. He was dead, with a bullet hole in his head, and some blood running down his cheek."

"Objection," drawled Gray. "The witness had no way of knowing that the hole had been caused by a bullet. She merely assumed it, because my client had been holding a gun. There are many implements that can pierce the skin, and leave breaks similar to those of a bullet. She is not qualified to make that statement, unless she was present when the bullet was removed."

Judge Thompson thought for a few seconds, then turned to the witness.

"The statement will stand, but please avoid assumptions."

She nodded, and smiled.

"Yes, your Honor, and I think that Mr. Gray is very foolish."

Gray jumped up, nearly knocking the thermos bottle to the floor.

"And I," he shouted, "think that Miss Williams should keep her Goddamned mouth shut!"

His Honor shot to his feet; the jurors stared; Miss Williams's lips

moved soundlessly; Abbott's mouth was set in a big grin as he glanced up at the judge.

"That," said the court, "will cost you one hundred dollars."

"Why, what for?" purred Gray.

"What for? Profan . . ."

"Your Honor, do you admit the existence of God?"

"Yes, but what . . ."

"Then how do you know that God hasn't damned Miss Williams's mouth?"

A reporter in the first row laughed.

The judge glared at Gray.

"That little piece of foolishness will cost you another hundred dollars."

Gray crossed his arms. "I refuse to pay."

Ferociously, the judge pounded his gavel.

"Fifteen minute recess. Mr. Gray, come into my chambers."

While the two were gone, Abbott's grin widened; there was a murmuring babble as everyone talked to four or five persons at once. Marlowe was casting uncertain glances at the door leading to the judge's chambers, and Miss Williams sat relaxed in the witness chair, faintly smiling.

When they returned, the judge took his seat, pounded for silence, and turned to Miss Williams.

"The defense counsel has informed me that he is a sick man, both mentally and physically. I must ask you to refrain from inciting him, and to apologize for calling him 'foolish'."

There was no stopping the babble now; even the clerk of the court looked puzzled. Abbott lost his grin and simply stared at Gray.

Miss Williams smiled weakly.

"I — I'm sorry, Mr. Gray. I didn't mean it."

"Your apology," Gray said haughtily, "is accepted."

Abbott's mouth was hanging open, and when the noise subsided, he continued the questioning, tugging nervously at a vest button.

"What did you do when you found Dr. Lane dead, with a *bullet* hole in him?"

She had telephoned for the police.

"Was there a silencer on this gun?"

"Yes."

"Did Dr. Lane ever make any remarks concerning Mrs. Marlowe?"

"Yes. When he was treating her he used to tell me that no 'cheap detective story writer deserved such a woman.'"

Gray jumped up.

"Your Honor, my client is one of the best paid, most competent and most widely read detective story authors in this country, and I resent any slur of this type."

Miss Williams smiled.

"I was quoting Dr. Lane."

"I don't care *who* you were . . ."

"Your Honor," put in Abbott acidly, "defense counsel is only attempting to prolong the trial with these senseless objections. . . ."

"I," said Gray, "wasn't objecting. I merely stated that I resented her statement."

"You . . ."

The judge coughed.

"Stop this bickering and continue the examination of the witness."

Sighing, Abbott turned to the witness.

"Was the doctor on more than friendly terms with the defendant's wife?"

He glanced at Gray with shifting eyes, anticipating an objection. But Gray wasn't even looking at the witness; he was glancing disinterestedly out of one of the windows.

"Yes," replied Miss Williams, "I saw lipstick on his face one day, just after she had left."

"Did the defendant seem anxious or nervous before the crime?"

"He looked as though he was going to kill a man."

No objection.

Abbott held a revolver in front of her face. There was a silencer attached.

"Is this the revolver you saw in Mr. Marlowe's hands?"

"It looks like it, but I can't be sure."

Abbott turned and faced Gray. "Your witness."

Gray nodded, unscrewed the cup-like cap of the thermos bottle, poured a blackish fluid into it, and drank the coffee slowly. Replacing the cap, he stood up.

Miss Williams had set her jaw in firm lines of resistance, and as he approached her, glared defiantly at him. He suddenly shoved his face down until their noses almost touched. She jerked back.

"Have you ever slept with Dr. Lane . . ."

A woman shouted something, but it was barely audible over the mingled mass of excited voices. The judge had been drinking a glass of water, and now the front of his robe was gleaming with moisture. Abbott was vainly yelling objections which were drowned out by the babble. Finally he bellowed:

"Your Honor, he has no right to ask that question, and I demand that the witness refuse to answer."

Gray began to speak, and the clatter became a whisper.

"I was interrupted, your Honor, and didn't complete my question."

Judge Thompson nodded. "Very well, complete it."

"I was going to say: have you ever slept with Dr. Lane in the same house?"

"Same objection," said Abbott.

"I intend to connect it."

"Very well." The judge wiped his frock with a handkerchief. "It will be answered. But if proper connection isn't shown, it shall be stricken out."

Miss Williams was cringing in the chair.

"I — I don't understand you," she murmured.

"Didn't you spend two weeks in the country with Dr. Lane, *alone?*"

"I — it was business."

One of the jurors laughed.

"How old are you, Miss Williams?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Have you ever been married?"

"No."

"What! A beautiful girl like you,

iever married?"

"I said 'no', and thanks for the ompliment."

Abbott's eyelids had been steadily arrowing, but he opened them wide is Gray smiled and bowed.

"Don't mention it. You've been howing enough of your legs this morning."

There was a strained silence, everyone staring at Miss Williams. Faint traces of a smile showed on the judge's lips.

She stared into Gray's eyes. He stared back. Her face was becoming a mass of red splotches, and she gritted her teeth, attempting to halt tears. Unconsciously, she shoved her skirt far over her knees.

"Th . . . that was filthy."

Her body began to quiver, and she covered her face with her hands, sobbing.

The judge ordered a fifteen-minute recess.

Sitting at his table, Gray watched Abbott comfort her.

"Do you always do that," Marlowe asked Gray, trying to smile.

"I have to. Her testimony is the state's whole case. I've got to divert the jurors' minds from it." He poured out more coffee.

Abbott strutted over.

"That," he scowled, "was a rotten trick."

"What? About Miss Williams?"

"No. The way you phrased that first question. You knew damn well that I'd object and make a fool of myself."

"I'm weeping in sympathy."

"All right, you've got her so nervous that she's perfect for cross-examination. But you can't win, Gray. No matter what you pull."

Gray grinned and brought the coffee to his lips.

"I'm going to smash your case to pieces. The trouble with you is that you didn't carefully prepare the case for the state. You decided to let it rest on the apparent impossibility of anyone but my client having committed the crime."

"Well? That's good enough for me."

When questioning was resumed, Miss Williams seemed calmer, although she wouldn't look Gray straight in the eyes.

"Now, when you saw Dr. Lane's body, what did you do?"

"I — Why, I went to his desk and saw that he was dead."

Gray stepped back.

"What! You mean to tell me that you didn't scream?"

She faltered.

"I — guess I didn't think of it."

He laughed. "You don't have to think to scream."

She said nothing, staring at the rose in his lapel.

"When you left the outer office to check the goods in the truck, how long were you gone?"

"About three minutes."

"Then you were outside the house at the actual time of the murder?"

"I suppose so."

He pointed to the floor plan.

"Are these shaggy lines surrounding the house bushes?"

"Yes."

"It would be a simple matter to hide in these bushes and not be seen by a passerby, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know, I've never tried it." She managed a weak smile.

"*Haven't you?*"

He matched her smile.

"Your Honor," Abbott wearily said, "I can see no point in asking these questions, nor in that last insinuation."

"I withdraw that last question," Gray said turning to the witness.

"Now, in your testimony you said: 'Dr. Lane had told me the day before that he was expecting a man at ten. . . .' Didn't you know *who* this man would be?"

"No. I didn't ask."

"Isn't that unusual? Didn't he tell you who his visitors were to be?"

"Yes — I mean, no. He didn't tell me about Mr. Marlowe."

"Why?"

"How the — how should I know?"

"Now let's get this part about the door straight. You claim the door was stuck. What do you mean by 'stuck'?"

"It wouldn't move freely. The door had been giving us trouble for a few weeks."

"What did Dr. Lane say when you told him about the door?"

"He said it was all right, that he'd fix it after hours."

Gray opened his eyes wide.

"Are you trying to tell me that a psychiatrist, *who must have absolute privacy with his patients*, said it was all right to have that door open all day?"

She leaped to her feet. "Yes, yes, yes, he did, I tell you, *he did!*"

He waved her back into the chair.

"You claim that Mrs. Marlowe was on more than friendly terms with the doctor?"

"You heard what I said about the lipstick."

"Was Dr. Lane good-looking?"

"Your Honor," objected Abbott, "the court isn't interested in Dr. Lane's physiognomy."

"I should think," grinned Gray, "the court would be very interested in Dr. Lane's facial features. After all, Mrs. Marlowe must have seen *something* in the doctor, if the state is going to contend that she was in love with him."

"Answer the question," ordered the judge, tapping the water pitcher.

"I guess he was," she frowned.

"You're the small fire-arms champion of a local woman's club, aren't you?"

Abbott slid his chair back. "Miss Williams isn't on trial! He's only . . ."

"I intend to connect it." Gray shoved his hands in his pockets.

She was ordered to answer the question.

"Yes, I am. So what?"

He ignored her, seating himself: "No more questions."

She left the stand hurriedly.

The state then called the male secretary who had been in the outer office. He corroborated Miss Williams' testimony, and Gray didn't

ight to have his testimony discredted, barely glancing at him.

"Your witness," Abbott said.

Looking up, Gray drawled: "No questions."

It was the same with the hospital goods dealer. Court adjourned for lunch.

The first witness of the afternoon, a husky, red-faced detective sergeant, sat down with a heavy sigh and joined his hands over his stomach.

He identified the revolver as the murder weapon by means of two scratches he had placed on the barrel the day of the crime.

Gray, seemingly paying no attention to the sergeant, was flipping the pages of a magazine.

The sergeant had been in charge of the case, and after hearing the statements of the three previous witnesses, had arrested the defendant. He explained to the jury that it was impossible to have fired from outside the house, through the anteroom window, into the doctor's office, without shooting a hole in the door. And there was no hole in the door. Marlowe's fingerprints had been on the gun, a .32 Smith & Wesson, with a Maxim silencer attached. No, the gun hadn't been successfully traced, but there were plenty of dishonest pawnshops. Yes, Marlowe himself had admitted that only he and Lane were in the two rooms.

"Your witness," Abbott murmured.

"No questions."

Frowning suspiciously, Abbott called his next witness.

The ballistics expert confirmed the sergeant's identification of the revolver. When it was turned over to him, it contained five full chambers and one empty shell.

The revolver was marked Exhibit A.

As the expert continued, telling the jury that at a distance of eight feet powder burns wouldn't show, Gray suddenly burst into a coughing fit. His eyes watered, and he attempted to stand, but collapsed in his chair. Spectators craned their necks, the judge leaned forward.

"Can you continue, counsellor?"

Gray shook his head and massaged his throat.

"I — I'll be all right — just need a cup of coffee. Go ahead with the questioning." Marlowe poured him the coffee, and he gulped it down.

The expert went on, but he was talking to a disinterested jury.

Again Gray asked no questions.

The county medical examiner was called. Lane had died almost instantly; the bullet had travelled through the left eye. It had entered at a downward angle and might have been fired from a stomach position by a man standing in the doorway.

"Your witness."

Gray slowly got to his feet and walked to the witness. "How do you know that the bullet entered at a downward angle?"

"From the normal position of a sitting man."

"And just how do you know that

Dr. Lane was sitting in a normal position?"

"I — well, I assumed . . ."

"Never mind your assumptions. You can't state the angle of the bullet's path with absolute accuracy any more than Dr. Lane can now."

He sat down, dismissing the witness.

Abbott cleared his throat, and with a wave of his hand said: "The state rests."

Court was adjourned until ten the following morning.

At ten-five, with an early morning rain splattering the large windows, Gray, in a blue pin-striped suit, opened the case for the defense. He addressed the jury with a clear, reverberating voice.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'm quite sure you are all familiar with your duty. If there is no doubt in your minds of my client's guilt, then you must bring in a verdict of guilty. However, if there is a reasonable doubt of his guilt, it is your obligation to vote not guilty. It is my intention to show you that reasonable doubt. My client is innocent, and I shall prove it. Remember, he was mainly indicted because the police could find no other method by which Dr. Lane could have been killed. Even as their case stands it must seem silly to people of your intelligence that a man as well versed in crime as my client obviously is should commit such a stupid crime."

He turned to his client.

"The defense's only witness is Mr. Niles Marlowe."

There was a forced hush as Marlowe, white-faced and lips in a firm line, stood up to his full six feet and took the stand. He was sworn in, and Gray questioned him.

He had gone to visit the doctor to ask him if his wife was improving. Miss Williams had shown him into the anteroom, directing him to a chair with its back to the window, telling him that the doctor was busy and would see him in a few minutes. He had been waiting about a minute and a half, when he heard a quick *swosh* followed by a prolonged grunt. Naturally, he rushed into the office. The doctor was there, dead.

"Could you please give a detailed description of the desk's position?"

"As I remember it, it was in the far left-hand corner, diagonally across from the door-opening. It was at a slant, cutting off the corner."

Coming out of the office, he'd noticed the gun lying on the rug, and picked it up. Then Miss Williams had come in.

"Did you murder Dr. James Lane?"

"No."

Gray smiled affably at Abbott: "Your witness."

Abbott began in slow, friendly terms, then followed with sharp, loud insinuations. Marlowe had been insanely jealous. He was so accustomed to murder that he didn't hesitate to commit one. He had coolly ended the life of the unsuspecting Lane. . . . For twenty minutes he spit out accu-

sations. Marlowe placidly answered when he could get a word in edgewise, although during the last few minutes, he faltered, looking anxiously at Gray, who was smiling at Abbott, shaking his head.

Exhausted, Abbott sat at his table, and sighed assuredly.

Judge Thompson adjusted his glasses, and folded his hands.

"You may sum up for the state, Mr. Abbott."

Abbott nodded, gulped some water, and stood before the jury.

He was a forceful orator. There was none of the wild shouting of his cross-examination. He chose his words carefully. He gave detailed conclusions that could be drawn from the witnesses' testimony, again pointing to the inescapable and irrefutable guilt of the defendant.

"In a case like this," he ended, "you will be tempted to lay the causation on Mrs. Marlowe. It is regrettable that she too cannot be punished. For it is women like Mrs. Marlowe who cause our court calendars to be needlessly filled. But let there be no pity for the defendant; he has robbed a man of his one indisputable possession: his life."

He sat down. It had been a convincing speech, and Marlowe was nervously rubbing his forehead, staring at the table top.

Gray stood up. He blinked once or twice, and walked to the jury box, clearing his throat.

"I must compliment the District Attorney," he said, "for his summation. It was well told, and all that one could expect. But sadly enough, there wasn't an atom of truth in it!

"If my client is guilty, why didn't he merely open one of the windows in Lane's office, and escape through the back? It would have been at least more sensible than what the prosecution claims he did. Imagine giving three witnesses the opportunity to testify him into the electric chair! It isn't credible! Moreover, he is supposed to have concocted a story which even the most brainless of men would have known would convict him. The truth is always difficult for the police to believe. They waved aside my client's story, because it was impossible for anyone else to have murdered Lane. But someone else *did* kill Lane!"

He paused, took a deep breath, and continued.

"The prosecution has shown you that a person could not have shot into the doctor's office from outside the anteroom window, without shooting a hole in the door, because of its right-angled position. Well, *the prosecution is wrong!*"

Gray took the short walk to the door leading into the judge's chambers, and flung it completely open.

"This is the position of the door on the murder day. It is open at right angles to the wall."

Gray stepped to one side, saying: "According to the floor plan, I'm in roughly the same position as the anteroom window with respect to the door."

Looking at the jury, Gray thrust

his hand in the direction of the door.

"*There are seventy-two square inches of clear space through which a bullet can pass in that door!*"

Abbott didn't sit down. His Honor readjusted his glasses. A light murmur spread over the courtroom, and the jury leaned forward in unison.

Gray fished in his pocket and pulled out a revolver, waving it at Abbott.

Abbott fingered his lapel. "Is that thing loaded?"

For answer Gray levelled the gun at the door, and pulled the trigger.

There was a loud smashing of glass, as a picture fell to the floor in the judge's chambers. Gray dropped the gun on the prosecutor's table, looking at Abbott.

"It's a .32 Smith & Wesson," he said, "*and you won't find any hole in the door!*"

Gray turned to the jury. "I have just used the same method the murderer used. *I shot through the crack in the door.* The space between the end of the door and its frame. Every door with hinges has one. It's six feet long, and at least an inch wide."

He walked to the floor plan, removed a wooden pencil from his breast pocket, and placed the tip on the center of the symbol that represented Lane's desk.

He turned his head to the jury. "Now watch!"

He drew a straight line from the desk to the crack between the wall and door, and continued it in a straight tangent. It passed through the anteroom window.

"That," he said, "is the path of the death bullet. The murderer was outside the open anteroom window, with my client's back to it. This person fired through the crack in the door, killing Lane. The section of the head that was hit could have been seen, just as I saw that picture in the judge's room, through the crack. I have been practicing that shot for almost a week. The murderer would have to be a skilled marksman to shoot through that small space. As my client ran into the office, the killer tossed the gun through the open window onto the rug, fairly certain that my client would pick it up, as he did, when he saw it. This fulfills and explains all the facts, and shows that my client was telling the truth. Now, with a clear conscience, you can't bring in any verdict but not guilty."

He sat down, bewildered eyes following him.

Abbott looked sullenly at Gray, and made a motion for adjournment, claiming that he would like time to investigate.

Gray leaped to his feet. "Your Honor, he should have investigated *before* he arrested my client. He has presented his case, and I demand that it stand."

Motion was denied. The court instructed the jury. The jury filed out of the room.

Twenty-three minutes later they returned. The foreman listened to the judge, nodded, and glancing around the courtroom, said:

"After careful consideration of both sides of the argument, we have found the state's case not proved, and have voted a verdict of not guilty."

Abbott wasn't listening. He was staring at an empty seat. Miss Williams had left.

It was the same shabby office. But there was no sunlight for the shade to sieve. A small, dusty bulb threw a dingy light across the room.

Gray looked at Mrs. Marlowe, then at a half-filled whiskey bottle. His head lolled back and forth drunkenly. He was having difficulty keeping his eyes open, pressing them with the palms of his hands.

"I came," she said, "to thank you for saving my husband's life, and to give you the other five thousand."

He nodded. "Have a drink? It's good to get back to the stuff — I can still taste that coffee — ugh!"

"No." She frowned. "I suppose by now the police have arrested Miss Williams?"

He shook his head, waving his hands.

"Why should they? She didn't do it."

"But you — Well, you practically *told* the jury she did it. Small-arms champion — outside the house at the time of the murder — it all fits."

He laughed. "It does like hell. She wouldn't have had the time to toss the gun through the window, then run around the side of the house, walk calmly into the outer office, and catch your husband *just as he was picking it up*. No, she was telling the truth."

She drew on a cigarette. "Then who did kill Lane?"

He grinned. "How innocent! *You did.* That's why you hired me. You never thought that a poor drunken fool could save your husband. You had to get the worst lawyer possible. And you only gave me a week to prepare the case." He coughed. "You're smart — and dumb. But I saw through you. How'd you feel when I showed the jury how *you* killed Lane? When you saw your plans shot to hell. . . ."

"You're drunk."

"'Course I'm drunk. Why shouldn't I be drunk? I don't know why you did it. Probably another man. Anyway, the whole idea was to get rid of your husband. You got Lane to fall in love with you — made sly remarks to your husband. He made an appointment — your other puppet, Lane, told you about it. You rushed out early in the morning — hid in the bushes outside the window. I don't know if you opened it, but you could have if it was shut — would have gone unnoticed on a hot day. You were going to kill your husband when he came into the room, quickly toss the gun next to him and leave. You needed a silencer. Someone might have heard the shot, run up to the house, and seen you leave. You were pretty sure they'd blame it on Lane — killed husband for you, old but effective. But while you were waiting, you noticed the crack in the door, and saw that you could hit Lane squarely in the head."

He gulped whiskey from the bottle.

"Then you saw the spot your husband would be in. Either way you'd get the same results. Both of them would go. But if you killed your husband, the case against Lane wouldn't be all you'd want it to be. But killing Lane would be different — airtight. You never thought anyone would think of the crack in the door. . . ."

She exhaled smoke and smiled. "You're crazy. The strain of the trial must have affected you. Besides, that's nothing but guess work."

He scowled. "Yeah? Then where did you go that morning?"

"Shopping."

"At eight o'clock in the morning? Think of a better one than that."

She sighed and stood up, walking to his right side, and patting him on the back.

"You're smart, Gray, very smart."

She opened her purse and removed a small black automatic. She began to point it.

He suddenly jerked up, grabbing the gun and slapping her in the face.

"Try to kill Bill Gray, will you? — O. K., Abbott, come on out, you've heard enough."

A side door swung open, and Abbott, followed by three men, walked briskly into the room.

She was crying and swearing at Gray, kicking her feet. Gray dropped the gun in his coat pocket. The three men managed to quiet her, and forced her out into the hall. Gray listened. He could hear her sobbing, shuffling down the stairs.

Abbott smiled sheepishly.

Gray opened a desk drawer and took out a glass. He was wideawake.

"Have a drink?"

Abbott nodded. "You know," he said, "if I hadn't listened to you, Miss Williams would be cooling her heels right now, waiting for an indictment."

Gray poured the liquor. "I've got to apologize to the girl. But I had to give the jury a suspicion of someone who fitted the facts. She fitted them better than Mrs. Marlowe, except for the time element. You —"

He suddenly dropped his jaw, opening his eyes wide.

"What's the matter? Heart?"

Gray shook his head.

"No — my five thousand dollars! I'll never get it now!"

Abbott laughed.

"Forget it. Think of what you've done for justice!"

"Justice, hell! I'm out five thousand smackers!"

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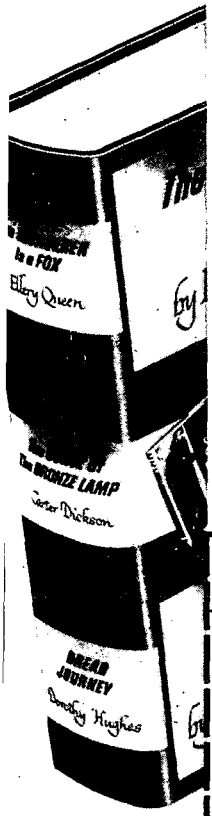

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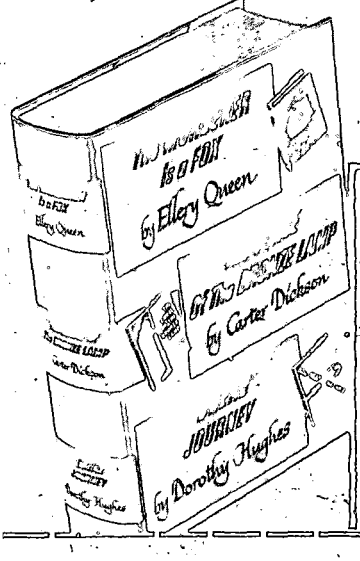

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