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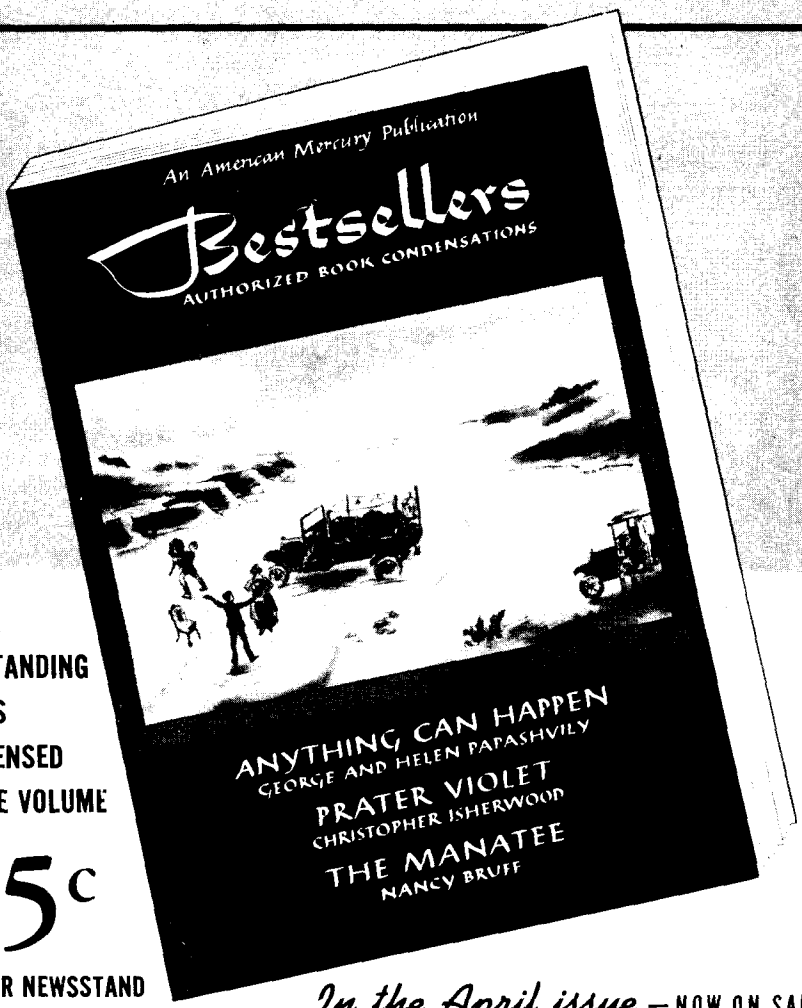
AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD



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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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MARCH **CRIME CLUB** SELECTION

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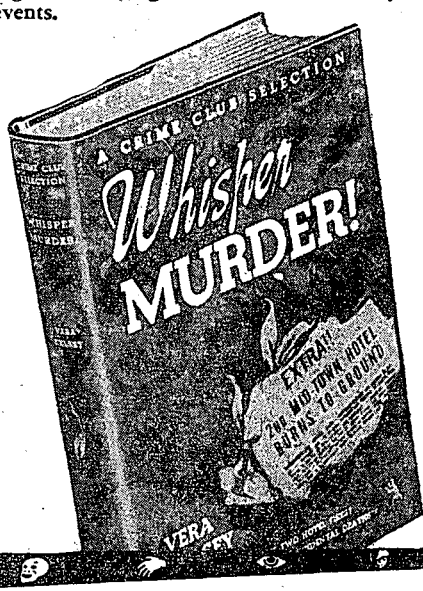

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THE CRIME CLUB

THE PRIZE WINNERS IN EQMM'S FIRST CONTEST

In June 1945 we proclaimed EQMM's first short-story contest. We sent publicity announcements all over the world — yes, even to embattled soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen in far-flung theatres of war. For the best original detective or crime story of 5,000-to-10,000 words, by amateur or professional, old-timer or newtimer, we offered a first prize of $2000, and for the six next best short stories, additional prizes of $500 each. The judges were Christopher Morley, noted author, critic, connoisseur, and member of the Editorial Board of the Book-of-the-Month Club; Howard Haycraft, author of MURDER FOR PLEASURE, *the most authoritative history of the detective story; and Your Most Humble Servant.*

The contest proved a huge, satisfying, and exciting success. No less than 838 manuscripts were submitted. In the last week before official closing we found ourselves literally swamped. Having made the error of allowing only three weeks between the end of the contest and the date promised for the announcement of winners, we — the entire staff of EQMM — worked day and night to read every submission and give each story the careful, personal consideration it deserved. Toward the very end we were — there's no denying it — a mighty groggy swing-shift, subsisting on black coffee, benzedrine, and intestinal fortitude. But we finished the job on schedule, never once cutting corners, and we reduced the 838 manuscripts to 15 possible prize-winners and turned these 15 finalists over to the judges. Now, with a lump in his throat and a warm glow in the environs of his heart, your Editor takes this opportunity to thank Messrs. Morley and Haycraft for their splendid co-operation, and particularly to express his deep and sincere gratitude to the other members of the EQMM staff, especially to Gertrude J. Huebner, Robert P. Mills, Helen Yaeger, and Bess Simpson, and above all to Mildred Falk without whose perseverance and perception the Herculean labor could never have been so triumphantly resolved.

The 838 original manuscripts came from every State in the Union (including the District of Columbia) — except one. No entry bore the postmark of any city, town, or hamlet in North Dakota. The "Flickertail State" is bounded north by the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, east by Minnesota, south by South Dakota, and west by Montana; in its total area of 70,837 square miles, among its 680,845 inhabitants (1930 census), in its chief cities of Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks, Minot, Jamestown, and Devils Lake, is there not a single detective-story writer? Like the famous hills of Nebraska, are the detective-story writers of North Dakota

equally nonexistent? — or, worse, extinct? To make up, however, for North Dakota's literary lapse, manuscripts came, by sea and by air, from England, Australia, and New Zealand; from servicemen and women stationed in Alaska, Germany, France, Italy, and Austria; and from south-of-the border aficionados in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. Surely it is the detective story that now makes the world go round!

You will remember that we originally promised one first prize and six second prizes. But when the 838 manuscripts were finally winnowed to 15 stories, we realized that we had underestimated the persuasive powers of our literary colleagues. How choose 7 from 15 — when all 15 are excellent tales! So, taking the bull by both horns, your Editor decided to break all contest precedents: instead of awarding one first prize and six second prizes as advertised, we splurged — and added eight more prizes! Here, dear readers, is a list of the 15 prize-winning stories — read 'em and exult!

FIRST PRIZE

A Star for a Warrior by Manly Wade Wellman
(introducing not only a new detective but a new *type* of detective)

SECOND PRIZES

An Error in Chemistry by William Faulkner
Chinoiserie by Helen McCloy
Malice Domestic by Philip MacDonald
Count Jalacki Goes Fishing by T. S. Stribling
Handcuffs Don't Hold Ghosts by Manning Coles
(the first short story about Tommy Hambledon)
You Can't Hang Twice by Anthony Gilbert
(the first short story about Arthur Crook)

THIRD PRIZES

I Can Find My Way Out by Ngaio Marsh
(the first short story about Inspector Alleyn)
Witness for the Prosecution by Q. Patrick
Lesson in Anatomy by Michael Innes
(the first short story about Inspector Appleby)
Goodbye, Goodbye! by Craig Rice

FOURTH PRIZES

Find the Woman by Kenneth Millar
The Watchers and the Watched by Jerome and Harold Prince
The Blue Hat by Frances Crane
(the first short story about Pat and Jean Abbott)
The Affair at the Circle T. by Clifford Knight
(the first short story about Prof. Huntoon Rogers)

These 15 prize-winning stories will appear in EQMM beginning with this issue, April 1946, and ending with the issue of December 1946. They will not appear in the order listed above: the exact sequence will be controlled by our long-standing editorial policy of making every issue of EQMM as varied and diversified as possible. Some issues will contain only one prize story, other issues two, still others three. But by the end of 1946 all 15 stories will have been published. Then, directly after the appearance of the 15th story, we shall arrange for the publication of a book-anthology containing only the 15 prize stories. This book will be on sale either in December of this year or January of next. Its tentative title is PRIZE-WINNING DETECTIVE STORIES OF 1946, *and in its own way and representing its own field, it will be comparable to those other classic annuals of the short story, the O'Brien collections and the O. Henry Memorial series.*

And that isn't all: We hereby announce the renewal of EQMM's short-story contest. Starting immediately, the prize contest is on again for 1946. Again we promise a first prize of $2000, and six second prizes of $500 each. Should results again warrant our being prodigal, we shall add third and fourth prize groups, as we did in the 1945 contest. This time, to protect the health of your Editor and his staff, we shall close the 1946 contest earlier — October 20, 1946; but winners will again be announced by Christmas, 1946. (Come on, North Dakota!)

Further: we hope to keep EQMM's yearly prize contest running indefinitely — so that each year we can bring to you the finest original detective-crime short stories being written, by the finest writers, young and old, new and well-known — so that always, year in and year out, with unfailing certainty, with cumulative impact, with ever-increasing quality, "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine" will continue to offer you the absolute best in detective-crime short fiction.

And now about the winner of the first prize: in the opinion of the judges, Manly Wade Wellman's "A Star for a Warrior" was the most original detective-crime story among the 838 submitted for the 1945 contest. Its originality is two-fold: it introduces not only a new detective character but a new type *of detective character; and it places this new type of detective against a background hitherto unexploited in the field of crime fiction. The detective is named David Return, and he is a full-blooded American Indian — a young brave of the Tsichah, an imaginary tribe based mostly on the Cheyennes and partly on the Pawnees. Don't misunderstand: Mr. Wellman has not created another Leatherstocking; his David Return is not a J. Fenimore Cooper character detecting only by footprints and broken twigs in the forest primeval. "A Star for a Warrior" is a story of today — of modern American Indians; young David is government-trained, an agency police-*

man whose beat is an Indian reservation; with his grandfather Tough Feather, the senior lieutenant of the agency police, he serves the government "to make things better for all Indians."

Nor is Mr. Wellman's new conception of a modern detective Indian in name only; faced with a murder case, David Return investigates not as a white man but as an Indian steeped in Red Man lore; and his deductions arise out of deep understanding of Indian character, tradition, and ceremonials. Indeed, David Return is the first truly American *detective to appear in print — even more authentically American than Melville Davisson Post's Uncle Abner.*

The author, despite the fact that he sold his first story in 1926, is a comparative newcomer to detective fiction. He is part Indian himself, a strapping man six feet one-and-one-half inches tall, weighing 220 pounds, with jet black hair and a tawny complexion that more than suggests the American West. He was born in Portuguese West Africa, Angola, the son of a medical officer attached to the Board of Foreign Missions. His father is known professionally as Cyril Kay-Scott, a famous doctor, research scientist, explorer, painter, critic, author, and dean of two colleges. Manly himself is a graduate of the University of Wichita, Kansas. His brother, Paul I. Wellman, is the "real literary show-piece of the family," according to Manly; Paul Wellman is a definitive student of Indian history and Manly credits most of his Indian knowledge to the many field trips he took with his brother.

So, readers, there is a new star in the West, a new star in detective-storydom; and it shines with the wisdom of the Shining Lodge and the strength of the young men coming on. Call hallelujah, call deep thanks . . . "the strong men keep coming on."

A STAR FOR A WARRIOR

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

YOUNG David Return half-ran across the sunbright plaza of the Tsichah Agency. He was slim everywhere except across his shoulders, his tawny brow, his jaw. For this occasion he had put on his best blue flannel shirt, a maroon scarf, cowboy dungarees, and on his slim toed-in feet, beaded moccasins. Behind his right hip rode a sheath-knife. His left hand carried his sombrero, and his thick black hair reflected momentary blue lights in the hot morning. Once he lifted the hat and slapped his thigh

with it, in exultation too great for even an Indian to dissemble. He opened the door of the whitewashed cabin that housed the agency police detail, and fairly bounded in.

"*Ahi!*" he spoke a greeting in Tsichah to the man in the cowskin vest who glanced up at him from a paper-littered table. "A writing from the white chiefs, grandfather. I can now wear the silver star."

The other lifted a brown face as lean, keen, and grim as the blade of a tomahawk. Tough Feather, senior lieutenant of the agency police, was the sort of old Indian that Frederic Remington loved to paint. He replied in English. "Reports here," he said austerely, "are made in white man's language."

David Return blinked. He was a well-bred young Tsichah, and did his best not to show embarrassment. "I mean," he began again, also in English, "that they've confirmed my appointment to the agency police detail, and —"

"Suppose," interrupted Tough Feather, "that you go outside, and come in again — properly."

Some of the young man's boisterous happiness drained out of him. Obediently he stepped backward and out, pulling the door shut. He waited soberly for a moment, then re-entered and stood at attention.

"Agency Policeman David Return," he announced dutifully, "reporting for assignment as directed."

Tough Feather's thin mouth permitted a smile to soften one of its corners. Tough Feather's deepset black eyes glowed a degree more warmly. "Your report of completed study came in the mail an hour ago," he told David, and picked up a paper. "They marked you 'excellent' everywhere, except in discipline. There you're 'qualified'. That's good, but no more than good enough."

David shrugged. "The instructors were white men. But you'll not have any trouble with me. You're my grandfather, and a born chief of the Tsichah."

"So are you a born chief," Tough Feather reminded him, "and don't forget it. This police work isn't a white man's plaything. We serve the government, to make things better for all Indians. *Ahi*, son of my son," and forgetting his own admonition, Tough Feather himself lapsed into Tsichah, "for this I taught you as a child, and saw that you went to school and to the police college. We work together from this day."

"*Nunway*," intoned David, as at a tribal ceremony. "Amen. That is my prayer."

From a pocket of the cowskin vest Tough Feather drew a black stone pipe, curiously and anciently carved. His brown fingers stuffed in flakes of tobacco. He produced a match and struck a light. Inhaling deeply, he blew a curl of slate-colored smoke, another and another and others, one to each of the six holy directions — north, west, south, east, upward and downward. Then he offered the pipe to David.

"Smoke," he invited deeply. "You are my brother warrior."

It was David Return's coming of age. He inhaled and puffed in turn, and while the smoke-clouds signalized the directions, he prayed silently to the Shining Lodge for strength and wisdom. When he had finished the six ritualistic puffs, he handed the pipe back to Tough Feather, who shook out the ashes and stowed it in his pocket. Then from the upper drawer of the desk Tough Feather produced something that shone like all the high hopes of all young warriors. He held it out, the silver-plated star of an agency policeman.

Eagerly David pinned it to his left shirt pocket, then drew himself once more to attention. "I'm ready to start duty, grandfather," he said.

"Good." Tough Feather was consulting a bit of paper with hastily scribbled notes. "David, do you remember an Indian girl named Rhoda Pleasant, who came to the agent last week with letters of introduction?"

"I remember that one," nodded David. "Not a Tsichah girl. A Piekan, going to some university up north. She's pleasant, all right," and he smiled, for Indians relish puns as much as any race in the world.

"Not pleasant in every way," growled Tough Feather, not amused. "She's been here too long, and talked too much, for a stranger woman. Plenty of young Tsichah men like her even better than you do. They might finish up by not liking each other."

"Then she's still here on the reservation? I met her only the one time, and the next day she was gone."

"But not gone away," Tough Feather told him. "Gone in. She borrowed a horse and some things to camp with. You know why, don't you? She wants to learn our secret Tsichah songs." The hard-cut old profile shook itself in conservative disapproval.

"*Ahi*, yes," said David. "She talked about that. Said she was getting her master's degree in anthropology, and she's hoping for a career as a scholar and an Indian folklore expert. She told me she'd picked up songs that Lieurance and Cadman would have given ten years of their life to hear and get down on paper. But I couldn't tell her about our songs if I wanted to. We hear them only about once or twice a year, at councils and ceremonies."

"The songs are like the chieftainships, passed from father to son in one or two families," reminded Tough Feather. "Right now only three men really know them —"

"And they're mighty brash about it," broke in David, with less than his usual courtesy. "I know them. Dolf Buckskin, Stacey Weed, John Horse Child. All of them young, and all of them acting a hundred years old and a thousand years smart, out there in their brush camp with a drum — the kind with a pebble-headed stick — and a flute. They think we others ought to respect them and honor them."

"And you should," Tough Feather rejoined stiffly. "They're young, but their fathers and grandfathers taught them songs and secrets that come down from our First People. Those three young men are important to the whole Tsichah nation. Too important to be set against each other by Rhoda Pleasant."

"You mean she's out there seeing them?" David was suddenly grave, too. "I see what you're worried about. They'd not pay any attention to a man who asked rude questions, but a young woman as pretty as that Piekan — *ahi!* She'd give anybody squaw fever if she tried."

"Go to their camp," commanded Tough Feather. "It's off all the main trails, so you'll have to ride a pony instead of driving a car. Tell the girl to report back here and then go somewhere else."

David frowned. This was not his dream of a brilliant first case for his record. Then he smiled, for he reflected that the ride back from the camp of the singers would be interesting, with a companion like Rhoda Pleasant. "Where is that camp, grandfather?"

Tough Feather pointed with the heel of his hand. "Southwest. Take the Lodge Pole Ridge trail, and turn at the dry stream by the cabins of old Gopher Paw and his son. There's no trail across their land, but you'll pick one up beyond, among the knolls and bluffs. That branches in a few miles, and the right branch leads to where the singers are camped. Take whatever pony you want from the agency stable."

"The paint pony?" asked David eagerly.

"He's not the best one," and Tough Feather eyed his grandson calculatingly. "Not the best traveller, anyway."

"Now about a saddle," went on David, "will you lend me the silver-mounted one that Major Lillie gave you ten years ago?"

Tough Feather smiled, perhaps his first real smile in twenty or thirty days. "All right, take it and take the prettiest bridle, too. You're probably right, David. You'll have less trouble bringing that girl back if you and your pony are good to look at."

The paint pony was not the best in the agency stables, but he was competent on the narrow rough trail David had to take. His light-shod feet picked a nimble way through the roughest part of the reservation, over ground even less fit for farming than the poor soil of prairie and creek bottoms. It was rolling and stony, grown up here and there with cottonwood scrub and occasional clumps of willow or Osage orange. Once or twice rabbits fled from the sound of the hoofs, but not too frantically: animals felt safe in the half-cover of this section; long ago they had escaped here from the incessant hunting enthusiasm of Tsichah boys with arrows or cheap old rifles. David followed the right branch of the trail his grandfather had described and went down a little slope, across an

awkward gully where he had to dismount and lead the pony, and beyond among scattered boulders, rare in this country.

He felt that he was getting near his work, and in his mind he rehearsed the words, half-lofty and half-bantering, with which he would explain to Rhoda Pleasant that she must cease her troublesome researches and head back with him. She was a ready smiler, he remembered, both bolder and warmer in manner than any Tsichah girl he knew. And she wore her riding things with considerable knowledge and style, like a white society girl. Suppose she elected to be charmingly stubborn, to question his authority? He decided to stand for no nonsense and to admit no dazzlement from her smile and her bright eyes. He would be like the old warriors who had no sense of female romance or glamor, who took sex, like all important things in their dignified stride.

Then he rode around a little tuft of thorn bushes, and saw that Rhoda Pleasant was beyond hearing arguments or considering authorities.

Here by the trailside was her little waterproofed tent, with a canvas ground cloth and a mosquito bar. Near it was picketed the bay horse she had borrowed at the agency. A fire had burned to ashes, and a few cooking utensils lay beside it. On the trail itself lay Rhoda Pleasant, grotesquely and limply sprawled with her face upward. Her riding habit was rumpled, her smooth-combed black hair gleamed in the sunlight like polished black stone. She looked like a rag doll with which some giant child had played until it was tired and dropped its plaything. Thrown away, that was how she looked. David Return knew death when he saw it.

He got off his pony and threw the reins over its head, then squatted on his heels beside the body. Rhoda Pleasant's neck-scarf had been white. Now it was spotted with stale blood, dark and sticky. David prodded her cool cheek with a forefinger. Her head did not stir on her neck. That was *rigor mortis*. She had been dead for hours, probably since before dawn. Fully dressed as she was, she might have died before bedtime the night before.

David studied her clay-pale face. The dimmed eyes were open, the lips slack, the expression — she had no expression, only the blank look he had been taught to recognize as that of the unexpectedly and instantly stricken. Gingerly he drew aside the scarf. The throat wound was blackened with powder but looked ragged, as if a bullet and a stab had struck the same mark. Someone had shot Rhoda Pleasant, decided David, then had thrust a narrow, sharp weapon into the bullet hole.

Rising, David turned his attention to the trail. Its earth was hard, but not too hard to show the tracks of moccasins all round the body, moccasins larger than David's. More tracks were plain nearer the tent and the fire, of the large moccasins and of a companion pair, long and lean. Here and

there were a third set of moccasin-prints, this time of feet almost as small as Rhoda Pleasant's riding boots.

Three men had been there, apparently all together. And there were three tribal singers camped not far away.

David broke bushes across the trail on either side of the body, and from the tent brought a quilt to spread over the calm dead face. Mounting again, he forced the paint pony off the trail and through thickets where it would disturb no clues. When he came to the trail beyond, he rolled a cigarette and snapped a match alight. Before he had finished smoking he came to another and larger camp.

In a sizable clearing among the brush clumps, by a little stream undried by the summer heat, stood an ancient Sibley tent like a square-bottomed teepee. Behind it was a smaller shelter, of bent sticks covered thickly with old blankets in the shape of a pioneer wagon cover. It was big enough for a single occupant's crouching or lying body, and entrances before and behind were tightly lapped over. Near one end burned a small hot fire, with stones visible among its coals. As David watched, a hand poked out with rough tongs made of green twigs, lifted a stone and dragged it inside. Strings of steamy vapor crept briefly forth.

"Sweat lodge," said David aloud. The old Tsichah had built and used sweat lodges frequently, but he himself had seen only a few and had been in one just once in his life, as part of the ceremony of joining the Fox Soldier society two years back. He called in Tsichah: "*Ahi*, you singing Indians! Someone has come to see you!"

From the Sibley tent came Stacey Weed. He was taller than David, and leaner, with hair cut long for a young Indian. All that he wore was a breechclout and moccasins. In one hand he carried a canvas bucket, and he turned at first toward where the camp's three horses were tethered on long lariats downstream from the tent. Then he pretended to notice David, and lifted a hand in a careless gesture of greeting. "*Ahi*, nephew," he said, also in Tsichah.

To be called nephew by a Tsichah can be plesant or unpleasant. An older man means it in friendly informality; a contemporary seeks to patronize or to snub or to insult, depending on the tone of his voice. Stacey Weed was perhaps two years older than David, not enough seniority to make for kindliness in the salutation.

"John," called Stacey back into the tent, "we must be important. A boy with a new police star has ridden in."

John Horse Child followed Stacey into the open. He too was almost naked, powerfully built and just under six feet tall. His smile was broad but tight. "I heard that David Return had joined the police," he remarked to Stacey, as though discussing someone a hundred miles away.

David kept his temper. He spoke in English, as he judged his grandfather

would do. "I suppose," he ventured, "that Dolf Buckskin's in the sweat lodge."

John and Stacey gazed at each other. Their eyes twinkled with elaborate and unpleasant mockery. "They say that policemen get great wisdom with those stars they wear," said John, carefully choosing the Tsichah words. "They can tell who's in a sweat lodge and who is not. It's a strong medicine. They learn things without being told."

"Then why tell them things?" inquired Stacey brightly.

The two squatted on the earth, knees to chin. John began to light a stone pipe, older and bigger and more ornate than the one Tough Feather had shared with David earlier that morning. It was part of the ceremonial gear these tribal singers used in the rites they knew. John smoked a few puffs, passed it to Stacey, who smoked in turn and handed it back. Neither glanced at David who got quickly out of his saddle and tramped toward them. He still spoke in English, which he knew they understood, but he used the deep, cold voice of unfriendly formality.

"I'm as good a Tsichah as either of you ever dared to be," he told them. "I'm a good American citizen too, and whether you like it or not this ground is part of a government reservation, under police authority. If we're going to have trouble, it will be of your starting. I want to ask —"

A wild yell rang from the sweat lodge. Out scuttled Dolf Buckskin, slimmer and shorter and nuder than either of his friends. He shone with the perspiration of the lodge's steamy, hot interior. Even as David turned toward him, Dolf threw himself full length into the widest part of the stream and yelled even louder as the cold water shocked his heated skin. He rolled over and over, then sat up and slapped the streams out of his shaggy hair.

"Come here, Dolf," called David, and Dolf pushed his slim feet into moccasins, tied a clout about his hips and stalked over, with a grin as maddening as either of his fellows.

"Rhoda Pleasant," began David, "came and camped near by, with the idea of teasing or tricking you into teaching her our tribal songs."

"We know that, nephew," said Dolf.

David decided to go back to the Tsichah tongue, since they refused to drop it. "She made eyes and smiles at all of you," he went on. "She half-promised all sorts of things if you would tell her your secrets."

"We know that," Stacey echoed Dolf, and the three of them looked at each other knowingly, like big boys teasing a little one.

Dolf sat down with his friends, and David stood looking down at the three. He pointed trailward with his lifted palm.

"Rhoda Pleasant lies dead back there," he went on, "within a little walk from here."

Then he reflected silently that it is not good to stretch your face with a

mocking grin, because when something takes the grin away you look blank, almost as blank as somebody who has been suddenly killed. The three singers betrayed no fear or shock, for they were Indians and steeped from boyhood in the tradition of the stoic; but they succeeded only by turning themselves stupidly expressionless.

John Horse Child broke the silence finally. "We know that, too," he said.

Stacey offered David the ceremonial pipe. It was still alight.

"Smoke," urged Stacey. "We will joke with you no more."

David squatted down with the three puffing as gravely as when he had smoked with Tough Feather. Then he handed back the pipe and cleared his throat. He spoke in Tsichah:

"First, let me tell what I know already. You're all tribal singers, medicine men, and when you think your knowledge is big and your position strong, you think the truth. Nobody among the Tsichah can replace any one of you very well. You are keepers of knowledge that should live among the people. You," he tilted his chin at John Horse Child, "play the flute. You," and he indicated Dolf Buckskin, "beat the drum with the pebble-headed drumstick. And Stacey, you are the singer and dancer. Without one, the other two are not complete. Besides, you are close friends, like three brothers."

"*Yuh*," assented Stacey. "That is true."

"I know things about the girl too. A small bullet was fired into her throat, and then a thin knife was stabbed into the same place. She died, I think, not too late last night. And all three of you have been at her camp."

"All three of us have been there several times," said John quietly. "Do you think, David, that all three of us killed her?"

"I think one went alone to her and killed her and made both the wounds," replied David. "I think that one hid his tracks, and that you went together and found her dead this morning. I think the killer has not told his two good friends what he did.

"If these things are true we can believe more things. Of you three, one knows who killed Rhoda Pleasant because he is the killer. Of the other two, each knows that one of his two friends killed her, and he wants to help whichever of the two it may be. I can see that much, because I know who you are and what you do, and what Rhoda Pleasant was trying to do here."

"She came smiling and flattering and asking for our songs," Dolf Buckskin admitted.

"*Ahi*," went on David," she was a pretty girl, prettier than any on this reservation. Three men, living alone together, find it easy to look at that sort of girl and to like her. Now I come to the place where I am not sure what to think. I cannot say surely which of several reasons the killer had to do that thing."

"Every killer has a reason," said John weightily, handing the pipe along to Stacey.

"It was about the songs, anyway," David ventured.

Stacey smoked the pipe to its last puff, tapped out the ashes, and began to refill it. "Perhaps it was none of us, David. Perhaps some other man, someone who wanted to rob her or steal her."

"No," said David emphatically. "Her face showed no fear or wonder. She had no trouble with the one who came to kill her, and she must have seen him, for the wounds were in front. Nobody else lives near here, anyway. I think the killer is right here."

John's grin of mockery found its way back. "Why don't you arrest the guilty man?" he challenged. "Nobody will stop you."

"But," added Stacey, rekindling the pipe, "you can't take the wrong man. The government courts would set him free, and pay damage money for false arrest. Probably the policeman who guessed so foolishly would be discharged."

"I'll get the right one," promised David bleakly. "The two innocent men won't be bothered."

"*Ahoh* — thanks," said Stacey deeply, and passed the pipe to Dolf.

"*Ahoh* from me, too," echoed Dolf.

"And from me *ahoh*," chimed in John. The pipe travelled around the circle again, David smoking last. Finally he rose to his feet.

"If you don't hinder me, I want to search the tent," he said.

"What you wish," granted Stacey, receiving the pipe from him.

David went to the tent and inside. Sunlight filtered brownly through the canvas. Three pallets, made up of blankets spread over heaps of springy brush, lay against the walls. David examined with respectful care a stack of ceremonial, costumes, bonnets and parcels in a corner, then turned to the personal property of the three singers.

John's bed could be identified by three flutes in a quiver-like buckskin container, slung to the wall of the tent. David pulled out the flutes one by one Each was made of two wooden halves, cunningly hollowed out and fitted together in tight bindings of snakeskin. Each had five finger holes and a skilfully shaped mouthpiece. At the head of the pallet lay John's carving tool. David slid it from its scabbard, an old, old knife, its steel worn away by years of sharpening to the delicate slenderness of an edged awl. It showed brightly clean, as from many thrustings into gritty soil. Someone had scoured it clear of Rhoda Pleasant's blood.

On another cot lay Dolf's ceremonial drum, of tight-cured raw buckskin laced over a great wooden hoop and painted with berry juices in the long ago — strange symbols in ochre and vermilion. David looked for the drumstick, that he had often seen at public singings, a thing like a little warclub with an egg-sized pebble bound in the split end of the stick. It was not in sight, and he fumbled in the bedclothes. His fingers touched something

hard and he brought it to light; not the drumstick, but an old-fashioned pocket pistol barely longer than his forefinger. David broke it and glanced down the barrel, which was bright and clean and recently oiled.

His exploration of Stacey Weed's sleeping quarters turned up a broad sheath-knife, but no gun. He emerged from the tent with John's slender carving tool and Dolf's pistol.

"You found them," said Stacey, hoisting his rangy body from its squat. "Which killed her?"

"Both," volunteered John, but David shook his head.

"Either wound would have been fatal," he said, "but the bullet went in first, and the knife followed. That changed the shape of the round bullet hole. As I say, she was struck down from in front, and she knew her killer and had not feared or suspected him."

"That bullet must have struck through her spine at the back of the neck," said Stacey at once, "or she would have looked surprised, at least, before she died."

"*Ahoh*, Stacey," David thanked him. "That is a helpful thought. Now, Rhoda Pleasant smiled on you all, but who did she like best?"

"She wanted only the songs," replied Dolf.

"And did she get any of them?" demanded David quickly.

Stacey shook his head. "I don't think so, David. We sang when she first came, but when we saw her writing on that paper lined out to make music-signs on, Dolf said to stop singing. That was the first day she visited us, and cooked our noon dinner."

David tried from those words to visualize the visit. Rhoda Pleasant had tried to charm and reassure the three by flattery and food. She had almost succeeded; they had begun to perform. When they grew suspicious and fell silent, had she concealed her disappointment and tried something else? He hazarded a guess, though guessing had been discouraged by his instructors.

"Then she tried paying attention to one of you alone. Which?" He waited for an answer, and none came. "Was it you, John, because you could play the songs on the flute?"

John shook his head, and Stacey spoke for him. "It was I. She wanted both words and music, and I knew them. She whispered for me to visit her camp. That was two days ago.

"I went," Stacey continued, "but she tricked no songs out of me. She tried to get me off guard by singing songs she had heard on other reservations, and the best of them was not as good as our worst. I sang nothing in exchange. Yesterday she came back and tried her tricks on John instead."

"We went riding together," supplied John. "She talked about songs to me, too, but I only said I had forgotten to bring my flute."

"Then she hunted out Dolf?" suggested David.

"*Wagh!*" Dolf grunted out the Tsichah negative like an ancient blanket Indian, and scowled more blackly

still. "Why should she pay attention to me? I am a drummer, and drum music is easy. The one time she heard us all together was enough to teach her what she wanted to know about my drum."

More silence, and David examined these new grudging admissions. Rhoda Pleasant had, very practically, concentrated on the two singers whose secrets were hardest to learn. On their own showing, John and Stacey had kept those secrets loyally. "This brings us to last night," said David at last.

"I will say something," John spoke slowly. "You think the pistol killed her, and it's Dolf's pistol. But perhaps he didn't use it. Perhaps Stacey did, or I, to make it look like Dolf."

"Perhaps," granted David. "Perhaps not. I think the stab in the wound was to change the shape of the bullet hole. It covered the killer's trail, as the scratching away of the tracks at her camp did."

"But it hid nothing," reminded John.

"Perhaps it *pretended* to hide something," pursued David. "The killer might have thought that he would give the wound a disguise — but one easy to see through."

"*Ahi*," rejoined Stacey gravely. "You mean that the bullet hole would mean Dolf's pistol and make him guilty — because the knife is John's and the pistol is Dolf's. Perhaps you want to say that I stole them both and killed Rhoda Pleasant."

"Perhaps he wants to say that I used my own pistol to kill," threw in Dolf, "and did the other things to make the pistol-wound look like a false trail."

"There is a way to show who fired the shot," David informed them. "A white man's laboratory trick, with wax on the gun hand and then acid dripped on to show if there was a fleck of powder left on the hand from the gun going off."

"My hand would show flecks like that," Dolf said readily. "I fired the gun for practice yesterday."

"I saw him," seconded John. "Anyway, David, you promised that you would take only the guilty man. That means you must find him here and now, without going to the agency for wax and acid."

"It was a promise," David agreed, "and the Tsichah do not break their promises to each other." He held out the thin-ground knife. "This was bloody, and now it is clean. Who cleaned it?"

"Whoever used it," said Stacey.

David put the knife on the ground. "You were telling me a story, John. You stopped at the place where you and Rhoda Pleasant went out riding and came back yesterday."

"She left me here at camp and rode on alone," John took up the account. "Dolf and Stacey saw her go away. We three were here together for supper, and together we went to sleep early. Then —"

"Then, this morning, I went to her camp alone," said Stacey. "Last night, when she came back past here with

John, she made me a sign, like this." He demonstrated, a scooping inward to beckon Indian fashion, then a gesture eastward. "Come after sunrise, she told me by that sign. I thought she would beg again for the music. I would let her beg, then laugh at her and say she was wasting her time with us. But I found her lying face up in the trail."

"As I found her," finished David for him. "Well, you probably are telling the truth. If you were questioned long in this way, any lies in your stories would trip each other up. This much is plain as your tracks at her camp: The killer went to her alone, with the knife and the pistol. He did not want his friends to know —"

"His friends do not ask to know," said Dolf, with an air of finality.

"Because," amplified John, hugging his thick knees as he squatted, "his friends know, like him, that Rhoda Pleasant was a thief of secrets. Nobody here is sorry she died, though we would be sorry if one of us suffered for killing her."

"Nobody is sorry she died?" repeated David, and tried to study all three of their faces at once. They stared back calmly.

"But all three went to her camp," said David again. "Not Stacey alone."

"I came and got them to see her," Stacey told him. "We had to decide what to do. We saw everything there you saw. We talked as we waited there. Finally we agreed we must carry the news, after we all took sweat baths."

"Sweat baths?" echoed David, "Why?"

"We are medicine men, and we had all touched a dead body," John answered him coldly. "Sweat baths are purification; or have you forgotten the Tsichah way since you learned the policeman's way?"

"I have forgotten neither way," was David's equally cold rejoinder. "Who said to carry the news, and who said to take the sweat bath?"

"I thought of both those things," Dolf volunteered.

"No, I think I did," argued Stacey "I built the fire anyway, and gathered the rocks to heat."

"But I took the first bath," resumed John, "for I touched her first when we saw her together. Then Stacey took his, and then Dolf, who had not finished when you first came."

David pointed to the slim knife he had brought from the sleeping tent. "This went to the lodge with you, John?"

"If you expect to find prints of guilty fingers, you will not," said John. "Yes, I took the knife into the sweat lodge — to purify it from the touch of that dead Piekan squaw, *Ahi*," and he put out his palm and made a horizontal slicing motion. "I finish. That is the end of what I will say."

There was silence all around. David stooped and took the knife, wedging it into the sheath with his own, then put Dolf's pistol into his hip pocket.

"Something here I have not yet found," he announced. "And I have wondered about it all the time we were talking. I think I know where it is

now. I, too, am going into your sweat lodge. Can any of you say why I should not?"

They stared, neither granting nor denying permission. David walked past the Sibley tent to the close-blanketed little structure, pulled away the blanket that sealed the door, and peered in through the steam that clung inside. It billowed out, grew somewhat thinner, and he could see dimly. Under his breath he said a respectful prayer to the spirit people, lest he be thought sacrilegious in hunting there for what he hoped to find. Then he dropped to all fours and crawled in.

On the floor stood an old iron pot of water, still warm. In it were a dozen of the stones that had been dropped in at their hottest to create the purifying steam. David twitched up his sleeve and pulled out one stone, then another and another. They were like any stones one might find in that part of the reservation. He studied the ground, which was as bare and hard as baked clay, then rose from all fours and squatted on his heels. His hands patted and probed here and there along the inner surface of blankets, until he found what he was looking for.

He seized its little loop of leather cord and pulled it from where it had been stuck between the blankets and one of the curved poles of the framework. A single touch assured him, and he edged into the open for a clear examination of it.

The thing was like a tiny warclub of ancient fashion. A slender foot-long twig of tough wood had been split at the end, and the two split pieces curved to fit around a smooth pebble the size of an egg. Rawhide lashings held the stone rigidly in place. It was the ceremonial drumstick he had missed when searching Dolf Buckskin's bed in the tent, the absence of which he had been trying to fit into the story of Rhoda Pleasant's death. He balanced it experimentally, swung it against his open hand, carefully bent the springy wooden handle.

Then he thrust it inside his shirt, standing so that the three watching singers could be sure of what he handled and what he did with it. He walked over to where his pony cropped at some grass.

"I'm going to look at Rhoda Pleasant once more," he announced. "That look will be all I need to tell me everything."

Mounting, he rode slowly up the trail to the silent camp of the dead girl. He dismounted once again and took the cover from the expressionless face.

Again he put out a finger to touch, this time at the side of the head, where Rhoda Pleasant's hair was combed smoothly over the temple. He felt the other temple, and this time his finger encountered a yielding softness.

"*Ahi*," he grunted, as if to confirm everything. "The thin bone was broken."

He returned to his horse and lounged with his arm across the saddle, quietly waiting.

Hoof-beats sounded among the brush in the direction of the singers' camp. After a moment, Dolf Buckskin rode into sight. He had pulled on trousers and a shirt, as though for a trip to the agency.

"I am waiting for you," called David to him.

"I knew you would be," replied Dolf, riding near. "Maybe I should have told you all about it when you brought my drumstick out of the sweat lodge, but it was hard to speak in front of my two friends who were trying to help me."

"You need not tell me much," David assured him, as gently as he could speak. "I knew the answer when John told of purifying his carving knife in the sweat lodge because it had touched the dead body of Rhoda Pleasant. Your drumstick was missing. I reasoned that if the drumstick was also in the sweat lodge, all was clear. And it was. Why should you have taken the drumstick into the lodge? Only to purify it, as you yourself must be purified. Why should it need purifying? Only if the drumstick too had touched the dead body. Why should it have touched the dead body? Only if the drumstick were the true weapon."

David paused. "You're a good drummer, Dolf. By long practice you can strike to the smallest mark — even the thin bone of the temple — swiftly and accurately, with exactly the strength you choose. That pebble-head is solid, the handle is springy. It was a good weapon, Dolf, and easier to your hand than any other."

"She did not even hear me as I came up behind her," Dolf said with something like sorrowful pride. "You were wrong about her seeing the killer and not fearing him. She never knew."

"You used your own gun and John's knife to hide the real way of killing. They were the false trails. But you could not break the old ceremonial rites. The true weapon had to be purified — and so I knew."

Dolf raised his head and looked at the still form. "It's strange to think of what I did. I wanted her so much."

"*Yuh*," and David nodded. "You wanted her. She would not look at you, only at John and Stacey. You were left out, and your heart was bad. Perhaps if you explain to the court that for a time your mind was not right, you will not be killed, only put in jail."

"I don't think I want to live," said Dolf slowly. "Not in jail, anyway. Shall I help you lift her and tie her on her horse's back?"

"*Ahoh*," said David. "Thank you."

When the three horses started on the trail back, David glanced down at his silver-plated star. It was dull and filmy — from the steam of the sweat lodge. An agency policeman's star should not be dull at the end of his first successful case. It should shine like all the high hopes of all young warriors. Proudly David burnished the metal with his sleeve — until it shone with the wisdom of the Shining Lodge and the strength of the white man's star.

When you read in a detective story that a person has been found with his throat slashed, you probably still experience a thrill of horror — especially if the writer knows his (or her) business. In crime fiction death by throat-cutting is not too uncommon — that is, peculiarly enough, if the victim is a human being. But that same thrill of horror becomes enormously intensified, produces what the French call a frisson d'horreur, *when the victim is not a man or woman but an animal! Why is it that ripping open the throat of an animal is somehow infinitely more terrifying than cutting the throat of a human being? Is there some atavistic memory deep within us, some vestigial remembrance of blood sacrifice, that rises in our own gullets, constricts our own throats, when we read of the midnight murder, in the dark of the moon, of animals?*

Hercule Poirot felt the subtle difference — the difference between fear and terror, between tremor and heartquake. It took all his courage to investigate the seventh Labor of Hercules in which a modern Cretan Bull of a man dreamed of blood lust, and afterwards creeping and flying things were found with their throats cut — sheep, young lambs, a collie dog, the Vicar's parrot, and on that last fateful night, a shivering little cat. It took all his courage to examine those severed throats and yet push on indomitably toward the grim and horrible truth. For the point remained: Why does a man, even with the taint of madness in his blood, slit the necks of innocent sheep?

The Labors of Hercules:

The Cretan Bull, or

THE CASE OF THE FAMILY TAINT

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

HERCULE POIROT looked thoughtfully at his visitor. He saw a pale face with a determined-looking chin, gray eyes, and hair of that blue-black shade so seldom seen.

He noted the well-cut but well-worn tweeds, and the unconscious arrogance of manner that lay behind her obvious nervousness. He then thought: "Ah yes, she is 'the County' — but no money! It must be something quite out of the way that would bring her to me."

Diana Maberly said, and her voice shook a little: "I don't know whether you can help me or not, M. Poirot. It's — it's a very extraordinary position. I've come to you because I don't know what to do! I don't even know if there is anything to do!"

"Will you let me judge of that?"

The color surged into the girl's face. She said breathlessly: "I've come to you because the man I've been engaged to for over a year has broken off our engagement." She eyed him defiantly. "You must think that I'm completely crazy."

"On the contrary, Mademoiselle, I have no doubt that you are extremely intelligent. It is not my *métier* to patch up the lovers' quarrels, and I know that you are quite aware of that. It must be, therefore, that there is something unusual about the breaking of this engagement. That is so, is it not?"

The girl nodded. "Hugh broke off our engagement because he thinks he is going mad. He thinks people who are mad should not marry."

"And do you not agree?"

"I don't know. What *is* being mad, after all? Everyone is a little mad. It's only when you begin thinking you're a poached egg or something that they have to shut you up. I can't see that there's anything wrong with Hugh at all. He's — oh, he's the sanest person I know. Sound — dependable —"

"Then why does he think he is mad? Is there, perhaps, madness in his family?"

Reluctantly Diana jerked her head in assent: "His grandfather was a mental case, I believe — and some great aunt or other. But every family has got someone queer in it. You know, a bit half-witted or extra clever or *something!*" Her eyes were appealing.

Poirot shook his head sadly. "Will you tell me, Mademoiselle, all about your fiancé?"

"His name's Hugh Chandler. He's twenty-four. His father is Admiral Chandler. They live at Lyde Manor. It's been in the Chandler family since the time of Elizabeth. Hugh's the only son. He went into the Navy — nearly all the Chandlers are sailors. Hugh's father wouldn't have heard of anything else. And yet — and yet, it was his father who insisted on getting him out of it."

"When was what?"

"Nearly a year ago. Quite suddenly."

"Was Hugh happy in his profession?"

"Absolutely."

"There was no scandal of any kind?"

"About Hugh? Absolutely nothing. He was getting on splendidly. He — he couldn't understand his father."

"What reason did Admiral Chandler give?"

"He never really gave a reason. Oh, he said it was necessary Hugh should learn to manage the estate, but that was only a pretext. Even George Putnam realized that."

"Who is George Putnam?"

"Colonel Putnam. He's Admiral Chandler's oldest friend. He spends most of his time down at the Manor."

"And what did he think of Admiral Chandler's determination that his son should leave the Navy?"

"He was dumfounded. He couldn't understand it at all. Nobody could."

"Not even Hugh Chandler himself?"

Diana did not answer at once. Poirot waited a minute, then went on: "At the time, perhaps, he, too, was astonished. But now? Has he said nothing — nothing at all?"

"He said — about a week ago — that — that his father was right — that it was the only thing to be done," Diana murmured.

"Did you ask him why?"

"Of course. But he wouldn't tell me."

Poirot reflected for a minute. Then he said: "Have there been any unusual occurrences in your part of the world? Starting, perhaps, about a year ago? Something that has given rise to a lot of local talk and surmise?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

Poirot said quietly, but with authority: "What was it?"

"There wasn't anything — nothing of the kind you mean."

"Of what kind then?"

"I think you're simply odious! Queer things often happen on farms. It's revenge — or the village idiot or somebody."

"What happened?"

"There was a fuss about some sheep. Their throats were cut. Oh! It was horrid. But they all belonged to one farmer and he's a very hard man. The police thought it was some kind of spite against him."

"But they didn't catch the person who had done it?"

"No!" She added fiercely. "If you think —"

Poirot held up his hand: "You do not know in the least what I think. Tell me this, has your fiancé consulted a doctor?"

"No. He hates doctors."

"And his father?"

"I don't think the Admiral believes much in doctors either. Says they are humbugs."

"How does the Admiral seem himself? Is he well? Happy?"

"He's aged terribly in the past year. He's a wreck — a shadow of what he used to be."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully. "Did he approve of his son's engagement?"

"Oh, yes. You see, my people's land adjoins his. We've been there for generations. He was frightfully pleased when Hugh and I fixed it up."

"And now?"

The girl's voice shook a little. She said: "I met him yesterday morning. He was looking ghastly. He took my hand in both of his. He said: 'It's hard on you, my girl. But the boy's doing the right thing — the only thing he can do.' "

"And then," said Poirot, "you came to me?"

"Yes. Can you do anything?"

"I do not know. But I can at least go down and see."

It was Hugh Chandler's magnificent physique that impressed Poirot more than anything else. He was handsome, with a tawny head of hair and terrific chest and shoulders. There was a tremendous air of strength and virility about him. Poirot murmured to Colo-

nel Putnam. "*C'est magnifique!* He is the young Bull — the Bull dedicated to Poseidon. A fine specimen of young manhood."

"I know," said Putnam and sighed. He was a dried up, tough little man, with reddish hair turning white and very shrewd eyes. He had a habit of drawing down his brows over his eyes and lowering his head, thrusting it forward, while those same shrewd little eyes studied you piercingly. He said: "What's it all about, M. Poirot?"

Poirot looked at him with his most innocent air. Putnam said: "I know your reputation, you know! What's it all mean? Did the girl get you down here over this business?"

"What business?"

"This business of young Hugh. She did, I see. She's a fighter — that kid. But it's all no good, you know. There are some things that you can't fight."

Poirot said: "There is insanity, I understand, in the family?"

"Well, as a matter of fact there is. Only crops up now and again, you understand — every two or three generations. Hugh's grandfather, for instance. Had to shut him up, poor devil."

"What form did his madness take?"

"Well, he was pretty violent, as a matter of fact. Quite all right up to the age of thirty — normal as could be. Then he began to go a bit queer. People began talking. Ended up as mad as a hatter, poor devil — dangerous, you know. Homicidal."

Putnam shook his head: "It's broken up poor old Charles. He's wrapped up in this boy. Lost his wife in a boating accident when the child was only ten years old. That gave him a pretty bad knock. She was a lovely creature. Show you her picture."

They stood together looking up at the portrait — a tall woman with auburn hair and a vivid, radiant expression. Putnam said: "The boy looks like her. Bad luck he should have inherited only one thing from the other side of the family."

Poirot said gently: "You knew her well?"

"We were boy and girl together. I went off as a subaltern to India when she was sixteen. When I came back she'd just got married to Charles."

"See much of them after that?"

"Off and on. Charles had always been one of my best friends. That's why I'm here now — in case he needs someone to stand by in this business."

Hercule Poirot said: "How much do you know — about this business?"

George Putnam's head came forward, his eyebrows descended, his eyes peered. He said deliberately: "I don't know anything. Understand, M. Poirot? This business wants hushing up — not broadcasting."

"You are aware that Miss Maberly's engagement has been broken off?"

"Yes, I know that."

"And the reason for it?"

"I don't know the reason. Not my business. Young people manage these things between themselves."

Poirot said: "Hugh Chandler told Diana Maberly that it was not right that they should marry — because he

was going out of his mind."

He saw the beads of perspiration break out on Putnam's forehead. Putnam said with an effort: "God help him, poor devil! You'd better get out of here, M. Poirot. There's nothing you can do. Poor Hugh. Poor old Charles. There's nothing to be done about it, M. Poirot."

Poirot said gravely: "If you could convince me of that . . . Why did Admiral Chandler force his son to leave the Navy?"

"It was the only thing to be done!"

"Was it to do with the killing of the sheep?"

"So you've heard about that?"

"What made his father suspect?"

Putnam hesitated, then he spoke, unwillingly, in short jerky sentences.

"Went to the boy's room. Found a basin there — blood in the water. Boy heavily asleep. Blood on his clothes. Same thing happened a few days later. Sheep found with their throats cut that night, too. The boy didn't know anything about it. Couldn't account for the blood. Didn't know he'd been out, even — and his shoes lying there all muddy where he'd kicked them off. Wasn't his fault you understand — *he didn't know*. Charles talked it over with me. Couldn't afford to risk anything — open scandal — he had to leave the service — come here where Charles could watch over him. You can see that. Stands to reason."

Poirot nodded.

Admiral Chandler was a white-haired man who looked older than his years. His shoulders stooped and his face was haggard. His dark eyes gleamed with a fanatical light.

He said: "We're the last of the Chandlers, M. Poirot. There will be no more Chandlers at Lyde after *we're* gone. When Hugh got engaged to Diana, I hoped — well, it's no good talking of that. Thank God they didn't marry, that's all I can say. I can't help being sorry that Diana brought you into this. I — well — I hoped to keep it dark."

Poirot said gently: "I am quite discreet."

"Yes, yes — I'm sure you are. All the same —" He broke off. "Diana — poor child — she can't believe it. I couldn't at first. Probably wouldn't believe it now if I didn't know that it's in the blood. The taint, I mean."

"You agreed to the engagement!"

"You mean I should have put my foot down then? But at the time I'd no idea. Hugh takes after his mother — nothing about him to remind you of the Chandlers. I hoped he'd taken after her in every way. There'd never been a trace of any abnormality about him. Dash it all, there's a trace of insanity in nearly every old family, isn't there, George?"

Putnam said: "Nobody would ever have believed there could be anything wrong with Hugh. Sometimes I can't believe it myself!"

He got up and went out of the room.

Admiral Chandler said gruffly: "Old George feels this as much as I do."

"He is a very old friend of yours? And of your wife's too?"

Chandler nodded. "Yes. George was in love with Caroline, I believe. When she was very young. He's never married. I believe that's the reason. Ah, well, I was the lucky one. I carried her off — only to lose her."

"Colonel Putnam was with you when your wife was drowned?"

"Yes, he was with us down in Cornwall where it happened. She and I were out in the boat together. He happened to stay at home that day. I've never understood how we came to capsize. . . . Her body was washed up two days later. Thank the Lord, we hadn't taken little Hugh out with us. . . . No good recalling the past. Better perhaps if Hugh *had* been with us. If it had been all over then. . . ."

"You have consulted a doctor?"

Chandler roared: "No, and I'm not going to. . . . The boy's safe enough with me to look after him. They shan't shut him up between four walls like a wild beast. . . ." His voice broke.

Poirot sat on a seat in the garden. Beside him sat Hugh Chandler. Diana had just left them. The young man turned a handsome, tortured face toward his companion.

He said: "You've got to make her understand, M. Poirot. You see, Di's a fighter. She won't give in. She won't accept what she's darned well got to accept. She — she will go on believing that I'm — sane."

"While you yourself are quite certain that you are — pardon me — insane?"

The young man winced. "I'm not actually hopelessly off my head yet — but it's getting worse. Diana doesn't know, bless her. She's only seen me when I am — all right."

"And when you are — all wrong, what happens?"

Hugh took a long breath. He said: "For one thing — I dream. And when I dream I *am* mad. Last night, for instance — I wasn't a man any longer. I was first of all a bull — a mad bull — racing about in blazing sunlight — tasting dust and blood in my mouth — dust and blood. . . . And then I was a dog — a great slavering dog. I had hydrophobia — children scattered and fled as I came — men tried to shoot me — someone set down a great bowl of water for me and I couldn't drink. *I couldn't drink.*"

He paused. "I woke up. *And I knew it was true.* I went over to the washstand. My mouth was parched — horribly parched — and dry. I was thirsty. But I couldn't drink, M. Poirot . . . I couldn't swallow . . . Oh, my God, I wasn't able to drink."

Hugh's hands were clenched on his knees. His face was thrust forward, his eyes were half closed as though he saw something coming towards him.

"And there are things that aren't dreams. Things that I see when I'm wide awake. Specters, frightful shapes. They leer at me. And sometimes I'm able to fly, to leave my bed, and fly through the air, to ride the winds — and fiends bear me company!"

"Tcha, tcha," said Hercule Poirot.

Hugh Chandler turned to him. "Oh, there isn't any doubt. It's in my blood. It's my family heritage. I can't escape. Thank God I found it out in time! Before I'd married Diana. Suppose we'd had a child and handed on this frightful thing to him!"

He laid a hand on Poirot's arm. "You must make her understand. You must tell her. She's got to forget. There will be someone else someday. There's young Steve Graham — he's crazy about her and he's an awfully good chap. She'd be happy with him — and safe. I want her — to be happy. He's hard up. So are her people, but when I'm gone they'll be all right."

"Why will they be 'all right'?"

Hugh Chandler smiled. It was a gentle lovable smile. He said: "There's my mother's money. She was well off, you know. It came to me. I've left it all to Diana."

Hercule Poirot sat back in his chair. "But you may live to be quite an old man, Mr. Chandler."

Hugh shook his head. "No, M. Poirot. I am not going to live to be an old man." Then he drew back with a sudden shudder.

"Don't you see?" He stared over Poirot's shoulder. "There — standing by you . . . it's a skeleton — its bones are shaking. It's calling to me — beckoning —"

The pupils of his eyes were widely dilated. He leaned suddenly sideways as though collapsing. He said: "You didn't see — anything?"

Slowly, Poirot shook his head.

Hugh Chandler said hoarsely: "I don't mind this so much — seeing things. *It's the blood I'm frightened of.* The blood in my room — on my clothes — and once there was a parrot — it was the Vicar's parrot. *It was there in my room with its throat cut* — and I was lying there with the razor in my hand wet with its blood!"

He leaned closer to Poirot. "Things have been killed," he whispered. "All around — in the village — out on the downs. Sheep, young lambs — a collie-dog. Father locks me in at night, but sometimes — sometimes — the door's open in the morning. I must have a key hidden somewhere but I don't know where I've hidden it. *I don't know.* It isn't I who do these things — it's someone else who comes into me — takes possession — turns me from a man into a raving monster who wants blood and who can't drink water. . . ."

He buried his face in his hands.

"You have not seen a doctor?"

Hugh shook his head. "Don't you understand? I'm strong. I'm as strong as a bull. I might live for years — shut up between four walls! I can't face that. It's better to go out altogether . . . there are ways, you know. An accident, cleaning a gun . . . Diana will understand. Once I'm sure that there is no hope. I'll take my own way out!"

He looked defiantly at Poirot, but Poirot did not respond to the challenge. Instead he asked mildly. "What do you eat and drink?"

Hugh flung his head. He roared

with laughter. "Salvation by diet, eh? Just what everybody else does."

"No special medicine? Cachets? Pills?"

"Good gosh, no."

Poirot said: "Does anyone in this house suffer with eye trouble?"

Hugh Chandler stared at him. "Father's eyes give him a good deal of trouble. He has to go to an oculist."

"Ah! Colonel Putnam, I suppose, has spent much of his life in India?"

"Yes, he's been out there a lot. He's very keen on India — talks about it a lot — native traditions and all that."

Poirot murmured, "Ah!"

Then he remarked: "I see that you have cut your chin."

"Yes, quite a nasty gash. Father startled me one day when I was shaving. I'm a bit nervy these days. And I've had a bit of a rash over my chin and neck. Makes shaving difficult."

"You should use a soothing cream."

"I do. Uncle George gave me one."

He gave a sudden laugh. "We're talking like a woman's beauty parlor. *Do you suffer from a habit of blushing? Do your best friends avoid you?* What the hell does anything matter when I'm mad — mad — mad!"

"Not yet."

"Well, that may be true. I may not have quite gone over the borderline — but it's coming. Nearer and nearer. Soon — I shall have gone — *right over the edge. . . .*"

Diana Maberly said: "Well?"

Her voice was breathless. Poirot shook his head slowly. "Have you courage, Mademoiselle? Great courage? You will need it."

"Then it's true? He *is* mad?"

Hercule Poirot said: "I am not an alienist, Mademoiselle. It is not I who can say 'This man is mad.' 'This man is sane.' "

She came closer to him. "Admiral Chandler thinks Hugh is mad. Putnam thinks he is mad. Hugh himself thinks he is mad —"

Poirot was watching her. "And you, Mademoiselle?"

"I? *I say he isn't mad!* That's why —"

"That is why you came to me?"

"Yes. I couldn't have had any other reason for coming to you, could I?"

"That," said Hercule Poirot, "is exactly what I have been asking myself, Mademoiselle?"

"I don't understand you."

"Who is Stephen Graham?"

She stared. "Stephen Graham? Oh, he's — he's just someone."

She caught him by the arm. "What's in your mind? What are you thinking about? You just stand there — behind that great mustache of yours — blinking your eyes in the sunlight, and you don't tell me anything. You're making me afraid — horribly afraid. Why?"

"Because I am afraid myself."

The gray eyes opened wide, stared at him. She said: "Afraid of what?"

Poirot sighed. "It is never so difficult to catch a murderer as to prevent a murder."

"Murder? Don't use that word."

"Nevertheless, I do use it."

He altered his tone, speaking quickly and authoritatively: "Mademoiselle, it is necessary that both you and I should pass the night in this house. I look to you to arrange the matter."

"I — But why —?"

"Because there is no time to lose. You have told me that you have courage. Prove it. Do what I request."

She nodded and turned away.

Poirot went into the house. He passed up the broad staircase. He heard Diana's voice in the library, and the voices of three men. There was no one on the upper floor. He found Hugh Chandler's room easily enough. There were various pots and tubes on the shelf over the washstand. Hercule Poirot went to work. . . .

A little later he asked Diana to drive him down to the village. He had forgotten, he explained, to pack his toothbrush. The chemist's shop was in the middle of the peaceful village street. Diana waited outside in the car. It struck her that Hercule Poirot was a long time choosing a toothbrush.

It was towards early morning that the summons came. Poirot was ready and waiting for it. The tap on the door had hardly sounded before he had drawn back the bolt and opened the door. There were two men outside. One was stern-faced and grim, the other twitched and trembled.

Colonel Putnam said simply: "Will you come with us, M. Poirot?"

There was a figure lying outside Diana Maberly's bedroom door. The light fell on a rumpled tawny head. Hugh lay there breathing stertorously. He was in his dressing gown and slippers. In his right hand was a sharply-curved, shining knife. Not all of it was shining — here and there it was obscured by red patches.

Poirot exlaimed: "*Mon Dieu!*"

Putnam said sharply: "She's all right. He hasn't touched her." He raised his voice and called: "Diana! It's us! Let us in!"

Poirot heard the Admiral groan and mutter under his breath: "My boy. My poor boy."

There was a sound of bolts being drawn. The door opened and Diana stood there. Her face was dead white. She faltered: "What happened? There was someone — trying to get in — feeling the door — the handle — scratching on the panels — Oh! it was awful . . . *like an animal.* . . ."

Putnam said sharply: "Your door was locked?"

"Yes, M. Poirot told me to lock it."

Poirot said: "Lift him up. Bring him inside."

The two men stooped and raised the unconscious man. Diana caught her breath with a little gasp as they passed her. "Is it Hugh? What's that — on his hands? Is it blood?"

Poirot looked at the two men. The Admiral nodded. "Not human, thank God! A cat! I found it downstairs in the hall. Throat cut. Afterwards he must have come up here —"

"*Here?*" Diana's voice was low with horror. "To *me?*" The man on the chair stirred — he muttered. They watched him, fascinated. Hugh Chan-

dler sat up. He blinked.

"Hullo," — his voice was dazed — hoarse — "What's happened? Why am I —?" He stopped. He was staring at the knife which he held still clasped in his hand. "What have I done?"

His eyes went from one to the other. They rested last on Diana, shrinking back against the wall. He said quietly: "Did I attack Diana? Tell me what has happened?"

They told him — unwillingly.

Outside the window the sun was coming up. Hercule Poirot drew a curtain aside. The radiance of dawn came into the room. Hugh's face was composed, his voice steady.

He said: "I see." Then he got up. His tone was quite natural as he said: "Beautiful morning, what? Think I'll go out in the woods and try to get a rabbit." He went out of the room and left them staring after him.

Then the Admiral started forward. Putnam caught him by the arm.

"No, Charles, no. It's the best way — for him, poor devil, if for nobody else."

Diana had thrown herself sobbing on the bed. Admiral Chandler said, his voice coming unevenly: "You're right, George. The boy's got guts. . . ."

Putnam said, and his voice was broken: "He's a man. . . ."

There was a moment's silence and then Chandler said: "Damn it, where's that accursed foreigner?"

In the gunroom, Hugh had lifted his gun from the rack and was loading it when Poirot's hand fell on his shoulder. Poirot said one word, said it with a strange authority: "No."

Hugh stared at him. He said in a thick, angry voice: "Take your hands off me! Don't interfere. There's going to be an accident, I tell you. It's the only way out. Don't you realize that if it hadn't been for the accident of her door being locked, I should have cut Diana's throat — Diana's!"

"I realize nothing of the kind. You would not have killed Miss Maberly."

"But I killed the cat — didn't I?"

"No, you did not kill the cat."

Hugh stared at him. "Are *you* mad — or am I?"

"Neither of us is mad."

It was at that moment that the Admiral and Putnam came hurrying in. Behind them came Diana. Hugh Chandler said in a weak, dazed voice: "This chap says I'm not mad."

Poirot said: "I am happy to tell you that you are completely sane."

Hugh laughed. "That's damned funny! It's sane, *is* it, to cut the throats of sheep and other animals? I was sane, was I, when I killed that parrot? And the cat tonight?"

"You did not kill the sheep — or the parrot — or the cat."

"Then who did?"

"Someone who has had at heart the sole object of proving you insane. On each occasion you were given a heavy soporific, and a bloodstained knife or razor was planted by you. It was someone else whose bloody hands were washed in your basin."

"But why?"

"In order that you should do what you were just about to do."

Hugh stared. Poirot turned to Colo-

nel Putnam. "Colonel Putnam, you lived for many years in India. Did you ever come across cases where persons were deliberately driven mad by the administration of a certain drug?"

Putnam's face lit up. He said:

"Never came across one myself, but I've heard of them often enough. The drug ends by driving a person insane."

"Exactly. Well, the active principle of the Datura is very closely allied to, if it is not actually, an alkaloid which is also obtained from belladonna. Belladonna preparations are fairly common, and this related drug is prescribed freely for eye treatments.

"By duplicating a prescription and getting it made up in different places a large quantity of the poison could be obtained without arousing suspicion. The alkaloid could be extracted from it and then easily introduced into a shaving cream. Applied externally it would cause a rash. This would soon lead to abrasions in shaving and thus the drug would be continually entering the system. It would produce certain symptoms — dryness of the mouth and throat, difficulty in swallowing, hallucinations, double vision — all the symptoms which Mr. Chandler had."

He turned to the young man. "Your shaving cream was heavily impregnated with this drug!"

Hugh said: "But who did it? Why?"

Poirot said: "That is what I have been studying since I came here. I have been looking for a motive for murder. Miss Maberly gained financially by your death, but I did not consider her seriously —"

Hugh flashed out: "I should hope not!"

"I envisaged another possible motive. Two men and a woman. Colonel Putnam had been in love with your mother; the Admiral married her."

Admiral Chandler cried out: "George? I can't believe it."

Poirot whirled round on Putnam.

"*Mon Dieu*, you must have suspected, that Hugh was *your* son? Why did you never tell him so?"

Putnam stammered, gulped. "I didn't know. It might have been. You see, Caroline came to me once — she was frightened of something — in great trouble. I don't know, I never have known what it was all about. She — I — we lost our heads. Afterwards I went away at once — it was the only thing to be done, we both knew we'd got to play the game. I — well, I wondered, but I couldn't be sure. Caroline never said anything that led me to think Hugh was my son. And then when this — this streak of madness appeared, it proved he wasn't."

Poirot said: "Yes, it settled things! You could not see the way the boy has of thrusting out his face and bringing down his brows — a trick he inherited from you. *But Charles Chandler saw it.* Saw it years ago — and learnt the truth from his wife. I think she was afraid of him — he'd begun to show her the mad streak — that was what drove her into your arms — you whom she had always loved. Charles Chandler planned his revenge. His wife died in a boating accident. He and she were out in the boat alone.

"Then he settled down to feed his concentrated hatred against the boy who bore his name but who was not his son. Your Indian stories put the idea of drug poisoning into his head. Hugh should be slowly driven mad. Driven to the stage where he would take his own life in despair. The blood lust was Admiral Chandler's, not Hugh's; the family streak of madness coming out in *him*. It was Charles Chandler who was driven to cut the throats of sheep in lonely fields. But it was Hugh who was to pay.

"Do you know, when I suspected? When Admiral Chandler was so averse to his son's seeing a doctor. For Hugh to object was natural enough. But the father! There might be treatment which would save his son — there were a hundred reasons why he should seek to have a doctor's opinion. But no, a doctor must not be allowed to see Hugh Chandler — in case a doctor should discover that he was sane!"

Hugh said quietly: "Sane . . . I am sane?" He stepped towards Diana.

Putnam said gruffly: "You're sane enough. There's no taint in our family."

Diana said: "Hugh."

Admiral Chandler picked up Hugh's gun. He said: "All a lot of nonsense! Think I'll go and see if I can get a rabbit —"

Putnam started forward, but the hand of Hercule Poirot restrained him. Poirot said:

"You said yourself — just now — that it was the best way. . . ."

Hugh and Diana had gone.

The two men, the Englishman and the Belgian, watched the last of the Chandlers cross the park and go up into the woods.

Presently, they heard a shot. . . .

To EQMM's galaxy of famous writers and Pulitzer Prize winners we now add the name of one of America's most popular and respected playwrights — Elmer Rice. A graduate lawyer (cum laude), Mr. Rice swapped what undoubtedly would have been a brilliant career in court for what turned out to be a brilliant career in the theatre. At the age of 22 Mr. Rice wrote his first play — "On Trial" — and experienced one of the most stupendous thrills that can fall to the lot of a young litterateur: his first professional effort was accepted by the very first producer to whom it was submitted, was staged on Broadway, and proved a substantial success!

After that came such outstanding hits as "The Adding Machine," "Counsellor-at-Law," and one of the most memorable American plays in the last two decades, "Street Scene." More recently Mr. Rice gave us "Flight to the West" and "Dream Girl," the latter starring his wife, Betty Field.

It is a great pleasure to welcome Elmer Rice to the field of crime fiction, although it is probable that Mr. Rice never thought of his story, "Conscience," as that type of story at all. Yet you will find that "Conscience" is the tale of a crook who commits a strange crime — indeed, one of the rarest crimes in all the annals of fictional felony; and we'll wager that you won't guess the nature of the crime until the very end of this unusual, perhaps unique, short-short.

CONSCIENCE

by ELMER RICE

HAMILTON clicked the telephone receiver sharply into place and uttered a loud and eloquent "Damn!"

"What's wrong?" asked Anne, entering with the morning's mail.

"It's that confounded story," said Hamilton. "I knew it would get me into trouble."

" 'Conscience'?" asked his wife.

"Yes, 'Conscience.' McMurray of the National was just on the wire. Wants me to come down right away. Can't discuss it over the phone. Nice mess! His voice was so frigid it's given me an earache."

"But I don't see why!" she protested. "There was nothing in what you did —"

"Yes, there was," he said. "I should have told them in the beginning. . . ."

"Then they might not have bought the story!" she exclaimed.

"All the more reason for their being sore now. Some kind busybody has called the truth to their attention, I suppose, and they feel that I've been putting something over on them."

"But what can they do?" asked his wife anxiously. "Make you give them back what they paid you?"

"I don't see how," said Hamilton. "I'm broke. What I'm afraid of is that the National won't buy any more of my stories. My best market too — good prices and prompt payment."

"Well," said Anne hopefully, "I guess you'll be able to fix it up."

Hamilton patted her cheek. "My little Pollyanna," he said, "you'd see the bright side of a smallpox epidemic. Well, I may as well get it over with. As the fellow in the electric chair said, this will certainly be a lesson to me."

"Don't you want to look at your mail before you go?" asked Anne, holding out the handful of letters.

"Guess it can wait," replied Hamilton; "I'm not expecting any checks. Let's see. Bill. Bill. Bill. . . . Hello, what's this? 'Home for the Feeble and Destitute.' Maybe it's an application blank. This looks like a way out!"

He tore open the envelope and quickly scanned a shaky scrawl.

"What the ——!" he ejaculated, in astonishment. "Do I know anybody named Tobias Small, Anne?"

"Tobias Small?" said Anne. "The name sounds — Why, yes, of course!" she exclaimed. "He's that nice old gentleman who used to live above us on Ninth Street. He'd been wealthy once, but his children had drained him dry and then neglected him. You don't mean to say that the poor old man has had to enter a home!"

"Apparently," replied Hamilton, "and, what's more, he seems to think I've based 'Conscience' on his life story. Thanks me effusively for showing up his ungrateful children and so on."

"Why, how amazing!" said Anne. "How can he think —"

"I don't know," said Hamilton, "but people do. It's astonishing how readers always discover themselves and their families in the stories they read. Well, I must write the old fellow a friendly letter — if I get out of McMurray's office alive."

As he turned into Madison Avenue he met a modish woman of thirty-five.

"Clara Hope!" he exclaimed, advancing with outstretched hand. "Why, it's a thousand years —"

But, to his amazement, the woman deliberately ignored his proffered hand and walked past with averted head.

Hamilton's hand fell to his side and his lower jaw dropped in astonishment. Then, recovering his senses, he turned and quickly overtook her.

"Why, Clara," he said, seizing her arm. "You haven't forgotten me!"

She wrenched her arm free and turned upon him two eyes filled with hatred.

"You're an unspeakable cad!"

"But what on earth —" cried the bewildered Hamilton.

"You needn't pretend innocence," she snapped. "I've read your disgusting story. I think it's unforgivably vile of you to make me out before the whole world as an unfeeling and ungrateful daughter. My father has no cause for complaint. His mind has been poisoned against me. And you take a lot of malicious rumors and — Oh, it's just too beastly for words."

"But, Clara, I assure you —" protested Hamilton.

"Never mind!" said the indignant woman. "Only from now on we're strangers, do you understand?"

Before he could reply she entered an apartment house and disappeared.

After twenty minutes of uneasy waiting in the reception-room of the National, Hamilton was shown into McMurray's private office.

"Hello, Hamilton," said the editor. "You've got us into a nice jam with that 'Conscience' story."

"I'm awfully sorry," said Hamilton volubly. "I should have explained —"

"Yes, you certainly should," said McMurray.

"But I thought —"

"You thought you'd camouflaged your characters sufficiently, is that it? Well, you didn't, and we're likely to have a libel suit on our hands. The ladies were in here this morning, and I want to tell you I've never seen an angrier pair of females in my life."

"What ladies?" demanded Hamilton. "Say, what the devil are you talking about?" he burst out.

"Don't try that line, Hamilton," said McMurray sharply. "You wrote a story about two women, who turned their old father out of doors after he'd impoverished himself for them, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Hamilton. "But —"

"And your characters are thinly disguised portraits of Mrs. Boothby, her sister and their father, aren't they?"

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Hamilton. "I never heard of Mrs. Boothby and her sister and —"

"Oh, come on, Hamilton!" said McMurray incredulously. "Never heard of Mrs. Frank Boothby, wife of the Cotton King?"

"Oh, you mean her?" said Hamilton. "Of course, I've heard of her."

"And you've exploited some story you've heard of her treatment of her father," said McMurray. "It may be true for all I know," he went on, "but this is a reputable magazine, and it's not our policy to lend ourselves to the spreading of scandal. We've treated you pretty decently, Hamilton, and you shouldn't have placed us —"

Hamilton could contain himself no longer. "Look here, McMurray," he shouted. "Either I'm crazy or the rest of the world is. I don't know the first thing about Mrs. Boothby. Never knew she had a sister or a father or anything about her."

"You didn't? Then how did you get hold of that story?"

"You mean to say you don't know?" asked Hamilton.

"I wouldn't ask you if I did."

Hamilton exhaled a deep breath. "It's incredible," he said. "Do you remember the day you called me up and said you had to have a story within twenty-four hours?"

"Yes," said McMurray. "But —"

"Well," Hamilton went on, "I hadn't an idea in my head, and I needed the five hundred very badly, so in desperation I committed a deliberate piece of plagiarism."

"Plagiarism?" said McMurray.

"Yes," said Hamilton. "I stole the plot of Shakespeare's King Lear."

DETECTIVE IN SPADES

In our September 1945 issue we introduced you to Philip Wylie's strictly amateur detective, the undersized and underrated bank clerk, Willis Perkins. Appropriately, Perkins' première was called "Perkins' 'First Case.'" But at that time we informed you that persistent little Perkins made not one but two separate and distinct débuts. To prove this astonishing state of affairs, we now offer "Perkins' Second 'First Case.'"

How did Philip Wylie come to write two first cases for his perceptive little Perkins? We can only guess. Perhaps this is what happened: Mr. Wylie took typewriter in hand and put Perkins on paper; he submitted this first fling to a magazine editor who — we are still guessing, mind you — liked the character but did not like the plot. So, the wily Mr. Wylie dreamed up another plot, again wrote it as Perkins' initial investigation, again submitted his brain-child to the magazine, and this time the persuasive little Perkins made the grade. This last statement is no longer guesswork: the story you are about to read actually appeared in "Collier's" years ago under the title "Perkins Takes the Case." With Perky successfully launched in print, Mr. Wylie then forgot that there was a prior début in manuscript, or if he didn't forget, he simply permitted the manuscript to hibernate in his files — until EQMM came along and purchased the original *Perkins peradventure. Thus homicidal history was made: surely Perkins is the only detective in fiction who not only was born twice but led, in the most literal sense, a double detectival life.*

It is interesting to remind you that it is usually the criminal of fiction who upsets, or tries to upset, all our scientific dicta. For example: the criminal in detective stories poohpoohs the physical impossibility of being in two places simultaneously. He (or she), let us say, commits a murder; he then arranges a perfect alibi proving that he wasn't on the scene of the crime at the time of the killing. In effect, therefore, the murderer becomes that incredible person who can be in two entirely different places at one and the same time. No such magical concomitance is ever attributed even to the most brilliant of bloodhounds: normally the detective submits to the laws and limitations of science — always excepting our unique Perkins. He, and he alone among fictional ferrets, solved two different cases at the same time and in the same place. Indeed, it is the mythical manhunter of the printed page who is the only true Superman of our age . . .

PERKINS' SECOND 'FIRST CASE'

by PHILIP WYLIE

AT EIGHTEEN Willis Perkins had been apprenticed to an accountant at two dollars per week. At twenty he had entered a bank. At thirty he was hidden in the dim interior of a downtown New York counting house. A pale, slight, undersized man whose most ambitious adventure in life had been a series of experiments with a mustache. At forty he was chief clerk at three thousand dollars a year.

Perkins was as much a fixture in the bank as the corroded copper weather vane on the roof. So, great was the astonishment when, on his forty-sixth birthday, he resigned his office. He gave no reason. No one dreamed the truth: that he had resigned to go into a life of terror and danger!

For twenty-eight years Perkins had pursued his hobby. Now, at forty-six, he was ready to make it his vocation. His hobby was crime detection. Prone on the floor under the flickering light of a gas lamp he had read Nick Carter. He was eighteen then. Far away he saw the future when he, too, would smile that strange and unreadable smile and say with a soft insistence, "You are going to your doom, Jed Halloway."

Sherlock Holmes came into his life. Jimmie Dale. The Lone Wolf. Cheri Bibi. Scotland Yard. The Paris Prefecture. The Cheka. The United States Intelligence Department. Slowly, Willis Perkins became perhaps the greatest authority on literary crime in the world. It was not his relaxation but his life.

He happened to be forty-six when other circumstances conspired to bring about his resignation. His cautious and farsighted investments assured him of three thousand dollars a year for the rest of his life. His equipment was complete.

His apartment consisted of two rooms on the top floor of an old brownstone house in Chelsea. They were large rooms. In one was a skylight. Through it he had access to the roof. In 1911 he had stolen the key to the cellar door. Surreptitiously he had furnished the back fence with two cleats so that it could be scaled instantly. When the new gutters and drains had been put on the old house, he had managed to influence the owner to make them of copper so that any reasonably agile man could use them as an unconventional exit.

At one time in his career, during a labor strike, Perkins had been pressed into service on pay rolls and had been given a permit to carry a pistol. Thereafter he had had it renewed annually.

He had attended night school for three winters. He had studied chemistry during that time. He also took a course in biology, and after some consideration he bought a microscope. The front room in his apartment contained a day bed, chairs, a desk, an

enormous wardrobe, and the walls were lined to the ceiling with home-made bookcases which were crammed with books. In the rear room Perkins had his laboratory.

In his wardrobe, and in a locked trunk, were his disguises. Often he had stepped from his brownstone house as another individual. Always his masquerade had been successful.

At forty-six he was ready. He had resigned his job. He had eaten his first breakfast and then his second with the knowledge that the day and all days thereafter were wholly at his disposal. One fly alone buzzed in the ointment of his beatitude. He was ready, waiting, a hound in leash — but there was no crime. For days that impossible situation had existed. It is true, he had read in the daily papers of numerous murders, burglaries and arsons which he wistfully longed to investigate, but he lacked the entrée. One could not merely walk upon the scene of a crime and say, "I am Willis Perkins," and then expect the police to bow and back away. Not at this moment in his career, he reflected.

Then came opportunity.

The day was a Friday. At about midnight Perkins had finished the task of bringing his notes up to date and he remembered that he had not had any supper. He decided to go out for a bite.

At the foot of the last flight, Perkins saw something that attracted his attention. It was a man lying on the floor. Perkins descended rapidly, but he stood some little distance from the man to make his preliminary examination. The only thought that entered his head was that Jack Evans, the artist who lived on the parlor floor, had fainted at the door of his apartment. The hall light was high and dim. Presently, however, Perkins' opinion was altered.

The man lay face down and he was very still. In the middle of his back, between his shoulder blades, was a rent. From the rent flowed slowly a red, thick liquid. Perkins knew that the liquid was blood, that the man had been stabbed, and that the knife had not been left in the wound. Someone had killed Jack Evans.

Perkins approached the body. He perceived that it was not Jack Evans, but a person whom he had seen occasionally entering the house. Another young man. Perkins touched the cheek. It was cold.

With minute care he inspected the hall. There was an umbrella in the rack. There were numerous tracks on the linoleum. Near the body was a thumb tack. Perkins picked it up, wrapped it in a silk handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

Again, he stood gravely over the body. He realized that the authorities must be notified at once. They would come in and make a hopeless muddle of the case, destroying all the clues that might be *in situ* at the moment. Perkins made a second careful search of the hall, crouching and at last creeping on hands and knees inch by inch over the place. He found a button, the corner of a newspaper, three

cigarette butts and a red wool thread. These he added to the tack in the silk handkerchief, being careful to finger none. He was calm and careful.

When he was satisfied, he went to the coin-box telephone in the hall and asked for police headquarters. He was given someone who said, "What d'ya want?" in a loud voice.

"This is Willis Perkins speaking," he answered. "I am talking from the telephone in the hall of No. 29 Olive Street. I have just found the body of a man who was stabbed in the back in this hall."

The voice said, "I'll send somebody around."

Perkins sat down on a step and waited for the police. They came in a very short time. Two men in uniform. They looked at him and they looked at the corpse. One of the policemen rolled it over and stared at the dead face, saying to the other, "Ever seen this guy?"

"No. And you better not touch that body."

The man who had turned it over then put it back. He used his toe for the operation. It took a position somewhat different from the one in which it had lain: Perkins noted that.

One of the policemen said, "Stabbed," and the other answered, "In the back."

Then they walked to the telephone together and one of them called a number, reciting after a due interval, "Guy here all right, Chief. Stabbed in the back. Yeah. We will."

The first policeman approached Perkins. "What do you know about this?"

Perkins answered, "Very little. I came down the stairs to get a late supper and I found him there. He has been in this house before, because I've seen him."

"What's his name?"

"Ashley," Perkins replied.

"You know him, eh?"

"No. His collar is loose. You'll find his name on a band stitched inside the collar. J. B. Ashley."

After that they waited until a second bevy of the policemen arrived. They questioned Perkins. Their combined opinion was expressed by one of them:

"You better come down to the station."

At that moment Jack Evans came through the door. He was surprised to see the policemen. But his astonishment on seeing the corpse was unbounded.

He said, "Good God! Ashley. Somebody's stabbed him!" And he knelt beside the figure. His face had paled a little and the amazement on it was replaced by a mixture of dismay and grief.

The police watched his reception of the spectacle silently. Perkins watched it narrowly. Jack Evans was pulled to his feet.

"You the bird that lives on this floor?"

"Why — yes."

"Know this guy?"

"Yes. I do. I know him well."

"Who is he?"

Jack Evans hesitated. "His name is Jerry Ashley. He lives on Ninety-sixth Street. I met him in art school — years ago. We got to be friends. He doesn't make much money. His family lives in the West somewhere. I gave him a key to my apartment so he could get in when I wasn't here. You see — it saved his coming all the way down and not getting in at all. He didn't have a telephone. And he couldn't spend a nickel on one unless he had to. He was as poor as that."

"Who killed him?"

Jack faced the policeman. "I haven't an idea in the world."

"We'll talk about it at the station."

It was four o'clock in the morning when Willis Perkins and Jack Evans went out on the street together. After hours of questioning they had been released and advised not to leave town.

They had a cup of coffee; then went together to No. 29 Olive Street. In the hall both stopped and stared at the spot where the body had been. Jack said, "Poor Jerry!" Then he turned to his companion. "I don't feel much like sleep. Would you care to come in?"

"Why — yes. Thanks."

The room was gaudy — made so by a disarray of paintings in every stage of evolution. Perkins after a pause said, "I don't suppose you know anything more about this than you told to the police?"

"Not a bit. Why?"

"Why, because —" Perkins stared at the ceiling — "I'm by way of being a detective myself."

"What!"

"Exactly. You didn't suspect it?" He smiled. "My personality is in itself a sort of disguise. I think — that with a little concentration — we can discover who killed your friend."

Jack looked at the man with perplexity. "I had the idea that you worked in a bank."

"So I did. Until recently. Crime detection has been my avocation. At the moment I'm engaged in a little piece of work that has to do with a gang of housebreakers."

Jack swore decently and earnestly. "I wouldn't have thought it in a thousand years. Then why didn't you call off those babies tonight? They were pretty unpleasant —"

"Because," Perkins answered, "they don't know who I am — and it is necessary that they never know."

Jack shook his head incredulously. "Then you're going to do something about Ashley?"

"Possibly," Perkins said. Out of the police station his valor and self-confidence had reasserted themselves.

Perkins left his perturbed host some while after dawn and went to his room. He examined the thumbtack and the button, the corner of the newspaper and the wool thread, as well as the cigarette stubs. He gave them his attention through a strong magnifying glass. He dusted them for fingerprints. He photographed the results. He wrote many pages of notes and after that he retired.

He had no way of discovering that the button had been where he found

it for two years and seven months, that the cigarettes were the one-time property of a gas man, a bill collector and Evans, that the bit of newspaper had fallen from Miss Grady's trash basket and that the red wool came from the lining of a dog collar. The thumbtack, had he known it, was an item from his own apartment, arrived there via the stair well. The majority of those histories was unascertainable by any amount of inductive research.

Perkins was unaware of that, and partly because of his innocence, he was a relatively happy man.

He was awakened by a knock on his door. He opened his eyes, remembered things in what he hoped was a flash, felt under his pillow to be sure that the revolver was in its place and then he crossed the room, donning slippers and bathrobe en route. Outside stood Jack Evans.

"Come in," he said.

Jack crossed his threshold for the first time, noted the library without perceiving its uniform tenor, smiled and said, "I thought maybe you'd like to have supper with my fiancée and myself."

Perkins accepted the invitation delightedly.

A time was arranged, and Evans left Perkins to his dreams and his activities.

When he made a sally of investigation to the lower floors and discovered a policeman standing like a wax statue in the hall, his discomfiture increased. He had the misfortune to meet the janitor, for the first time since the tragedy, within earshot of the minion of the law, and any opportunity to probe him for original material was smothered in lugubrious and self-conscious commonplaces.

At six-thirty he knocked on Evans' door and was admitted. They left soon afterward and called for the young lady. Besides being tall and blonde, she proved to be charming and piquant and more intelligent than any young woman Perkins had ever known in banking spheres. She gave them a cocktail (which Perkins drank, remembering that Holmes indulged himself in a vastly more lamentable vice) but she demurred at Jack's suggestion that they dine at Tony's.

"That dreadful Nicco person is there," she said.

Jack insisted with various phrases. It was nonsense to be annoyed by the attentions of an Italian restaurant hireling. He was downcast and needed a drink. Eventually they went to Tony's. Tony's was in a cellar. It was crammed with tables and heavy with smoke. Waiters slid through it like eels, carrying food and wine and steins of beer.

The place interested Perkins — a rendezvous in Bohemia not unlike the nefarious dens of the Rue Pigalle in Paris. They were met at the door by a young Italian who was oblivious of the men and very polite to Caroline. He found a table for them, and afterward he bent over it talking to the girl until Jack asked three times for a menu.

"I told you," Caroline said, "Nicco

would make a nuisance of himself."

"He is the owner?" Perkins asked.

"No. He works here. He ran into me on Seventh Avenue one day when I was having difficulty with wind and rain and an umbrella. That evening some one brought me here for the first time. Nicco considered it was an act of Providence, and he's presumed on it so far as to have even called on me. I was always out. But you understand, of course, the difficulties that can ensue from a thing like that, Mr. Perkins."

Perkins was the man of the world. "Quite," he said.

The meal was served. Wine was brought. Some time after they had finished their dinner and while the wine was still being poured, Perkins noted with a dim astonishment that he was holding the entire attention of the other two. He was telling them about a certain bizarre matter which took place in the Berlin underworld in 1911 and by mischance he had made himself the central figure.

"I managed," he finished, "to hold onto the gun in spite of the kick. It was all that saved me. The little effort of pulling the trigger resulted in a faint. But I'd winged him, luckily."

"Did you kill him?" Caroline asked breathlessly.

"Why —" a deprecatory gesture — "no. Not quite. The hangman did."

In the pause that followed, Jack yawned. "You know, I didn't sleep all last night, and I think that the best thing we all could do would be to go home and rest."

Caroline was disappointed. "Why — Jack —"

Perkins bowed. "Probably you're right —"

"Hate to be a wet blanket —"

"Not at all —"

So ended the first adventure of Willis Perkins in the gay world. So ended his first experience with alcohol. Caroline was bestowed upon her mother. Jack waved from his door.

"Glad you came with us. Fine stories you tell. Sorry I'm so weary. See you tomorrow."

The following morning, Perkins hurried to the address of J. B. Ashley. From a distance he perceived that a policeman was standing in front of the building talking to someone, so he marched past the house without giving it another glance. He was disappointed. He had not thought that there would be a guard at the house.

He returned to his own abode and once more went over the clues he had gathered at the scene of the murder.

As darkness fell he murmured to himself, "I should have come into the field of major crime less abruptly. I lack practical experience." He realized unhappily that he had made no progress with the murder.

It was harder for him to go to sleep that night. His eyes did not close until the three single strokes that mark twelve-thirty, one, and one-thirty had sounded out from the clock on the Vanderholt Building.

Suddenly Perkins sat bolt upright. Someone was knocking softly.

"Who is it?" he whispered.

"Me! Caroline! Open the door!"

Perkins was on his feet. The light was lit. The door was open. The girl came in. Again his blood ran fast. The girl was white and trembling. Summons in the night!

"What is it?" he said. He sounded too excited. "There, my child. Sit down. You are upset."

"I can't sit. Oh, Mr. Perkins, you've got to do something. They came to Jack's apartment late tonight with a search warrant and they found the knife that killed Jerry Ashley over his bedroom door."

Perkins was startled. "What!"

"His fingerprints were on the knife. Jack's."

"Good Lord —!"

"You're a detective. You understand these things. They have him in jail. They allowed him to telephone me — just now. Jack said to tell you as soon as it was morning. But I couldn't wait. I couldn't stand it. Don't you see — he's charged with murder? And he's the only person in Chelsea who knew Jerry. *And the knife was in his room.*"

Perkins' knees turned to water.

"Knife in his room?" he murmured.

"Yes. The knife. The body was in the morgue. They made sure. He told me all about it on the 'phone. He said to tell you. He said —" she choked — "he said not to worry and that everything would be all right. That this was just some grisly trick played on him."

"You mean," Perkins struggled to speak, "that the knife was *planted?*"

"Don't tell me that you think Jack put it there!"

"No — no — no — no." If only he had the courage to control himself. Planted. A knife planted. It was the one thing to which he might cling. The one fact in the avenue of his knowledge. Anyone else would have known instantly that it was a plant. But — perhaps Jack did — he shuddered. The human, the real, the emotional possibilities were stifling him.

The girl continued to talk. "You must do something right away. Can't you tell them who you are — and at least get Jack out of jail?"

Perkins considered meeting his Waterloo with confession. But if he confessed, it would mean relinquishing everything.

"My dear, don't be alarmed," he said unsteadily, "I will do everything I can. Go home and rest."

Then she was gone. Perkins paced the floor, forgetting to wear his slippers. He wiped his inconspicuous face with his small, nervous hands. He almost sobbed. He was not a detective. He was not Bradley, the man who moved in silence. Nor Gorgalta, the insuperable mentality. For one instant he had been a very kind man. That was all.

With a malicious persistence it gradually became daylight. The noises in the street were rejuvenated. Time would go on. Things would happen. Things that had now become inevitable and dreadful. Caroline brought the late morning papers to him. It was all there. "Death Artist," they called Jack. They explained how he was suspected of having murdered his friend,

of hiding the knife and returning to pretend surprise at the murder, and then bringing the knife into his rooms, hiding it by the "purloined letter" system.

In the afternoon Caroline came again. "I saw him. He's frightened."

"Tell him — not to be."

"Oh — Mr. Perkins — you must act. Act! This is unbearable."

"I —"

"Sometimes today I've doubted you. You just sit here in your room. And he's in jail. In jail. The papers are writing dreadful things about him."

It was the beginning of a nightmare. Jack's parents appeared and visited his rooms at 29 Olive Street. They had come a long way. They were very grave and quiet — almost as if they suspected their son. The papers said that Jack's lawyers were so and so. The days fell off the calendar like autumn leaves. Perkins thought of giving his clues to the police. His precious clues. The State was sure of its case, he read. Jack would be imprisoned for life — or even electrocuted, if they could find a motive.

A time came when Caroline no longer called on Perkins. A time came when Perkins decided that it was useless to consider going to see Jack.

Then, one evening, Perkins knew that it was three days until the trial would begin. Three days. He decided to submit his clues as fresh evidence. Maybe someone, someone better than himself, someone who had had experience, could make something of them. He gathered them into his handkerchief. He understood the danger of admitting that he had withheld evidence. He appreciated the ridiculous position in which he would be placed.

In agony he assembled his clues. Grimly he added his photographs. He would go the whole, miserable distance. There might be something in the photographs — something he could not see. He began his march to pitiful surrender — a surrender of twenty-eight years. The story was ended: He had been the hero, at first. Now — he was only the jester. He reached the front door. One last glance he cast back into the hall. The light that came through the frosted panels was as dim as the light that had burned above the body when he came upon it and thought that it was Jack unconscious in front of his apartment.

Perkins' hand was on the knob. It rested there. He repeated this last memory to himself. He had thought the body was Jack. Jack. Had someone else also thought that it was Jack? Had someone killed Ashley believing it was Jack? Had Jack any enemies? No one had considered that! And Perkins knew one potential enemy. Only one. Possibly that was fortunate.

Perkins' march ended there. He faced about. He ran up the stairs two at a time. Again the leather chair. Again the concentration. But no frantic effort of attention was necessary. His mind raced ahead.

It was a new Perkins who descended the stairs — a self-assured Perkins who knew what he was doing. He went on

an errand which required possibly a half-hour and then he approached the police station. He went directly to the desk.

"I'm Perkins," he said modestly. "I wish to speak with Captain O'Hara."

"He's busy."

"On the Ashley murder."

"Wait a minute."

Captain O'Hara — the man who had examined Perkins, the man whose name was most frequently connected with the Ashley murder, the man who had instituted the search which turned up the knife — was at his desk.

He said, "Well?" He looked Perkins over from head to foot.

Perkins half closed his eyes. "Did it ever occur to you, Captain, how seldom Americans use knives as lethal weapons?"

"No."

"A slight point, no doubt. But, in the present matter, a point of grave importance. I must confess that I myself overlooked it for a while."

"What do you want?"

"A minute of your time. I merely wish to assure you that Mr. Jack Evans is innocent of the murder of his friend and that the assassin is a different person entirely."

"Who is it?"

Perkins lifted his hand. "One thing at a time —"

"What the hell is this?"

"O'Hara, you can't afford to make a fool of yourself." There was that in Perkins' manner which assured the Captain that he was either an eccentric or a maniac. He listened angrily. "I noticed, when I found the body, that it resembled Jack Evans. In fact, I had mistaken it for Jack. I believe it was brought out some time ago that the impecunious victim was actually wearing a hat and coat lent him by the defendant. Hence my error. Now, then, it was easy for a person coming from behind and nerved to do murder to mistake Ashley for Evans. Suppose that happened. Suppose someone had tried to kill Evans and accidentally killed Ashley instead.

"That person would be covered — because the police would look for someone who would want to kill Ashley or might conceivably want to kill him. Evans' enemies would be ignored. You follow me?"

"Go ahead —" O'Hara said impatiently. "And cut it short."

"Now, assume that our murderer got the wrong man. Evans still lives. What prettier revenge for Evans' enemy than to fasten his mistaken killing on the artist?"

"Has Evans any enemies?" The question was red hot.

But Perkins remained cool. Cold, in fact. His voice was a monotone. "He has. He is engaged to a very fine girl, as you know. There is another young man — an Italian — in love with that girl. Hopelessly, desperately in love with her. An Italian, Captain. In that connotation recall my statement about knives and nationalities. I —"

"What's his name?"

"Just a moment —"

"Good God, man —"

Perkins' hand was lifted languidly. The police officer sat back.

"I have a few things to add, Captain. One: the murder was committed the night after the young couple became engaged — a betrothal made possible by his recent success in the art world. Two: on the night following the murder, the happy pair and I dined together. After the meal, Mr. Evans expressed an intense desire to sleep. We — or I — accompanied him home. Now, we were served in the restaurant by the aforementioned Italian. Assume that Mr. Evans' drink was drugged. Assume that the Italian made his way to 29 Olive Street, burglarized the parlor floor, found Evans stupefied, pressed the knife into his hand and then hid it over the door. Assume that he then tipped off the police to search the apartment —"

"There you're off. We had no tip. It was my idea."

"And an excellent, if obvious, idea. Especially excellent for our Italian. Very well. Assume all this. He has made a mistake about his victim. But it serves his end at the last because his enemy — his rival in love — is arrested for the deed."

O'Hara was thoughtful. "That sounds like something — maybe. Some frameup! But the hell with it. We have our man. You can't prove it."

Perkins was at the door. "Ah? There I have been fortunate. I took the liberty of asking one of your constables to assist me in a little matter. Together we visited Mr. Nicco Varci and accused him of the murder."

"You can't do that!"

"We have done it. Mr. Varci fainted and when he came to he tried to escape. There was a scuffle. Afterward he confessed. Your constable has taken him to a clinic for the stitching of a minor laceration."

O'Hara's face was gray. "They'll ride me. They'll kid me in the papers! They'll *get* me for it!"

Perkins understood this situation and he knew its etiquette.

"O'Hara, old man," he said, gently, "this is your case. I don't want my name in it. I'm busy with other things."

"You mean —"

"Exactly. And if you ever want me again — Willis Perkins, 29 Olive Street — at your service." He bowed. He was gone. He went into the sunshine delirious with joy — but outwardly the inscrutable man his ten thousand books insisted upon.

It was some time later. Jack Evans was giving a little dinner for his fiancée, and Mr. Willis Perkins.

"We can't ever attempt to thank you — Mr. Perkins." It was Caroline's hundredth repetition of the theme. "And for Mr. O'Hara to get the credit — you're a darling."

Perkins blinked. But something strong and steely within him did not allow the tears to fall. He lit his pipe again. His hand had no tremor.

"It was nothing," he began. "Elementary. Did I ever tell you about a night on the Congo and a strand of rope? Now there was something — ah — abstruse. . . ."

SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

Jottings from a Mystery Critic's Notebook: John Dickson Carr, here on visit, reports whodunit writing in England hard hit by the war. Many older writers inactive; so few new names that famed London Detection Club (of which American-born Carr is secretary) is having difficulty filling vacancies in its ranks. . . . Carr is short, slight, mustached, pipe-smoking, witty, reserved but affable; doesn't look his 40 years. Favorite conversational topic: detective stories. . . . Georges Simenon another New York visitor from overseas. His publishers state creator of Inspector Maigret is now completely cleared of collaborationist charges reported last Fall. In fact, author is said to have aided Allied paratroopers dropped in France to prepare way for D-Day. . . . Simenon plans to make home in Montreal; will write new Maigret stories as well as non-detective fiction. . . . Richard Lockridge, of Mr. and Mrs. North combination, out of Navy as P.R.O.; will not return to "New York Sun" as drama critic. . . . Also back in mufti: Col. F. Van Wyck Mason, Richard Webb and Hugh Wheeler (who collaborate as Patrick Quentin, Q. Patrick, Jonathan Stagge), Aaron Marc Stein (George Bagby), Stuart Palmer, Darwin Teilhet, Dashiell Hammett, Lee Bayer, Will Oursler. And (if it's news) the conductor of this department. . . . Ray Bond, of Dodd, Mead Red Badge staff, readying anthology of code and cipher stories for another publisher's late Spring list. . . . Watch for Will Cuppy anthology, MURDER WITHOUT TEARS (swell title). . . . Hilda Lawrence and H. W. Roden two very different authors who started writing their own whodunits because they couldn't find enough of the kind they liked. . . . Wonder who invented "whodunit"? . . . Tony Boucher on from Berkeley for annual Baker Street Irregular dinner. He's doing Sherlock Holmes radio scripts, promises new novel soon. . . . Sherlockians now have their own quarterly, "Baker Street Journal," published at $5 the year by Ben Abramson, 3 West 46th Street, New York 19. . . . Marco Page and Steve Fisher two Hollywoodians who will have new mysteries out this Spring after long absences from the book counters. Page's will be his first since FAST COMPANY.

Now It Can Be Told: "Pat Hand," whose Careful Jones cardplaying stories in EQMM have caused wide speculation as to author's identity, is Thomas B. Costain, author of season's bestseller THE BLACK ROSE — and, incidentally, this department's father-in-law. . . . Things I Never

Knew Till Now: Agatha Christie has published non-detective fiction under pen-name "Mary Westmacott."

More news of English authors: Dorothy Sayers is now living in the country, translating Dante; doubts she'll ever do another Peter Wimsey story . . . But sometimes they fool you. At 80, A. E. W. Mason's THE HOUSE IN LORDSHIP LANE — first Hanaud & Ricardo story in 11 years — will be one of season's events when published here this Spring. . . . E. Phillips Oppenheim, another octogenarian, was at work on his 112th thriller when he died at his home in Guernsey, in February. . . . And A DEED WITHOUT A NAME, recently issued here, was 121st novel by Eden Phillpotts, now in 84th year. Stout fellas, these British. . . . Michael Innes, back in England after several years at Adelaide University, Australia, has promised his publishers to stop fooling and go back to mood of early Appleby stories. (It's about time!) . . . Lt.-Col. Eric Ambler out of British Army. . . . Anthony Gilbert is a woman, Lucy Beatrice Malleson. And Joseph Shearing is Marjorie Bowen — who is Mrs. Gabrielle Margaret Vere (Campbell) Long!

Back home: Baynard Kendrick, first president of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., creator of blind sleuth Duncan Maclain, receiving plaudits for LIGHTS OUT, fine (non-detective) novel about a blind veteran. . . . Other whodunit writers publishing or contemplating "straight" fiction: Zelda Popkin, Mabel Seeley, Mitchell Wilson, Katharine Roberts. Okay — but don't stay away too long. . . . Kathleen Moore Knight off to Mexico again after delivering ms. of new Elisha Macomber novel, first in some time, to her publisher. . . . Brett Halliday wintering in Connecticut. . . . Kurt Steel convalescing after long hospital siege. . . . Vera Caspary, back from England for filming of BEDELIA, once edited fingerprint magazine.

Mystery Recognitions: Ellery Queen and Dashiell Hammett awarded silver "Gertrudes" by Pocket Books, signifying that THE NEW ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN and THE THIN MAN, respectively, have passed million-copy sales mark in that series. . . . And the Book League of America has adopted Jonathan Stagge's DEATH'S OLD SWEET SONG (scheduled by Crime Club) as June selection for its subscribers.

Tour-de-Suspense: Every few years the mystery story, using the term in its wide and inclusive sense, produces a "natural," a work that for some reason arouses excitement and discussion far in excess of that usually accorded crime fare. I am not entirely certain that Charlotte Armstrong's current suspense-sensation THE UNSUSPECTED (Coward-McCann) belongs in quite the same class as THE CANARY MURDER CASE, THE BELLAMY TRIAL, THE MURDER OF ROGER ACKROYD, or REBECCA. But when a mystery novel by a non-"name" author is serialized by the "Saturday Evening Post," is pur-

chased by a major moving picture studio for a fancy figure long before book publication, and when it furthermore creates the amount of talk you and I have been hearing for the last several months — surely, game beyond the ordinary is afoot.

In the normal course of events I am strongly opposed to reviews which disclose any appreciable portion of a mystery novel's plot (a topic I want to discuss further in these pages at some future date). But since Miss Armstrong's method is to name her villain in the first chapter, and thereafter to depend on the devices of suspense rather than those of mystification for her effects, there can be no harm in stating the outline of her story as the basis for our consideration.

Briefly: the novel opens with the hero, Francis, suspecting that his fiancée has been murdered by her employer, Grandison, an enormously clever retired theatrical director and national character. To find evidence of the crime, Francis poses as the husband of Grandison's blindly adoring ward, Mathilda, whose fortune Grandison has been embezzling and who has been reported lost at sea. When Mathilda unexpectedly returns, it is a shock to both men. Francis attempts (a) to convince her that she is suffering from amnesia, to protect his own position, and (b) to make her aware of Grandison's villainy and her own peril. The story moves swiftly into a taut life-and-death duel between the two men, both racing against time, and rises to a climax that is pure and hair-raising Grand Guignol.

By tight writing and broad, colorful delineation of character and mood, Miss Armstrong has created on this structure an extraordinarily exciting surface melodrama of suspense, rather than the "psychological study" her novel has been carelessly acclaimed in some quarters. ("Psychological" implies something a good deal more internal than she has either attempted or achieved.) This is not said in criticism. Miss Armstrong has accomplished so ably what she set out to do that I for one feel no temptation to chide her for not being Dostoevsky as well.

And yet . . . good as THE UNSUSPECTED is, it seems to me it could have been more effective *on the purely entertainment level.* For all its excellence, it partakes of a structural weakness that is found in too many suspense stories being written today (and for which reason the subject is considered here at more than the usual length). I refer to the curious habit of sacrificing mystery to supposititious novelty, as if there were some special virtue in being able to say: "The reader knows who the murderer is all the time!" This is doubtless a temptation, especially as it lessens the problems of technical construction faced by the author, but I am convinced it is a mistake all the same. For unknown peril — as that master of the subject, Alfred Hitchcock, has pointed out — is always vastly more terrifying than known peril; and the

story which possesses *both* suspense and mystery is inevitably more powerful than the story which relies on suspense alone. (Obviously, the foregoing is not intended to refer to stories told from within the murderer's own consciousness, of the type of MALICE AFORETHOUGHT and DOUBLE INDEMNITY. Such tales are *suorum generum.*)

By way of illustration (and with due apologies to Miss Armstrong) I wish that it were possible to make a simple experiment. I wish that THE UNSUSPECTED could be re-told from the viewpoint of Mathilda; beginning with her return from a supposed watery grave to find a stranger masquerading as her husband; and with the reader just as much in the dark as she as the story begins to unfold. Such an approach would obviously require much greater technical effort on the part of the author. But it would result, I am convinced, in the sheerest novel of suspense *and* mystery since REBECCA.

Crimes in Brief: You will look far and long, in this year of grace, for a more satisfying example of the eerie-cum-deductive tale than HE WHO WHISPERS (Harper), in which John Dickson Carr expertly blends again the elements for which he is most famous — the apparently impossible crime and the apparently supernatural influence — and Dr. Gideon Fell battles mightily against vampirism, ancient and modern. . . . Roy Huggins doesn't miss a plot cliché of the tough-guy division in his overlong THE DOUBLE TAKE (Morrow), but his fresh and Chandleresque prose and likeable private eye, Stu Bailey, compensate for these faults. Huggins writes like an old hand; if he is really the beginner his publishers profess to believe, put him in your winter book. . . . Writing also surpasses plot in THE PAVILION (Simon & Schuster), Hilda Lawrence's first novel without Mark East (whom you will miss chiefly for his humor). The author's dry, oblique style redeems the old one about the decaying Southern family and the stupid little mouse of a heroine. The murderer is psychologically visible at all times, and the main interest is in the hunt for evidence of bygone crimes. . . . If you like Mr. and Mrs. North as much as I do, you will have fun — despite some pretty tall coincidences — with Frances & Richard Lockridge's MURDER WITHIN MURDER (Lippincott), about the killing of a research worker on a book of true crime cases. (Someday, though, I'd like to read a North story in which Mrs. N. does *not* wander alone and unprotected into the murderer's parlor in the last chapter.) . . . Admirers of the MALICE AFORETHOUGHT — DOUBLE INDEMNITY school (see above) should not miss Doris Miles Disney's DARK ROAD (Crime Club), an absorbing if necessarily grim study of the mind of a murderess. It is the finest work to date of a young author who will bear watching.

In the early 1930s Frederick Nebel belonged to the hardboiled school of "Black Mask" writers that included, among others, Dashiell Hammett, Raoul Whitfield, and Carroll John Daly. Mr. Nebel specialized at that time in two characters — Captain Steve MacBride and tough dick Donahue. We brought you a MacBride story 'way back in our November 1942 issue, and now we bring you "Donny" Donahue, a private agency operative who is a blood-brother to Hammett's Continental Op.

"Dead Date" is a typical example of the terse, tough 'tec tale that "Black Mask" developed almost singlehanded and that finally exerted so powerful and important an influence in the history of the detective story. The hero of this kind of tale is always a rugged individualist in the purest American tradition. The story plots depend almost wholly on physical action and usually wind up with a terrific chase and bountiful blood-letting. While it is true that the old "Black Mask" formula is fading somewhat, that currently we are tempering its "realism" with the best qualities of the more intellectual approach, it is equally true that writers like Nebel and Hammett left an indelible imprint on modern crime-story technique.

DEAD DATE

by FREDERICK NEBEL

DONAHUE went down four steps into the shadow-ridden areaway, turned left and stopped before a wrought-iron gate. He pressed a button, stood humming *Sweet and Lovely.*

An inner door opened. A girl came and pressed her face to the wrought-iron bars and Donahue, saying: "Greetings, Carmen," snapped her familiarly under the chin.

"Oh, it ees *you, señor!*"

The bolt clanged as it was thrown back. The door swung inward and Donahue followed it, a rangy tall man in a camel's hair topcoat.

"You have been away a long time, *señor.*"

"Been slumming in the Village for weeks. . . . Let me." He swung the heavy gate shut, slammed home the bolt, flicked a kiss off the girl's cheek and laughed good-humoredly when she chided him. They went into the hallway, closed the inner door, and Donahue gave her his hat and topcoat.

"Listen, beautiful," he said. "A lady'll be here tonight. She'll ask for me."

"*Si, señor.*"

The Spanish atmosphere ended there. Going down the corridor and through a swing-door into a small luxurious bar, the scene was made Levantine by the barman, who swung a large nose towards Donahue and grinned, waved.

"Donny, as I live and breathe!"

Donahue hooked a heel on the pol-

ished rail and plucked a potato chip from a bowl. "Martini — dry, Maxie."

"So where you been — where you been?"

"Oh, hither and yon. . . . Hello, Walter. How's the kid?"

Walter Nass, the proprietor of the place, came across past a large *hors d'oeuvres* table, gripped Donahue's right hand with his right and felt Donahue's biceps with his left.

He smiled. "Keeping fit, huhn, Donny?"

Donahue nodded past Nass's square shoulder. "That Klay?"

"Yeah."

Donahue turned back to the bar, planted elbows on it and lifted his Martini without taking an elbow off the bar. He drank and then suddenly turned and said: "I thought Klay was over on the West Side."

Walter Nass shrugged. He changed the subject, saying: "Eating tonight or just on the way through?"

"I'll want a table in one of your private rooms. There'll be a jane along later. . . . I thought Klay was over on the West Side?"

Walter Nass shrugged. "What am I going to do about that?"

He turned and walked towards the headwaiter, who was beckoning from the dining-room entrance. Donahue turned to look after Nass, and Klay, eating at one of the bar tables against the back wall, looked up and waved his fork. Donahue moved his chin upward in acknowledgment, turned back to the bar and ordered another Martini.

Klay got up and came over, carrying his napkin with him and rubbing his chin free of salad oil. He wore his clothes with a theatrical elegance, carried himself erect. His cornsilk hair was brushed back in a pompadour. His face had been shaven very closely and powdered profusely, so that now it had a gray-white look. His eyes were mouse-colored, flat, and when he smiled he showed false upper teeth.

"Imagine meeting you here, Donahue," he drawled in a crusty voice.

"That calls for no imagination, Klay."

"I've just started the meat course. Join me?"

"No, thanks."

Klay's eyelashes were almost white. "What's going on at the District Attorney's office these days?" he asked.

Donahue half-turned and looked over his cocktail at Klay. "I'm a private dick, Klay. What the hell do I know about the District Attorney's office?"

Klay laughed. "Yeah, I get you."

Donahue's brown eyes were frankly disapproving of the plain-clothesman. Klay nodded mockingly, turned and drifted back to his table.

Donahue finished his second cocktail and went upstairs to a telephone booth. He dialed and while waiting for the connection scowled at his wrist watch. He crowded the transmitter with his mouth.

"Get Mr. Castleman. . . . Donahue." He tapped his foot for a long minute; stopped tapping it and dipped his head. "Frank? . . . This's Donny.

. . . Say, I don't feel right. There's a fluke here somewhere or else old man coincidence is on the job. . . . Well, Klay; he's downstairs wolfing grub now. . . . Well, if it is coincidence I don't give a damn, but if something leaked out and this crackpot is playing me ring-around-the-rosie — . . . I know, I know, but I've got a date with this jane and I don't like to have Klay pulling a Dracula around here all night. If somebody in your office got loose-mouthed, it might be just too bad. . . . Okay, Frank. Oh, yeah, I'll tell you all right. S' long."

He pronged the receiver, shoved out of the booth and went downstairs to the bar. He had two vertical creases between his black eyebrows. Lights gleamed on his high cheekbones and light moved back and forth in his brown eyes, and his wide lips were tight beneath his long, straight nose.

He leaned on the bar, shook his head when Maxie reached for his empty glass. Walter Nass appeared in the dining-room entrance, looked at his back and then turned his troubled stare on Klay. Nass came over to the bar and rubbed his elbow against Donahue's.

"What's up, Donny?"

Donahue crackled a potato chip between long hard teeth. "Do me a favor, Walt. Tell Carmen when the jane comes to send her up by the front stairway."

"Jane?"

"I'm meeting a jane here. I'll go up and meet her in the room, then."

Walter Nass looked puzzled. "Cripes, Donny, I'd hate to have anything happen here. What's Klay doing here?"

"Search me."

"There's something wrong."

Donahue growled. "Don't be an old woman —" He broke off because Carmen was beckoning from the corridor.

"A chauffeur says the lady wishes you should see her in the car," Carmen explained when Donahue reached her.

He said: "Get my hat and coat."

Walter Nass was at his elbow, saying: "What now, Donny?"

Donahue said nothing. He went down the hall behind Carmen. She helped him into his coat in the shadow of the stairwell, and he was slapping on his hat when Walter Nass touched him again.

Donahue said: "I don't know. I'm going upstairs and then down and out the back way."

Nass looked worried. "Cripes, I thought —"

"Keep your pants on, Walter. I may be goofy but I'm not taking a chance. . . . Carmen, you stay in here. . . . Okay, Walter; you want to let me out?"

Nass pushed past Donahue giving him a sidelong look and then climbed the carpeted staircase. They went halfway down the corridor above, took a rear stairway that grounded back of the kitchen. Nass dangled keys and his face was genuinely concerned.

"Honest, Donny — I think you ought to watch your step."

Donahue prodded him. "I'll watch it, kid."

Nass let him out into a dark alley, stood hovering in the doorway while Donahue groped his way rearwards. Donahue reached the street that paralleled the one in which Nass's place stood. He turned left and walked a half block to a main north-and-south artery.

He turned south, the big collar of his overcoat up around his ears, the brim of his hat snapped down low over his eyes. He reached the corner and went close to the window of a cigar store. There was a man standing on the corner looking down the dark side street. He wore a blue overcoat with the collar upturned, and he was hatless. He had blond close-cropped hair.

Donahue entered the cigar store, bought a packet of cigarettes and killed a few minutes opening it and watching the corner. The man kept looking into the side street and tapping a foot on the curb. Presently Donahue walked out, retraced his steps north and took the first right turn. He followed the side street to the next north-and-south artery and did not stop until he reached the first corner.

He entered the street, walking west; took a flat black automatic pistol from an armpit-holster and shoved it into his coat pocket. He also left his hand in the pocket. When he got halfway up the block he could see the hatless man standing on the corner beyond.

Nass's place was near the west end of the block. There was a sedan parked in front of it, its tail-light a red eye in the darkness. Donahue walked close to the curb, and when he came abreast of the sedan he crowded his body close against it.

Nothing happened. He saw no other car nearby, heard no idling engine. But he saw the hatless man turn and cross the main drag beyond and disappear behind a fleet of moving cars. Donahue opened the tonneau door and saw the woman sitting in the corner.

"What's the idea?" he said.

She did not answer. She did not move.

His head went down between his shoulders and his gun came halfway out of his pocket. He flung a look about, up and down the street; returned it to the tonneau. He reached in with his left hand and grabbed the woman's arm. She fell sidewise — softly — and lay quietly on the seat.

He had tried to stop the fall of her body. Failing, he drew his hand back, rubbed his fingers together and then looked at them. They were smudged.

He stepped back to the curb and stood very erect. His brown eyes flashed, marble-hard, and a whispered oath slipped out of a corner of his mouth. He was suddenly warm and he pulled down the collar of his coat, drew a handkerchief and wiped the blood from his fingers.

He turned away and went down into the areaway. He rang the bell and before its echo died Carmen came out, as though she had been waiting for him.

He said nothing. She opened the wrought-iron gate and he went past her long-legged, with a swish to his overcoat. He ran into Walter Nass in the corridor and Nass's face was a white question mark.

"Klay," Donahue said, and went down the corridor.

Klay put down a pony of brandy and laid his long, prehensile fingers on the white napery.

Donahue stopped in front of the table and Klay looked at him with half-shuttered eyes.

Donahue said: "There's a dead woman outside."

"H'm," Klay said and stood up quietly. His glance flicked Donahue and he wiped his flat lips with a napkin, dropped it and came around the table, square-shouldered and erect. "How'd it happen?"

"Shot."

"I didn't hear a shot."

"She was shot elsewhere and some kind-hearted son-of-a-so-and-so delivered her at the door."

Klay strode swiftly out of the bar, up the corridor. Donahue followed slowly and Walter Nass met him in the hallway. Nass was patting his forehead with a handkerchief and Carmen was holding her hands together just inside the door and looking round-eyed.

"Donny, what happened?"

Donahue grabbed his arm roughly. "Take it standing, Walt. It didn't happen here."

"Who was she, Donny?"

Donahue did not reply. He crossed to Carmen and muttered: "What makes you think that guy was a chauffeur?"

"He — he wore a cap like a chauffeur, *señor.*"

"Okay. I get that too."

He heaved past her and opened the iron gate, climbed out of the areaway and saw Klay half in the tonneau, with the car's dome light on. Donahue stood on the sidewalk and waited until Klay backed out.

Klay was casual, undisturbed. "How'd you find this?"

"A guy came to the door here and said she wanted to see me."

"Where's the guy?"

"How the hell do I know?"

Klay nodded to the car. "You expecting her?"

"I was, yes. Check those plates. It's not her car."

"Who is she?"

"You know as well as I do."

Klay squinted at him. "What are you getting hot about?"

"What do you expect me to do — light a Murad?"

Klay lifted his cleft chin. "Don't get huffy, Donahue." He tried to put beef into the words but they snagged over his teeth and sounded somewhat hollow. He licked his dry flat lips and ducked down into the areaway.

Donahue reached into the sedan and turned out the dome light. He closed the tonneau door, looked sourly up and down the street and went down into the areaway vestibule. Klay was using a wall telephone near the checkroom and Carmen was twisting a handkerchief round and round. Walter

Nass was watching Klay at the telephone but when Donahue came in Nass turned towards him and shrugged.

Klay hung up and turned from the phone. His hair shone like platinum and his gray-white face looked long and hollow in the cheeks. His nape was straight, his tailored shoulders square.

"This ain't so sweet." He looked at Donahue when he said it, then turned and walked to the iron gate, climbed to the sidewalk.

Donahue came up behind him and got in front of him. "What's the idea of a crack like that?"

"You're out of diapers, aren't you?"

"What's the idea of a crack like that, I asked?"

Klay nodded to the sedan. "Having dates with Cherry Bliss, weren't you?"

"Maybe," Donahue said, "I'm not the only guy's had dates with Cherry Bliss."

"I guess she's had dates with a lot of guys."

"Maybe you don't get me."

Klay worked his artificial smile. "I don't care if I get you or not, Donahue."

"What I've been wondering, Klay, is how the hell you happen to be over on the East Side. I thought you were working the cab-joints over on the West Side."

"This happens to be my night off. I'm just taking care of this till the precinct men get over. I'm not quizzing you, Donahue. That'll be their job. So keep your sarcasm to yourself — or chuck it at the precinct men."

"This is vice squad business, Klay."

Klay's lips tightened. "This is my night off, Donahue."

Sergeant of Detectives, Kelly McPard was a big fat man with rosy cheeks and a neat sandy mustache. His eyes were bright blue, whimsical. He had an easy, engaging smile. His sandy hair was silken on his large head and he had a smooth, polished cleanliness.

He drained the glass of beer, was careful to wipe the foam from his mustache.

"Now, Donny — after all, what the hell. You're not telling me that your date with this twist was a social one."

Maxie was polishing glasses furiously behind the bar.

Donahue said: "I had a date with her, Kelly — and that's that. She was bumped off before she got here and that leaves me in the dark."

A uniformed officer came into the bar and said: "The Morgue bus is here."

"Tell 'em to take the body down," McPard said. "Tell Craik to drive the car to Headquarters and have 'em look for fingerprints. The car was bent in midtown last night and after they've looked it over they can return it to the owner. I'll follow up as soon as I've finished here. . . . Fill that up, Maxie."

"I'm sliding," Donahue said.

"Shucks, wait," McPard said. "Your date's dead, so what's the hurry?"

Donahue eyed him levelly. "You're wasting your time and my own, Kelly. You're a swell egg, but you're up a wrong tree."

McPard was tranquil. "I'm not so sure about that, Donny. I know there's only one reason why you'd have a date with Cherry Bliss. She's seen her day, Cherry has. I know you go in for neat dames, and Cherry used to be neat but that, kid, was long ago and far away. There's only one reason why you'd have a date with her."

"Maybe I put her on the spot, huhn?" Donahue mocked.

"Don't be a dumb animal. You were going to meet her here because she had some dope you wanted."

"And what was the dope?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out."

Donahue said: "Bushwah, Kelly."

Klay came in from the corridor, his derby in sharp contrast to the pallor of his hatchet face.

"Well, that's that," he said offhand. "I'll take Scotch, Maxie. . . . You've got all this dope, eh, Kelly?"

McPard looked into his beer. "All from you, thanks, Ken. But Donny, here, is getting his feelings hurt."

Klay chuckled flatly. "He gets that way quite often. A guy can't look crooked at him any more. He thinks that agency of his is just about the berries. I've seen a lot of private dicks lose their licenses in my time."

"Yeah," Donahue said, frankly sarcastic. "And I've seen a lot of city flatfoots lose their shields."

"Tsk, Tsk," McPard clucked dispassionately. "This is no place to bicker."

Donahue growled: "Then tell that fashion plate to keep his trap shut." He tossed a five-dollar bill on the bar. "Four cocktails out of that, Maxie."

"Listen, Donny." McPard faced him and smiled benevolently. "I'm not trying to ride you, kid. But the death of this jane is going to raise a hell of a stink and I'd like to be on the inside track. You can't just walk out on this. You had a date with the jane and the Commissioner is going to want to know how come. Cripes, I can't go down and tell him you just had a date with her."

"You tell him anything you want, Kelly. I don't know a thing. Not a thing. Can't I have a date with a jane? Is there a law against having a date with a jane?" He took the change from the five-dollar bill and crammed it into his pocket. "I like you, old socks. You're straight, and I can't say that about some coppers I know."

His gaze passed McPard and clicked with Klay's. Klay came over close to Donahue and his flat lips took on a vicious twist.

McPard shoved them apart, complaining: "You guys make me sick."

Donahue muttered: "Let him say what he wants to say. Go ahead, Klay."

Klay's lips shook. He said, suddenly: "Ah, hell!" and turned and strode stiffly across the room.

McPard was gripping Donahue's arm. "Now easy, Donny — for crying out loud, easy."

Donahue shrugged free of McPard's

hand, said: "So long, Kelly." He left the bar, went up the corridor.

Walter Nass was standing inside the iron gate with Carmen. He turned a harried look on Donahue.

Donahue said: "I'm sorry, Walt, this had to happen here."

"You're not in Dutch, Donny, are you?"

"Nah, not me. Somebody else might be, though." Donahue looked back down the hall and growled: "That lousy crackpot!"

"I'd go easy, Donny."

Donahue smacked Nass's back. "You know me, boy." A low laugh rumbled in his throat. He pinched Carmen's cheek. "Smile, beautiful!"

He yanked open the gate, rolled out into the areaway, up to the street.

Frank Castleman, the District Attorney, was having brandy and coffee in his library when Donahue came in. Castleman was a square-built stocky man, with crisp iron-gray hair and a rugged jaw. He didn't rise.

"Haul a chair over, Donny, and give me the dirt."

Donahue said: "There's not much dirt — yet." He carried a high-backed occasional chair to the desk and sat down. "Kelly McPard's on it."

"Good man."

"Swell. But he's a cop, Frank — and the cops is a system. The cops, may they always be right; but right or wrong, the cops: that's Kelly's credo and that's going to be hard to climb over, maybe. Klay said it was his night off."

"How'd the girl die?"

"Kerplunk in the heart — a small bore, I'd say offhand. These mugs fell on her somewhere and let her have it. Kelly shot the body to the Morgue. The car she came in was swiped last night and Kelly sent it down to H.Q. for fingerprints."

"Kelly asked a lot of questions?"

"Plenty. That guy knows I didn't have a date with Cherry because I liked her. And I think Klay knows too. When I first came in Klay asked me what was going on in your office."

Castleman leaned back. "Why was she coming to meet you, Donny?"

"She was going to give me the names of some guys mixed up in the vice racket. Big names. It took me two weeks, a lot of soft language and hard liquor to win her over. She called me up this afternoon and said she'd spill the works. She must have got suddenly sore about something, I don't know what. She sounded sore — mad.

"If Klay happened to be at Walter Nass's by accident, all well and good. If he was there by appointment — well, boy, that gives me something to crack, and it's not a nut. Klay might hurt me — I don't know. He was scared about something tonight. And Kelly is going to camp on my trail; he's like that."

Frank Castleman got up, went to the Georgian fireplace and shoved in a fresh log.

He said: "They must have known she was going to turn over. They must have heard it somehow. I wonder if she had anything in writing."

"I don't know. But writing or otherwise, she had the goods."

Castleman grunted. "Unh." He came back to the desk solid-heeled and sat down. After a minute he looked up at Donahue.

"Donny, I can't make this out. Not yet. I smell something behind this. But whatever you do, don't let them know — yet — that I've hired you. Fundamentally there's nothing wrong about my hiring a private detective. But I've come to the stage in this racket where I can't rely on my men when I start after something in the Commissioner's woodpile. It's a rotten shame that out of the several thousand honest cops there's got to be a few, a mere handful, that are turning vice and corruption towards their own beneficial ends. But if it's found out — now — that I've gone out of my own camp and hired you, I'll never hear the end of it."

Donahue said: "It's the system. A lot of cops know they're working with guys that are crooked, but they'd never squeal. It's like one big family. They picked up an idea a long while ago that they've got to protect the honor of the family."

"Can I depend on you to keep a tight lip?"

Donahue laughed. "You mean when they ask me down at Headquarters?"

Castleman nodded.

Donahue held up his hands. "Why should I worry, Frank? I'm strictly clean. I had a date with Cherry — and as for what kind of a date I had, that's my business."

"You know I appreciate this, Donny."

Donahue stood up. "That's business, Frank. I took this job with that understanding."

"Only business?" Castleman stood up and smiled ruefully.

Donahue shrugged. "Well, I think you're a pretty swell District Attorney, too."

"Sure, sure." Castleman came around and put friendly pressure on Donahue's arm. "I often wonder why you never went on the cops. You'd have risen high."

"I don't like the system, boy. . . . That brandy looks good. Do I rate?"

Donahue entered his hotel apartment at ten-thirty whistling *Trees*. He hung up his hat and overcoat, undressed down to undershirt and trousers and was mixing rye and Perrier in the little pantry when the knocker sounded. He carried the drink into the living-room and laid his hand on the knob, his ear against the panel.

"Who is it?"

"Me, Donny."

"Libbey?"

"Li'l ol' Libbey!"

Donahue opened the door and Libbey of the *City News Bureau* breezed in, said: "Greetings, Sherlock — or is it Shylock?" and took the glass from Donahue's hand. He downed half of it, smacked his lips. "Not bad," he said. He crossed the room to a console, knocked open a cedar humidor, helped himself to a cigarette and lit up. He flopped into a big club chair,

raised the glass. "I forgot: to you; old boy, old boy."

"Life's just a bowl of cherries, huhn?"

Donahue went into the pantry, mixed another drink and came back into the living-room.

"So what?" he said.

Libbey grinned boyishly, though he was not a boy. "The boss said if I came up here you'd tell me all about that body in front of Walter Nass's tonight."

Donahue chuckled. "You're an optimist."

"Come on, Donny; be Santa Claus."

"You were over at Headquarters, weren't you?"

"Yup."

"You got the dope there, didn't you?"

"The bald details, but what I want —"

"That's all I know: the bald details. I had a date with a jane and somebody bumped her off. What's that make me — a know-it-all? . . . nix, sweetheart. I don't know a damned thing, and if I did I'd get a ghost-writer and cash in on the tabs. Be your maturity, Libbey. Beat it. I'm turning in."

Libbey got up, considered his empty glass. "Know anything about Ken Klay, the vice squad sheik?" He did not accompany the question with an upward look.

Donahue had his trousers half-off. He pulled them up again and came over to Libbey, holding them up in front. "You're going to make cracks about me to other people maybe, and maybe I'm not going to like it much."

Libbey chuckled and put his empty glass in Donahue's hand. "My error, Donny."

The phone rang and Donahue went across the room and scooped it up off the secretary. "Yes, Donahue. . . . Huhn?" He turned his back to Libbey and his eyebrows came together. "What makes you think so? . . . Maybe I could at that. Leave me your number and I'll call you in five minutes. . . . No; I didn't think you would. Okay, then; call me in five minutes."

He hung up, got an old briar out of the desk, crammed it with bright Burley, lit up and shot fragrant smoke ceilingward. He swiveled and spread a palm.

"So I'll be seeing you again sometime, Libbey?"

Libbey laughed. He didn't say anything. He crossed the room cheerfully, grinned from the door, winked, went out. Donahue scowled at the door, tapped the pipe's Bakelite stem on his teeth; then started dressing. While buttoning his vest with his left hand he used his right to pick up the telephone receiver, and bent over.

"Hello, little wonderful," he said to the hotel operator. "How about doing a favor for your constant admirer? . . . Well, it's like this. A guy's going to call me any minute. When he does, kind of make believe things are balled up and ask for his number, the way exchange operators do sometimes. Then remember the number. . . . I know it's off-color, but so is the guy that's going to call. . . . Thanks. I'll

drop around a box of candy one day. . . . Oh, perfume instead, eh? . . . *Chez Moi*, huhn? Little gold-digger!"

He hung up and had finished dressing; when the phone rang.

"Yeah," he said into the transmitter. "I'll listen now. Shoot. . . . Well, to begin with, Mr. So-and-So, I'll have to approach him. You're taking it for granted that he's my client and that's where you're all wet — soaking. But go ahead; spiel it. . . . I get you. Ten thousand, huhn? And I'm to act as the little old go-between? . . . I see. Well, call this number at nine sharp tomorrow morning."

He hung up, waited for a moment holding the telephone and then lifted the receiver. "Well, little wonderful? . . . Thanks." He pronged the receiver quietly and set the instrument down. He wrote a number on a slip of paper, tucked the paper into a vest pocket. He shrugged into his overcoat, grabbed his hat and went out.

It was eleven when he came out into the street. He walked north for two blocks, entered a cigar store and went into a telephone booth. He called a number and said, presently: "Did I wake you, Frank? . . . Good. Listen. I want you to do something for me, Frank. I can't do it myself. Get in touch with your office, have 'em check up a telephone number: Alexandria 4141. Get the address. How long do you suppose it will take? . . . Okay. Call me back at Waterford 9086."

He hung up, slipped out of the booth, left the door open and bought a late paper. Ten minutes later the phone in the booth rang and he got the call.

"That's not so hot, Frank, but even so it may work. . . . I'll tell you tomorrow morning. Can I see you at eight? . . . Swell."

He paused outside the booth to write an address beneath the phone number he had put down on the slip of paper. He went into the street and out of the tail of his eye saw a man move behind the corner building opposite. He turned casually east and moved down the dark side street. He did not look back until he reached the next corner; turning north, he thought he saw a figure moving in the shadows up the side street. He turned west at the next block, walked fast and when he had gone about two hundred yards ducked down into an areaway. He stood motionless and quiet.

A few minutes later he heard approaching footfalls. He saw a man drift by. He rose out of the areaway and had taken six steps before the man spun.

"You wouldn't by any chance be tailing me, would you?" Donahue said.

Klay's gray-white face remained expressionless. "Oh, it's you, Donahue?"

"Maybe you thought it was four Hawaiians." His voice was brittle.

Klay was stiff, straight. "Guilty conscience?"

"I know when I'm being tailed, Klay. I thought this was your night off?"

"It is. I'm walking off a heavy supper."

"I thought maybe you were walking off the guilty conscience you seem to think I have."

Klay said quietly: "There's something about you I don't like, Donahue."

"There's a lot of things about you I don't like and they wouldn't bear repeating in nice company. I don't know which way you're headed tonight, but whatever it is, I'm going in the opposite direction. Now get started."

"I'm going crosstown."

"Fine. You look better from the back than the front."

Klay chuckled dryly, swung easily on his heel and sauntered east. Donahue watched him for a moment, then turned around and retraced his steps.

Castleman was one of those men who look ruddy and well-slept in the morning. His beaver-brown suit was nicely aged and had an air about it of having been leisurely draped to his body. He was eating breakfast when Donahue came in.

"Sit down, Donny. . . . Jenny, if I want you I'll ring."

The elderly maid vanished. Castleman nodded to the door and Donahue closed it, then crossed the little room and leaned near one of the French windows.

"This egg," he said, "phoned last night and wants ten thousand for a list of names, a few letters and cancelled checks he says will interest you."

Castleman looked sharply at Donahue.

"What did you say?"

"I said he was mistaken in thinking that you were my client. I added, though, that I'd approach you. That was stalling for time."

"Think it's in connection with that killing last night?"

"What else?"

Castleman stuck a cigarette between his lips. He pried in his pockets for a match, but Donahue came across with a lighter and put flame to the cigarette. Castleman sucked in while staring intently across the table. He started, and as an after-thought said: "Thanks," nodding to the lighter.

"Klay was playing hide-and-go-seek with me, too, last night."

Castleman was absorbed by his own thoughts and he said: "I'd pay ten thousand if it's the real goods."

"That's why I didn't want to tell you this last night."

"Why?"

"I didn't want you to get big-hearted with dough right away."

Castleman, perplexed, seemed unable to marshal a prompt reply; and in the meantime Donahue sat down and began talking fast: "There's something screwy somewhere, but I can't lay my finger on it. If Cherry Bliss was rubbed out because some mugs were afraid she was going to spring a story, why then is some guy calling up and offering dope for ten thousand berries? Look. You'll pay the ten thousand. You'll get names and general dirt you've been looking for.

You'll use it in court to clamp the lid down on some big operators and no doubt several guys on the vice squad. You'll naturally — or kick me if you don't — you'll naturally have occasion to use Cherry Bliss's name. Okay. What kind of legerdemain will you use when the defense asks where you got your dope? You got it from Cherry Bliss. Whether you admit that or not, they'll know it. Then what? Then who killed Cherry Bliss to get the information she had? Answer: Our eminent District Attorney was in collusion with a gang of heels. He went to drastic measures to get information. He used criminal methods himself to bring evidence against criminals."

Castleman toyed with a mouthful of smoke, then shot it through his nose. "You think of things, Donny. Then what about this guy who called up?"

"I'm going after him. There's no proof yet that I'm working for you. I'm going after this guy and see what he's got. Klay's mixed up in this, but I don't know how. I've got him worrying and if I keep him worrying long enough he'll take a header."

Castleman broke out in a concerned grimace. "Hell, Donny, it sounds dangerous for you."

"My eye, dangerous! Only if this guy tries to approach you before I get to him, act dumb. Under no circumstances offer to pay for information. Okay?"

"I see what you mean. Sure." He stood up, came around the table cracking a ruddy smile. "You're doing a lot for me, Donny."

"You're paying for it, aren't you?"

Castleman chuckled. "Not for these added attractions you stage — at your own expense." His jaw tightened. "But if the worse comes to the worst, old man, I'm behind you — to the last ditch."

Donahue's rough low laugh was not unpleasantly ironic. "Get dramatic, now, Frank; get dramatic! And I'll break down and yell, 'To the death for dear old alma mater!' Or am I thinking of something else? . . . Be seeing you — or phoning you anonymously."

He went down in the elevator, took a side exit out and strode long-legged southward along the Park. When he had gone a matter of five blocks he motioned to a taxi, climbed in and gave an address. He got off ten minutes later on the East Side, near the railroad terminal, and walked south three blocks. He entered a drug-store that specialized in books, stationery and cold drinks.

He walked on spic-and-span white tiles to the rear and found a bank of four telephone booths. He entered them and copied down the number of each. Then he called his hotel.

"Good morning, Miss Tracy. This is Donahue. . . . I'm fine. If anybody calls me at nine tell them to call Alexandria 4677. . . . Thank *you!*"

He was in the end booth on the left and he stayed there behind the closed door, his hat yanked down over his eyes. He looked at his watch. It was a

quarter to nine. Men and women entered the adjacent booths; bells rang; doors opened and closed. Donahue watched the men who came to the booths. When his wrist watch said nine o'clock the phone in his booth rang. He removed the receiver and let it hang.

He stepped out of the booth. In the next booth a girl was talking. In the next a fat old man was yelling in Italian. Donahue pressed close to this door, then turned about and went around back of the booths and on to the one at the extreme right. He pressed his ear to the back panel. He heard a man's voice.

"I tell you, I've been cut off. . . . Alexandria 4677." There was a moment of silence. "The hell you're ringing 'em! . . . I tell you, a party's expecting my call. . . . Oh, all right — all right!"

There followed the sound of a receiver being slammed into its prongs.

Donahue stepped across behind a pyramid of books. He saw the man come out of the booth; a large man in a fawn-colored fedora and a belted tweed overcoat. The man strode towards the front door, went outside and stood on the corner, lighting a cigarette with his head bent into the wind. When the man swung around and headed down the side street, Donahue walked out and spotted him.

When a half dozen pedestrians, headed in the same direction, got between him and the man in the belted coat, Donahue started. They walked three blocks, until finally the man turned right and climbed a flight of stone steps between iron handrails. Donahue quickened his pace. He saw the man draw a ring of keys from his pocket, insert one in the hall door, open it. The man swung the door wide, entered; and the door began swinging shut against a pneumatic pressure. Donahue took the steps two at a time and caught the door before it quite closed.

He entered with his head down, and saw the man halfway up the staircase. He reached the foot of it and had his gun out, leveled.

"Steady, brother!"

He climbed the stairs rapidly until he was but two beneath the man, then said: "Now we'll go up to where you are going. Hands away from sides, like a nice boy."

The man stared dully at him, his lower lip beginning to protrude.

"Who the hell are you?" he asked.

"We had a phone date, but I thought I'd call in person. Donahue's the name, you'll remember. You're blocking traffic, you tramp. Shove up!"

The man turned and went on upward, and he was careful about keeping his hands clear of his pockets. They climbed another flight and at the top Donahue stopped him.

"Anybody else in your place?"

"No."

"If there is, honeybunch, you'll get it smack in the back, no fooling."

The big man scowled and went down the hall slowly, dangling his keys. He opened a door at the rear,

and Donahue was close behind him with the gun in the back of the tweed coat. They entered an apartment and Donahue kicked the door shut. The man turned with his broad heavy chin down on his chest, his mutinous eyes staring from beneath red brows.

"You're a sweet mutt, ain't you?"

"I don't want dialogue from you. I had a date with Cherry Bliss last night and it's the first time a jane's turned up dead on me. I'm not used to it."

"Gunning for the D.A., huhn?"

"No."

"Hell, fella. I didn't kill Cherry Bliss."

Donahue laughed harshly. "Maybe you think shooting people is a new kind of light entertainment. . . . I'm after something, mister — several things; and I intend to bail out of this thing with my hands clean."

"And mine dirty, I suppose."

Donahue lifted his chin. "Before we go into any more bright back-chat, suppose you fork over."

The man's voice was deepening. "Suppose I don't."

Donahue took three quick steps and jammed the muzzle of his automatic hard against the big man's midriff.

"If you think I'm a bluff, you haven't been around much." He caught hold of a lapel of the tweed coat, ripped it open savagely. Three buttons fell to the floor. "Those hands, kid — watch 'em!" He crowded the big man against the wall. "Try clowning and I'll let you have it!"

"Jeeze, I was only —"

"You were only trying to bring that knee up," Donahue snapped. His left hand moved quickly, drew a .38 from beneath the man's left armpit, shoved it into his own pocket.

"Listen, Donahue. Listen, I got to get something out of this. I got to —"

"The only time I bargain with a hood is to save my own skin."

He ripped a wrinkled brown envelope from the big man's inside pocket, stepped back and said: "Turn and face the wall, with your hands way up and palms against the wall."

The man did this and Donahue backed across the room until he came to a table. He kept his gun leveled across the room with his right hand. With his left he emptied the contents of the envelope on to the table. He did not bend over. He remained erect, groped with his left hand and raised at random a check to the level of his face, so that he could look at it and at the same time watch the man against the wall.

It was a canceled check, made out to Kenneth Klay, signed by Geraldine Bliss. He groped again and picked up a letter. It was quite wrinkled, written in the slanting hand sometimes noticed in the writing of left-handed persons. It was addressed to Cherry and signed by Ken. Its keynote was one of money. There was another check made out to a magistrate who at present was up for questioning before a board headed by District Attorney Frank Castleman. There were other checks and other letters relative to the once famous vice queen's dealings with a number of men in the

pay of the municipal government.

"This is sweet," Donahue said. Still using only his left hand, he slipped the lot back into the envelope, tucked the envelope away in an inner pocket.

The big man dared to turn around. His face looked white and peculiarly bloated and there was a glassy look in his eyes.

"For cripes' sake, Donahue, give me a break!"

"Why didn't you give Cherry a break?"

The big man stretched his neck as though finding it hard to speak. "She was going dippy, no kidding. She was going to turn all that info over free of charge. She was broke. She was out of the business and she was broke. I tried to talk her out of it. I told her she'd be flat on her back after this if she didn't promote some cash. But she was dippy. She said, 'Nix. I'm clearing out of this racket.' I got mad, Donahue. Honest, it wasn't planned."

"So then you got the swell idea of dropping her in front of a place where she had a date last night."

The big man turned red. "That was Louie's idea. He figured it would chuck suspicion the other way. He figured everybody'd think she was done in by the mob she was turnin' up."

"All right. Why didn't you make a pass at the guys that were named in these letters and checks?"

"Jeeze, don't you see? Them guys are on the carpet now, most o' them. They ain't got no strings to pull. We figured the D.A.'d go far to get this junk and we'd get a clean ticket out. Listen —" He started away from the wall.

"Back, get back!"

The big man groaned. "Gawd, you don't need us! That stuff there'll incriminate enough guys to last a lifetime and put the D.A. in line for mayor for next election. At heart I'm a good guy. I didn't mean wrong. Things just happened —"

"Boy, do I hate your guts! At heart you're a dirty heel, that's what you are. And I'm not going to run myself into a jam by letting you go! Do I look dumb or something?"

The big man held his throat with one hand, stretched out the other towards Donahue. "Listen. Get in touch with the D.A. Tell him how things stand. I don't want no dough, honest. Just tell him how things stand and see if he don't give me a clean ticket out. You got there what he wants, what he's been looking for. Why pick on a poor guy —"

"You must have been dropped on your head when very young if you stand there and think I'm going to talk you up to the D.A. This is a pinch, sweetheart. Now shut up."

Donahue went across to another table and lifted a Continental telephone, called a number. "Hello, Kelly there?" He waited a moment, eyes and gun trained on the big man. "Hello, Kelly. This is Donahue. I've got a nice pinch for you." He gave the street and number; added: "Snap on it, Kelly, before this mug gets ideas."

Donahue said to the big man:

"Now face the wall again."

"Gawd 'lmighty —"

"Turn around."

Handcuffs dangled, snapped shut, locking the big man's hands together.

"Now sit down in that chair there. . . . Smoke?"

There came the click of a lock. The door opened and a young man with blond, close-cropped hair breezed in, stopped short and almost fell over.

"All right, goldilocks," Donahue said. "Do setting-up exercises."

"I — I —"

"You — you — *up*, baby!"

"Well, for the love o' cripes — Buck!"

"Yeah — yeah," panted the big man. "Lookit me!"

The blond young man had a flippant smile. "Ain't this just too bad?"

Buck groaned. "Jeeze, Louie, don't crack wise like that. This guy's Donahue. He's got them papers and the cops is coming over any minute."

Louie's eyes shimmered. "Oh, so he's a police nose, huhn?"

"I'm the little boy scout," Donahue said, "who saw you up near Walter Nass's last night, after you parked the car in front."

"The hell you saw me!"

"Standing on the corner with your hat off. I was only ten yards behind."

Louie's flippant smile faded slowly and then he snapped at Buck: "What the hell did you want to let this guy put you in a jam like this for?"

"Gawd, Louie, he went and framed me! In good faith I offered him the whole dope —"

"In good faith!" mocked Donahue. "My, my, don't you see yourself through rose-colored glasses! . . . Hey, you, Louie, kick that door shut and keep your hands up."

Behind Louie, Klay stepped through the doorway, with his service revolver drawn and his gray-white face passionless. His gun stopped against Louie's back. In a split moment he had the manacles on. He shoved Louie, and the latter stumbling, complained: "I never seen things happen so fast!"

Klay ignored him because his interest was bent on Donahue, and also his gun. "So, what's your newest fable in slang, Donahue?"

"Here's something, and it's not a fable: you stink."

Louie began walking up and down with the mature irritation of the very young. "Damn it, damn it, is this an act or something? I'm beginning to burn up! First one thing, then —"

"Louie, for cripes' sake!" Buck groaned.

"Why should I? Who are these eggs? I ain't gonna —"

Klay turned back his lapel, revealed his police shield.

Louie stopped pacing and stared. "Then why the hell didn't you say so?" He turned and stared hard at Donahue, pointed: "And him?"

Klay smiled. "I'll take care of him. Now you get over there by your boy friend and keep that loud mouth of yours shut till I ask you something."

Donahue had lowered his gun because Klay's was pointing at him. "All right," he said. "You can take

these eggs in, Klay. I'll breeze out."

"Wait. Why should I take these eggs in?"

"The big one bumped off Cherry Bliss. She had a lot of dope on a lot of big poobahs in this man's city and she was going to turn it over. So he bumped her off. Then he got the dope."

"Where's the dope?"

Donahue said: "I've got to get along. Come on, we'll both take these eggs over to the precinct."

"Wait, you." Klay's gun stopped Donahue and Klay said without turning his head: "You guys, where's the dope this bird's talking about?"

Buck took heart. "He's got it! Him! He took it away from me. I was trying to get in touch with the right party but he frisked it off me. He's got it, mister; and he's gonna cash in himself on it."

Klay looked thinly at Donahue. "Shake-down, huhn?"

"Shake-up, Klay — if you get what I mean."

"Let me have it."

Donahue laughed shortly in Klay's face. "Boy, you're the berries — bowls and bowls of them."

"He's got them papers," Buck rushed on. "He's going to use 'em against a lot of guys. Your name's in there too, now I remember. He's going to cash in on 'em. Me — he double-crossed me! I thought he was representing the right guys, and then when he gets 'em he turns on me and laughs."

Donahue made a sharp right turn, took six long steps and smacked Buck in the mouth. Klay sped after him and spun him around.

"Never mind that, Donahue. Hand over what you took from this guy and do it fast." His face was becoming livid, his eyes very pale and hard.

Donahue was steaming up. "Not on your natural. I've got those papers, right in here" — he tapped his breast pocket — "and I know who I'm going to hand them over to. And it's not you."

Klay made a left-handed pass at Donahue's pocket. Donahue caught his arm and flung it down savagely.

"Don't try it, Klay!"

Louie began snarling: "Listen, Klay, there's stuff in those papers that means you're done for if it gets out. Me and Buck's in a jam and we got to spring out of it. We know what's in them papers. Unlock these cuffs and we'll take this guy. If them papers get in the wrong hands it's bad news for you and a lot of other guys. Like Buck said, we were tryin' to do right by you but this egg double-crossed us."

Klay's gun was pressing hard against Donahue's stomach, his eyes were narrowed down whitely. "Donahue, I want those papers."

"You heard me the first time, copper. You've double-crossed a lot of women in your day and got away with it, but you're not getting away with this."

Buck cried: "He called up another cop! He called him Kelly. The cop's on the way over. You better step on it, Klay!"

Klay's nape stiffened. For an instant his hand shook.

"Donahue," he said, "you're going to turn over those papers or you're going to regret it."

"If you've got the nerve, Klay, reach in my pocket and get them."

Klay stepped back, tossed a key to the floor. "Buck, unlock your boy friend's cuffs."

Buck let out a joyous grunt, fell to the floor and picked up the key. He unlocked Louie's manacles and Louie smacked his hands together.

Klay said: "Get behind this guy. Take his gun. . . . Don't move, Donahue, or you'll get it!"

Louie whistled cheerfully as he took the gun from Donahue's hands, tapped his pockets and took also the gun which Donahue had taken from Buck, and the key to Buck's manacles. He pressed both guns against Donahue's back and went on whistling. Donahue didn't move.

Klay took the brown envelope from Donahue's pocket and backed away. Louie went over and unlocked Buck's manacles and gave him back his gun. Buck let out a vast breath and beamed.

Klay was slipping fingers into the envelope when Louie, nodding to Buck, stepped swiftly and jabbed his gun against Klay's back. Buck took the cue and trained his gun on Donahue and Louie reached over Klay's shoulder and took the brown envelope.

"You were born dumb, fella," Louie said.

Klay sucked in a breath and remained quivering where he stood.

Louie clipped: "Okay, Buck. We lam."

"Yeah, bo!"

They backed to the door. Louie opened it and motioned to back out. Buck ducked behind him and Louie paused a moment on the threshold.

"Pleasant dreams, guys!"

He vanished, slamming the door.

Klay whirled, his gun held level with his waist. Donahue jumped from behind, ripped the gun from his hand and sent him spinning across the room.

He snarled: "That was a swell frame you walked into, Klay. Thanks. I'm going to get those hoods and I'm going to get those papers."

He lunged across the room, yanked open the door and barged out. But Klay had the gun he had taken from Louie, and he reached the door a split-second behind Donahue, opened it and bounded down the stairs after him.

He caught up with Donahue at the hall door and Donahue whirled on him. "Swell, Klay! You'll be along — a cop — and that'll cover me. But remember, baby —"

Klay went through the hall door, down the steps, and saw Buck and Louie a half block away, walking east. He broke into a run and the two ahead saw him and darted across the street, their heels flying.

Donahue caught up with Klay and they ran side by side. Klay's face was white and shiny now with sweat, and little muscles worked at the corners of his mouth. Buck and Louie turned at the first corner, and when Donahue

and Klay reached it they saw the other two pounding north.

Klay raised his gun and fired. The shot crashed a window and glass fell, rained noisily on the sidewalk. Buck and Louie turned east and Klay and Donahue went after them past public garages and run-down frame houses.

Donahue lifted his gun, aimed off-hand while galloping and fired. Buck missed a step, swayed a bit but kept rushing headlong beside Louie. Louie turned around and fired two shots past Buck's shoulder. One smacked against a fire-hydrant and the other whistled above Donahue's head. Klay fired and Buck put his hands straight out and began stumbling. He stumbled faster and faster, tried to look back, then plunged suddenly to the gutter — so hard his legs flew up, banged down again, as he rolled.

Neither Donahue nor Klay stopped to look at Buck. They knew Louie had the envelope, and Louie was beyond, fleet as the wind. Trucks were backed up against warehouses here. Louie weaved among them; plunged down an alley, and was almost through when Klay and Donahue spotted him.

Klay slowed down to fire. He missed and Donahue rushed past him and pounded his heels down the alley, reached the next street and swung east. Louie cut across in front of a horse-drawn truck, turned to fire around the back of it. The shot tore off the lapel of Donahue's overcoat pocket, and Donahue, though off balance, fired and his shot knocked Louie against a house-wall. Louie rebounded, ran on for a dozen paces, then jumped behind a pole and fired. Klay broke into a run, firing again. Louie made the alley and Donahue reached the entrance as Klay did, and heard Klay's empty gun click. He saw Louie turning again to fire. Donahue stopped in his tracks. His gun boomed. Louie wilted and began sagging backward. Then he stopped moving, swayed for an instant, crashed down.

Donahue broke into a run, reached Louie and dropped down beside him. He tore the envelope from Louie's inside pocket, was rising when Klay fell on him, clubbing his revolver.

"I knew it was empty," Donahue said, reeling. "I heard it back at the entrance — or I'd never have come in this alley ahead of you!"

"Give me those, Donahue!"

Donahue stopped against the house-wall, rebounded and drove his fist to Klay's jaw. Klay took it and struck with his gun, crashing in Donahue's hat. Donahue grunted and jumped back, stopped the next blow with an upraised arm; cracked his own gun against Klay's jaw and drew blood. White-eyed, Klay came back at him, walloped his foot to Donahue's stomach. Donahue tried to cry out but couldn't. He had bullets left in his gun but he was not fool enough to plant his trademark in Klay. He took three blows on the head while still fighting for his breath and holding his hands to his injured stomach.

Louie had started crawling. He crawled past the fighting men, and Donahue saw him and tried to push

off Klay. Klay twisted, saw the gun in Louie's hand and broke with Donahue, plunged towards Louie. Louie fired, grimacing. Klay doubled up and struck the cobbles with his forehead.

Louie turned his gun on Donahue but Donahue was waiting for him. He let Louie have it. Louie rolled over quietly and lay very still.

There were running feet in the alley, and Donahue, cramming the envelope into his pocket, saw Kelly McPard and a couple of uniformed policemen. He leaned against the wall, wiped his face, looked at the blood on his fingers.

"Hey, Donny," McPard said, puffing to a stop.

"I think Klay's shot."

"What the hell!"

"Yeah. This mug here. He let Klay have a dose."

McPard pointed. "You and Klay working together to get these two hoods?"

"Believe it or not, Kelly. Side by side. We ran side by side all the way."

"This the pinch you called about?"

"Yeah."

McPard looked puzzled. "You didn't say Klay was there."

"He wasn't. He joined me. He's been Johnny-on-the-spot ever since last night."

McPard bent his ruddy face. "You shot too?"

"No. I got kicked in the belly. A lousy two-timer kicked me in the belly." He kept rubbing his stomach, licking his lips, making painful grimaces. "I ought to get a drink. A good shot of brandy might help. There's a bar right around the corner."

"Go ahead, then. But come back here, Donny. Don't go sliding out!"

"Promise."

Donahue went on through the alley, walked a block and entered a café. "Brandy," he said. He dragged his feet into the lavatory, took the brown envelope from his pocket. He drew a stamp from his wallet, affixed it. He unclipped his fountain pen from a vest pocket and wrote on the envelope: Frank Castleman — and the address.

He returned to the bar, swallowed his brandy and shouldered out into the street. He walked to the next corner, looked up and down, dropped the letter into a mail box.

When he trudged weary-footed up the alley Kelly McPard was waiting for him and one of the cops was kneeling with Klay in his arms.

McPard said: "Klay said there were papers, Donny."

"Did he?"

"Kid, I'd like to see 'em. Klay asked me to. He's a cop. I've got to give him a break."

Donahue held his coat open. "Search me, Kelly."

Kelly searched him, then dropped his hands and looked up into Donahue's eyes. "Where are they, Donny?"

"Maybe that was just an idea Klay had. Sort of rambling in his mind. I've got no papers."

"You wouldn't cheat on me, would you, Donny?"

"Not on you, Kelly. I don't cheat on right guys."

HIGH SHERLOCTANE

The most controversial, the most blasphemous, by all odds the most sensational Sherlockian revelation of our decade (indeed, of our generation, if not of all time) was Rex Stout's "Watson Was a Woman." This bombshell was flung orally within the sacred precincts of the Murray Hill Hotel, during the meeting of the Baker Street Irregulars on January 31, 1941. The flinger, of course, was Rex Stout, who was invited to attend that fateful session as Guest of Honor, but who finally departed, head high and beard bristling, the Guest of Dishonor. Yes, it was a profane night in which Holmesian history was born: Who of the innermost circle will ever forget Mr. Stout's first wolfish pronouncement — the savage glee with which he blithely disclosed that Watson Was a Woman? Who among those shocked sycophants of Sherlock will ever forget the pure Holmesian horror that set in, like a sort of literary rigor mortis, when the creater of Nero Wolfe pronounced those terrible and terrifying words — WATSON WAS A WOMAN!

From the first spoken syllable Mr. Stout's sacrilege was destined to be printed and reprinted, ad infinitum. The wanton, wicked words appeared in print as fast as copy could be prepared and thrust into a linotyper's hands — in the March 1, 1941 issue of "The Saturday Review of Literature." And that was only the beginning. The sinful sentences continued to detonate in THE POCKET MYSTERY READER *(1942), edited by Lee Wright. They exploded again in* PROFILE BY GASLIGHT *(1944), edited by Edgar W. Smith, where they were followed by Dr. Julian Wolff's masterly rebuttal, "That Was No Lady." How curious that it took a Wolff to catch a Wolfe!*

If you have never read Mr. Stout's "monstrous perpetration," here's your chance. "Watson Was a Woman" is a detectival desecration, a shameless shenanigan, committed by a sly and sinister Sherloctopus — for surely you now recognize the true nature of Mr. Stout's Sherloccupation. If, however, you have already read the disillusioning details of Watson's femininity, please refresh your memory — for now, for the first time in print, there are further revelations to be made public, and these too will shock your Sherlockian sensibilities. But more of that when you have finished reading the most irreverent irregularity ever irrupted among the blushing members of that canonical society, the B.S.I.

WATSON WAS A WOMAN

by REX STOUT

GASOGENE: Tantalus: Buttons: Irregulars:

You will forgive me for refusing to join your commemorative toast, "The Second Mrs. Watson," when you learn it was a matter of conscience. I could not bring myself to connive at the perpetuation of a hoax. Not only was there never a second Mrs. Watson; there was not even a first Mrs. Watson. Furthermore, there was no Doctor Watson.

Please keep your chairs.

Like all true disciples. I have always recurrently dipped into the Sacred Writings (called by the vulgar the Sherlock Holmes stories) for refreshment; but not long ago I reread them from beginning to end, and I was struck by a singular fact that reminded me of the dog in the night. The singular fact about the dog in the night, as we all know, was that it didn't bark; and the singular fact about Holmes in the night is that he is never seen going to bed. The writer of the tales, the Watson person, describes over and over again, in detail, all the other minutiæ of that famous household, — suppers, breakfasts, arrangement of furniture, rainy evenings at home — but not once are we shown either Holmes or Watson going to bed. I wondered, why not? Why such unnatural and obdurate restraint, nay, concealment, regarding one of the pleasantest episodes of the daily routine?

I got suspicious.

The uglier possibilities that occurred to me, as that Holmes had false teeth or that Watson wore a toupee, I rejected as preposterous. They were much too obvious, and shall I say unsinister. But the game was afoot, and I sought the trail, in the only field available to me, the Sacred Writings themselves. And right at the very start on page 9, of A STUDY IN SCARLET, I found this:

> ". . . It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning."

I was indescribably shocked. How had so patent a clue escaped so many millions of readers through the years? That was, that could only be, a woman speaking of a man. Read it over. The true authentic speech of a wife telling of her husband's — but wait. I was not indulging in idle speculation, but seeking evidence to establish a fact. It was unquestionably a woman speaking of a man, yes, but whether a wife of a husband, or a mistress of a lover, . . . I admit I blushed. I blushed for Sherlock Holmes, and I closed the book. But the fire of curiosity was raging in me, and soon I opened again to the same page, and there in the second paragraph I saw:

"The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavored to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself."

You bet she did. She would. Poor Holmes! She doesn't even bother to employ one of the stock euphemisms, such as, "I wanted to understand him better," or, "I wanted to share things with him." She proclaims it with brutal directness, "I endeavored to break through the reticence." I shuddered, and for the first time in my life felt that Sherlock Holmes was not a god, but human — human by his suffering. Also, from that one page I regarded the question of the Watson person's sex as settled for good. Indubitably she was a female, but wife or mistress? Two pages later I found:

". . . his powers upon the violin . . . at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder* . . ."

Imagine a man asking another man to play him some of Mendelssohn's *Lieder* on a violin!

And on the next page:

". . . I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast . . . my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. With . . . petulence . . . I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast."

That is a terrible picture, and you know and I know how bitterly realistic it is. Change the diction, and it is practically a love story by Ring Lardner. That Sherlock Holmes, like other men, had breakfasts like that is a hard pill for a true disciple to swallow, but we must face the facts. The chief thing to note of this excerpt is that it not only reinforces the conviction that Watson was a lady — that is to say, a woman — but also it bolsters our hope that Holmes did not through all those years live in sin. A man does not munch silently at his toast when breakfasting with his mistress; or, if he does, it won't be long until he gets a new one. But Holmes stuck to her — or she to him — for over a quarter of a century. Here are a few quotations from the later years:

". . . Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me. . . . I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted. . . ."

— *The Adventure of the Empty House*

"I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals."

— THE VALLEY OF FEAR

"The relations between us in those latter days were peculiar. He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index books, and others perhaps less excusable."

— *The Adventure of the Creeping Man*

And we have been expected to believe that a man wrote those things! The frank and unconcerned admission that she fainted at sight of Holmes after an absence! "I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals" — the old-

est uxorial cliché in the world; Aeschylus used it; no doubt cave-men gnashed their teeth at it! And the familiar plaint, "As an institution I was like the old black pipe!"

Yes, uxorial, for surely she was wife. And the old black pipe itself provides us with a clincher on that point. This comes from page 16 of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES:

". . . did not return to Baker Street until evening. It was nearly nine o'clock when I found myself in the sitting-room once more.

"My first impression as I opened the door was that a fire had broken out, for the room was so filled with smoke that the light of the lamp upon the table was blurred by it. As I entered, however, my fears were set at rest, for it was the acrid fumes of strong coarse tobacco which took me by the throat and set me coughing. Through the haze I had a vague vision of Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips. Several rolls of paper lay around him.

" 'Caught cold, Watson?' said he.

" 'No, it's this poisonous atmosphere.'

" 'I suppose it *is* pretty thick, now that you mention it.'

" 'Thick! It is intolerable!'

" 'Open the window, then!' "

I say husband and wife. Could anyone alive doubt it after reading that painful banal scene? Is there any need to pile on the evidence?

For a last-ditch skeptic there is more evidence, much more. The efforts to break Holmes of the cocaine habit, mentioned in various places in the Sacred Writings, display a typical reformist wife in action, especially the final gloating over her success. A more complicated, but no less conclusive, piece of evidence is the strange, the astounding recital of Holmes's famous disappearance, in *The Final Problem*, and the reasons given therefor in a later tale, *The Adventure of the Empty House*. It is incredible that this monstrous deception was not long ago exposed.

Holmes and Watson had together wandered up the valley of the Rhone, branched off at Leuk, made their way over the Gemmi Pass, and gone on, by way of Interlaken, to Meiringen. Near that village, as they were walking along a narrow trail high above a tremendous abyss. Watson was maneuvered back to the hotel by a fake message. Learning that the message was a fake, she (he) flew back to their trail, and found that Holmes was gone. No Holmes. All that was left of him was a polite note of farewell, there on a rock with a cigarette case for a paperweight, saying that Professor Moriarty had arrived and was about to push him into the abyss.

That in itself was rather corny. But go on to *The Adventure of the Empty House*. Three years have passed. Sherlock Holmes has suddenly and unexpectedly reappeared in London, causing the Watson person to collapse in a faint. His explanation of his long absence is fantastic. He says that he had grappled with Professor Moriarty on the narrow trail and tossed him into the chasm; that, in order to deal at better advantage with the dangerous Sebastian Moran, he had decided to make it appear that he too had toppled

over the cliff; that, so as to leave no returning footprints on the narrow trail, he had attempted to scale the upper cliff, and, while he was doing so, Sebastian Moran himself had appeared up above and thrown rocks at him; that by herculean efforts he had eluded Moran and escaped over the mountains; that for three years he had wandered around Persia and Tibet and France, communicating with no one but his brother Mycroft, so that Sebastian Moran would think he was dead. *Though by his own account Moran knew, must have known, that he had got away!*

That is what Watson says that Holmes told her (him). It is simply gibberish, below the level even of a village half-wit. It is impossible to suppose that Sherlock Holmes ever dreamed of imposing on any sane person with an explanation like that; it is impossible to believe that he would insult his own intelligence by offering such an explanation even to an idiot. I deny that he ever did. I believe that all he said, after Watson recovered from the faint, was this, "My dear, I am willing to try it again," for he was a courteous man. And it was Watson, who, attempting an explanation, made such a terrible hash of it.

Then who was this person whose *nom de plume* was "Doctor Watson?" Where did she come from? What was she like? What was her name before she snared Holmes?

Let us see what we can do about the name, by methods that Holmes himself might have used. It was Watson who wrote the immortal tales, therefore if she left a record of her name anywhere it must have been in the tales themselves. But what we are looking for is not her characteristics or the facts of her life, but her *name*, that is to say, her *title;* so obviously the place to look is in the *titles* of the tales.

There are sixty of the tales all told. The first step is to set them down in chronological order, and number them from 1 to 60. Now, which shall we take first? Evidently the reason why Watson was at such pains to conceal her name in this clutter of titles was to *mystify* us, so the number to start with should be the most *mystical* number, namely seven. And to make it doubly sure, we shall make it seven times seven, which is 49. Very well. The 49th tale is *The Adventure of the Illustrious Client.* We of course discard the first four words, *The Adventure of the,* which are repeated in most of the titles. Result: ILLUSTRIOUS CLIENT.

The next most significant thing about Watson is her (his) constant effort to convince us that those things happened exactly as she (he) tells them; that they are on the *square.* Good. The first square of an integer is the integer 4. We take the title of the 4th tale and get RED-HEADED LEAGUE.

We proceed to elimination. Of all the factors that contribute to an ordinary man's success, which one did Holmes invariably exclude, or eliminate? Luck. In crap-shooting, what

are the lucky numbers? Seven and eleven. But we have already used 7, which eliminates it, so there is nothing left but 11. The 11th tale is about the ENGINEER'S THUMB.

Next, what was Holmes's age at the time he moved to Baker Street? Twenty-seven. The 27th tale is the adventure of the NORWOOD BUILDER. And what was Watson's age? Twenty-six. The 26th tale is the adventure of the EMPTY HOUSE. But there is no need to belabor the obvious. Just as it is a simple matter to decipher the code of the Dancing Men when Holmes has once put you on the right track, so can you, for yourself, make the additional required selections now that I have explained the method. And you will inevitably get what I got:

Illustrious Client
Red-headed League
Engineer's Thumb
Norwood Builder
Empty House

Wisteria Lodge
Abbey Grange
Twisted Lip
Study in Scarlet
Orange Pips
Noble Bachelor

And, acrostically simple, the initial letters read down, the carefully hidden secret is ours. Her name was Irene Watson.

But not so fast. Is there any way of checking that? Of discovering her name by any other method, say *a priori*? We can try and see. A woman wrote the stories about Sherlock Holmes, that has been demonstrated; and that woman was his wife. Does there appear, anywhere in the stories, a woman whom Holmes fell for? Whom he really cottoned to? Indeed there does. *A Scandal in Bohemia* opens like this:

> "To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. . . . In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex."

And what was the name of *the* woman? Irene!

But, you say, not Irene Watson, but Irene Adler. Certainly. Watson's whole purpose, from beginning to end, was to confuse and bewilder us regarding her identity. So note that name well. Adler. What is an adler, or, as it is commonly spelled, addler? An addler is one who, or that which, addles. Befuddles. Confuses. I admit I admire that stroke; it is worthy of Holmes himself. In the very act of deceiving and confusing us, she has the audacity to employ a name that brazenly announces her purpose!

An amusing corroborative detail about this Irene of *A Scandal in Bohemia* — *the* woman to Holmes according to the narrator of the tales — is that Holmes was present at her wedding at the Church of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. It is related that he was there as a witness, but that is pure poppycock. Holmes himself says, "I was half-dragged up to the altar, and before I knew where I was I found myself mumbling responses. . . ." Those are not the words of an indifferent witness, but of a reluctant,

ensnared, bulldozed man — in short, a bridegroom. And in all the 1323 pages of the Sacred Writings, that is the only wedding we ever see — the only one, so far as we are told, that Holmes ever graced with his presence.

All this is very sketchy. I admit it. I am now collecting material for a fuller treatment of the subject, a complete demonstration of the evidence and the inevitable conclusion. It will fill two volumes, the second of which will consist of certain speculations regarding various concrete results of that long-continued and — I fear, alas — none-too-happy union. For instance, what of the parentage of Lord Peter Wimsey, who was born, I believe, around the turn of the century — about the time of the publication of *The Adventure of the Second Stain?* That will bear looking into.

Kurt Steel, who is really Professor Rudolf Kagey of New York University, has occasionally written detective-story reviews for the New York newspaper, "PM," and mighty fine reviews they've been: deep-digging, perceptive, and brilliantly understanding. Owing to illness, Mr. Steel was unable to review your Editor's 1945 anthology — ROGUES' GALLERY. *So, in the same spirit of understanding, Mr. Steel dropped your Editor a note which read as follows: "In* ROGUES' GALLERY *you've outdone yourself in energy, discovery, and taste. Awfully sorry I didn't have a chance to say so in print [Mr. Steel did not reckon with your Editor — for here he is saying so in print!]. It's a lovely job — and the rubric is quite as entertaining as the stories themselves."*

Needless to say, this letter warmed the cockles of your Editor's heart; and it also taught your Editor something he did not know — a new meaning for an old word. Mr. Steel used the word "rubric," and his use of that word made your Editor's face red. Just what did he mean? A dip into Webster solved the mystery. Rubric, in addition to its connotations of redness, is defined as: "A section heading of a discourse or writing." In other words, precisely what you are now reading — what your Editor has been calling an "introduction" or "prefatory comment." There is still another meaning ascribed to "rubric" which also pleased us enormously; to wit, "A form or thing established or settled, as by authority." The implication that our editorial comments, both in anthologies and in EQMM, are "things established, as by authority" is a most pleasant thought. . . . For all of which, explicit and implicit, our sincere thanks to Mr. Steel.

But a new meaning for an old word is not the only thing Mr. Steel can

teach us. Indeed, no. We thought we knew a bit about Sherlock Holmes but Mr. Steel can give us cards and spades, and still beat us hands down. Especially on that always fascinating subject of The Private Life of The Great Man. Was Rex Stout correct in his theory that Watson was a woman? Dr. Julian Wolff said no. He agreed with Mr. Frank V. Morley's exceedingly clever bon-mot — that Watson, far from being feminine, was really Holmes's he-manuensis. Dr. Wolff concluded by suggesting that "we cease prying into the most intimate affairs of Dr. Watson."

Mr. Steel rejected that admonition — and for very good reason. He was convinced that the truth about Watson, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, had not yet been revealed. Mr. Stout had rushed in where angels fear to tread; Dr. Wolff had locked the door after the first glimmer of truth had been stolen; Mr. Steel decided to peek through the keyhole again, into that sacred bedroom at 221B Baker Street, and tell us the facts of life about Holmes and Watson — and we don't mean bees, although Mr. Steel does make Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen.

THE TRUTH ABOUT WATSON

by KURT STEEL

FOUR years ago the scholarly world was shocked by a modest monograph from the pen of my friend and fellow worker, Dr. Rex Todhunter Stout. In that paper Dr. Stout offered a solution to a serious problem — The Identity of the Second Mrs. Watson.

Stout himself admits that when his hypothesis first occurred to him he blushed and closed the book. "Not only was there never a second Mrs. Watson," he writes, "there was not even a first Mrs. Watson. Furthermore, there was no Doctor Watson. . . . Watson was a lady — that is to say, a woman."

For this heresy, Dr. Stout has been shamefully abused. It is not my purpose here to defend him. What I shall do is to demonstrate that his research, if carried beyond the point where he carelessly dropped it, proves not what he was at pains to set forth but almost precisely the opposite.

Stout cites passages from A STUDY IN SCARLET which do sound suspiciously as if they flowed from the pen of a yearning, uneasy, petulant female. We can, I think, accept his analysis of this story, but unhappily he overlooked the far richer implications of another tale.

In THE SIGN OF FOUR Mary Morstan comes to Holmes with her pitiable dilemma shortly after lunch on July 8, 1887. She tells her story and leaves.

Now consider the odd passage which follows her departure. It is ostensibly John H. Watson speaking: [1]

> "Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly down the street until the gray turban and white feather were but a speck in the sombre crowd.
>
> 'What an attractive woman!' I exclaimed, turning to my companion.
>
> He had lit his pipe again and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. 'Is she?' he said languidly. 'I did not observe.'
>
> 'You really are an automaton — a calculating machine,' I cried. 'There is something positively inhuman in you at times.'
>
> He smiled gently. . . . 'I am going out now. Let me recommend this book . . . Winwood Read's MARTYRDOM OF MAN.'
>
> I sat in the window and mused . . . until such dangerous thoughts came into my head . . . My future was black."

Surely those are the words of a woman starving for gentleness and love, a woman whose pliant soul has reached the breaking point, a woman turned finally to such dangerous thoughts that she herself dare not consider them. We can see Dr. Stout ruffling his beard and gloating. But wait.

What other evidence does my learned colleague offer in support of his thesis that Watson was a woman? He writes: "The singular fact about the dog in the night was that it didn't bark; and the singular fact about Holmes in the night is that he is never seen going to bed." [2] In short, he argues that Victorian reticence prevented the biographer (or biographress) of Sherlock Holmes from exposing such delicate nuptial matters to the public eye. But here my scholarly friend's research betrayed him.

Surely every reader will remember that in January, 1888 Holmes and Watson "slept in a double-bedded room" at Birlstone; [3] in June, 1889 we find them cosily sleeping in the same room at the Hereford Arms in the "pretty little country town of Ross;" [4] in March, 1892 they put up together in a single room at the Bull "in the pretty Surrey village of Esher." [5]

And what will Dr. Stout say to the fact that on September 3, 1902, Holmes and Watson are discovered shamelessly lying side by side "in the pleasant lassitude of the drying room" on the upper floor of the Northumberland Avenue Turkish Bath? [6] What of Watson's mustache [7] and his playing Rugby for Blackheath? [8] Come now, Dr. Stout. Have all these casual references been sneaked in by an impostor's hand?

Stout also announces that "in all the 1323 pages of the Sacred Writings [Irene Adler's] is the only wedding we ever see — the only one, so far as we are told, that Holmes ever graced with his presence." But what of Violet Smith's curious wedding to Mr. Woodley in April 1895? [9] And as for

[1] *The Sign of Four*, p. 100. All references by page are to THE COMPLETE SHERLOCK HOLMES, with preface by Christopher Morley, Doubleday, Doran & Co., New York, 1936.

[2] *loc. cit.*

[3] *The Valley of Fear*, p. 946.

[4] *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, p. 232.

[5] *The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge*, p. 1038.

[6] *The Adventure of the Illustrious Client*, p. 1160.

[7] *The Naval Treaty*, p. 516.

[8] *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire*, p. 1221.

[9] *The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist*, p. 623.

that wedding of Irene Adler's, Holmes himself "laughed heartily for several minutes" [10] before he could control himself and tell Watson how he had been dragooned into appearing as a supporting witness.

Stout would have Holmes speaking at this point like "a reluctant, ensnared, bulldozed man — in short like a bridegroom;" and by the use of an absurd acrostic Stout would convince us that Holmes was married on that occasion to — "Irene Watson." Nonsense. Holmes is laughing — laughing heartily for the only time in his career. This is not "the dry chuckle which was his nearest approach to a laugh," [11] but a loud guffaw.

Where does all this leave Stout and his argument that Watson was a woman? We have seen that A STUDY IN SCARLET and the tone of the first two chapters in THE SIGN OF FOUR appear to bear out the gynecomorphous theory. But we have also seen that every other datum Stout advances is poppycock. He seems then to be half right and half wrong — Watson half man and half woman.

This is intolerable. *Or is it?* Suddenly it occurs to us that all the pro-Stout evidence is to be found on or before the afternoon of July 8, 1887; all the anti-Stout evidence comes from episodes later than that date. And here is the solution.

There were *two Watsons*, and the first *was* a woman masquerading as a man — as her doctor brother in order to be near the man she loved.

But is this, like Stout's half-truth, merely a lucky guess? The first test to give an hypothesis is to see whether it clarifies other obscure points in the field being studied. Does this theory that there were two Watsons — first a woman, and then a man — answer other questions which have perplexed scholars? *Does* it! Listen.

Take that matter of the date of THE SIGN OF FOUR. The first two chapters of the story concern the afternoon of June 8, 1887, yet when evening comes it is a "September evening." This has well nigh driven the pedants nuts. Bell vacillates between September 7 and September 27; Father Knox proves by astronomical data that the whole thing occurs on September 7, and offers the *ad hoc* explanation that Watson's handwriting was misread by the printer.

But the whole difficulty vanishes if we assume that three months passed after that July afternoon when the gentle pseudo-Watson threw down THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN with a wail of despair and owned herself licked. Some time between July and September she persuaded her brother, the genuine Dr. Watson, to take her place.

Did she have a brother? Well, what about the "elder brother" whose watch she had shown to Holmes that same July afternoon? Scholars have puzzled over this brother for decades. Elementary. This was John H. himself, the lazy wastrel whom his strong-minded but all too feminine sister was

[10] *A Scandal in Bohemia*, p. 185.
[11] *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire*, p. 1218.

impersonating to keep up family appearances — while he pretended to be in India.

Pretended to be in India, I say. Does he, in the next thirty years ever encounter any old cronies who can testify to his having been in India? Yet London should have swarmed with them. No, we must reluctantly conclude that before he came under Holmes' straightening influence John H. had been hanging around Islington pubs, dodging creditors, shaming his honest and upright sister. While she, poor girl, falls hopelessly in love with an automaton who scorns her pitiable efforts at romance [12] and casually tosses her — THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN.

This new theory also answers another disputed question, that of the "second" Mrs. Watson. There was no second Mrs. Watson. John Watson's marriage to Mary Morstan endured, but it was clearly a tepid thing from the first. Only a few weeks after his wedding Watson confesses that he has put on seven pounds.[13] Three months later when Holmes asks him to go to Birmingham, he takes only an instant to explain to his wife; [14] and by the second year, when Mrs. Hudson brings him word of the dying detective, he rushes off without even saying goodbye to Mary.[15]

As for Mary herself, consider the Freudian slip she makes when she wonders whether she should send "James" off to bed.[16] James, indeed! Your husband's name, forgetful spouse, is John. Small wonder that when Holmes and Watson come off the case next morning it is to Holmes' digs they go for breakfast and not to Watson's bleak house.

So it is not surprising that after a while John and Mary drifted apart. But there is no jot of evidence that the marriage came actually to an end. The trouble is that on March 31, 1894 Watson says Holmes had "learned of my own sad bereavement," [17] and all the prosy pundits assume that this must refer to Watson's wife. On such a slender hunch everybody has hitherto concluded that Watson must have taken a second wife when he turns up married in January, 1903.[18]

In reasoning this way, however, scholars have overlooked a pregnant line in the opening paragraph of *The Adventure of the Speckled Band.* This episode, Watson tells us, occurred in the early days of the Baker Street association but for many years he has been prevented from telling the story.

Why has Watson waited? Because "a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given." [19] Who is this shadowy female? Who, indeed? Who is the object of Watson's "sad bereavement" which Holmes mentions

[12] *The Sign of Four*, p. 92.
[13] *A Scandal in Bohemia*, p. 178.
[14] *The Stock-Broker's Clerk*, p. 417.
[15] *The Adventure of the Dying Detective*, p. 1097.
[16] *The Man With the Twisted Lip*, p. 259.
[17] *The Adventure of the Empty House*, p. 559.
[18] *The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier*, p. 1179.
[19] p. 292.

on his return from the falls of the Reichenbach a few months later?

Clearly both references point to the same woman. But can this be Watson's wife, Mary? Not at all, for *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* antedated Mary's entrance, occurring in those early days when Watson's unhappy sister was prowling about the premises on the make for Holmes. Nor can the "bereavement" refer to Mary, as we have seen. Then to whom? To the pseudo-Watson, of course, to John H. Watson's sister who had passed from Sherlock's life that fretful July afternoon in 1887. There is thus no need for a second Mrs. Watson; the first Mrs. Watson was indestructible; the *sister* it was that died.

Other long-standing puzzles clear up at once when submitted to this new hypothesis. The long proemial passage about the Civil War, "a very preposterous way of settling a dispute," which occurs word for word in both *The Resident Patient*[20] and *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box*[21] has caused much confusion. Now, of course, the explanation is patent.

But what of Sherlock's own part in these shenanigans? Was the great man himself deceived? Has he nowhere given us a hint of his own reaction to the tangled business? We search, and at last come upon a short caustic monologue. It is some time after 1889 and Holmes is moralizing upon women. "One of the most dangerous classes in the world," he says, "is the drifting and friendless woman."[22]

Dangerous? Why dangerous? Why not interesting, curious, provocative? Is Holmes remembering some particular drifting and friendless woman whose life left its mark on his own? "She is helpless," he continues, "migratory, lost, as often as not, in a maze of obscure *pensions* and boarding houses . . ."

For the moment Holmes is a bitter man. We wonder. We read the words again, and faintly there comes an echo from the past. We leaf back, back — back through more than eleven hundred pages until we come to the very first page of all, the opening of A STUDY IN SCARLET.[23] It is Watson speaking, but we are no longer deceived. We know *which* Watson now. We are not put off now by the pitiable effort at masculine disguise.

> "I had neither kith nor kin in England [except a reprobate brother, of course] and naturally gravitated to London, into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed at a private hotel in the Strand . . . in the great wilderness of London."

Before this last ineluctable proof from the two strange principals themselves, can any doubt remain? Now do you see why when young Stamford (who was undoubtedly in on the thing) heard Miss Watson, trousered impostor that she was, boldly suggest that she will share lodgings with Sherlock Holmes, he "looked rather strangely at me over his wineglass?" And why shouldn't he?

[20] p. 488. [21] p. 1043.

[22] *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax*, p. 1109. [23] p. 4.

"Waiting for the Police" is the first appearance in EQMM of J. Jefferson Farjeon, one of England's best known mystery-story writers. Mr. Farjeon belongs to a "writing family": his father, Benjamin Farjeon, was a novelist; his sister, Eleanor, and his brother, Herbert, are both novelists and playwrights; and equally interesting from the viewpoint of artistic heredity, his maternal grandfather (after whom Mr. Farjeon was named) was the great American actor, Joseph Jefferson.

Too little is known of J. Jefferson Farjeon on this side of the Atlantic. Quite a few of his many books have had American publication, but somehow they have not achieved in the United States a popularity comparable to that which Mr. Farjeon enjoys in England. For the most part only the connoisseurs tingle to his work — a great pity, and a great loss to the true aficionado. Perhaps "Waiting for the Police" — a startling example of Mr. Farjeon's talent and a story brand-new to the American public — will "break the ice" and send you scurrying among second-hand bookstores on the trail of Mr. Farjeon's past work.

Mr. Farjeon is noted in England for his keen wit, both personally and in his literary style. He is also noted — and it seems a paradox, doesn't it? — for his ability to depict the "grandly sinister" against a scenic design of pure horror. Dorothy L. Sayers has said that Mr. Farjeon is "quite unsurpassed for creepy skill." You will find both these qualities — humor and horror — in "Waiting for the Police." Impossible? Read the story and see . . .

WAITING FOR THE POLICE

by J. JEFFERSON FARJEON

I WONDER where Mr. Wainwright's gone?" said Mrs. Mayton. It didn't matter to her in the least where he had gone. All that mattered in regard to her second floor back was that he paid his three guineas a week regularly for board and lodging, baths extra. But life — and particularly evening life — was notoriously dull in her boarding house, and every now and again one tried to whip up a little interest.

"Did he go?" asked Monty Smith.

It didn't matter to him, either, but he was as polite as he was pale, and he always did his best to keep any ball rolling.

"I thought I heard the front door close," answered Mrs. Mayton.

"Perhaps he went out to post a letter," suggested Miss Wicks, without pausing in her knitting. She had knitted for seventy years, and looked good for another seventy.

"Or perhaps it wasn't him at all," added Bella Randall. Bella was the boarding house lovely, but no one had taken advantage of the fact.

"You mean, it might have been someone else?" inquired Mrs. Mayton.

"Yes," agreed Bella.

They all considered the alternative earnestly. Mr. Calthrop, coming suddenly out of a middle-aged doze, joined in the thinking without any idea what he was thinking about.

"Perhaps it was Mr. Penbury," said Mrs. Mayton, at last. "He's always popping in and out."

But it was not Mr. Penbury, for that rather eccentric individual walked into the drawing room a moment later.

His arrival interrupted the conversation, and the company reverted to silence. Penbury always had a chilling effect. He possessed a brain, and since no one understood it when he used it, it was resented. But Mrs. Mayton never allowed more than three minutes to go by without a word; and so, when the new silence had reached its allotted span, she turned to Penbury and asked,

"Was that Mr. Wainwright who went out a little time ago?"

Penbury looked at her oddly.

"What makes you ask that?" he said.

"Well, I was just wondering."

"I see," answered Penbury slowly. The atmosphere seemed to tighten, but Miss Wicks went on knitting. "And are you all wondering?"

"We decided perhaps he'd gone out to post a letter," murmured Bella.

"No, Wainwright hasn't gone out to post a letter," responded Penbury. "He's dead."

The effect was instantaneous and galvanic. Bella gave a tiny shriek. Mrs. Mayton's eyes became two startled glass marbles. Monty Smith opened his mouth and kept it open. Mr. Calthrop, in a split second, lost all inclination to doze. Miss Wicks looked definitely interested, though she did not stop knitting. That meant nothing, however. She had promised to knit at her funeral.

"Dead?" gasped Mr. Calthrop.

"Dead," repeated Penbury. "He is lying on the floor of his room. He is rather a nasty mess."

Monty leapt up, and then sat down again.

"You — you don't mean —— ?" he gulped.

"That is exactly what I mean," replied Penbury.

There had been countless silences in Mrs. Mayton's drawing room, but never a silence like this one. Miss Wicks broke it.

"Shouldn't the police be sent for?" she suggested.

"The police have already been sent for," said Penbury. "I 'phoned the station just before coming into the room."

"How long — that is — when do you expect —— ?" stammered Monty.

"The police? I should say in two or three minutes," responded Penbury. His voice suddenly shed its cynicism

and became practical. "Shall we try and make use of these two or three minutes? We shall all be questioned, and perhaps we can clear up a little ground before they arrive."

Mr. Calthrop bridled.

"But this is nothing to do with any of us, sir!" he exclaimed.

"The police will not necessarily accept our word for it," answered Penbury. "That is why I propose that we consider our alibis in advance. I am not a doctor, but I estimate from my brief examination of the body that it has not been dead more than an hour. It could not, of course, be more than an hour and a half," he went on, glancing at the clock, "since it is now ten past nine, and at twenty to eight we saw him leave the dining room from his bedroom ——"

"How do you know he went to his bedroom?" interrupted Miss Wicks.

"Because, having a headache, I followed him upstairs to go to mine for some aspirin, and my room is immediately opposite his," Penbury explained. "Now, if my assumption is correct, he was killed between ten minutes past eight and ten minutes past nine, so anyone who can prove that he or she has remained in this room during all that time should have no worry."

"We've all been out of the room," Miss Wicks announced for the company.

"That is unfortunate," murmured Penbury.

"But so have *you!*" exclaimed Monty, with nervous aggression.

"Yes — so I have," replied Penbury. "Then let me give my alibi first. At twenty minutes to eight I followed Wainwright up to the second floor. Before going into his room he made an odd remark which — in the circumstances — is worth repeating. 'There's somebody in this house who doesn't like me very much,' he said. 'Only one?' I answered. 'You're luckier than I am.' Then he went into his room, and that was the last time I saw him alive. I went into my room. I took two aspirin tablets. I went into the bathroom to wash them down with a drink of water. By the way, my water bottle again needs filling, Mrs. Mayton. Then as my head was still bad, I thought a stroll would be a good idea, and I went out. I kept out till — approximately — nine o'clock. Then I came back. The door you heard closing, Mrs. Mayton, was not Wainwright going out. It was me coming in."

"Wait a moment!" ejaculated Bella. "How did you know Mrs. Mayton heard the front door close? You weren't here!"

Penbury regarded her with interest and respect.

"Intelligent," he murmured.

"Now, then, don't take too long thinking of an answer!" glared Mr. Calthrop.

"I don't need any time at all to think of an answer," retorted Penbury. "I know because I listened outside the door. But may I finish my statement in my own way? Thank you! As I say, I came back. I went up

to my room." He paused. "On the floor I found a handkerchief. It wasn't mine. It hadn't been there when I left. I wondered whether it was Wainwright's — whether he'd been poking around. I went into his room to ask if the handkerchief was his. I found him lying on the floor near his bed. Dressed, of course. On his back. Head towards the window, one arm stretched towards the fireplace. Stabbed through the heart. But no sign of what he'd been stabbed with. . . . It looks to me a small wound, but deep. It found the spot all right. . . . The window was closed and fastened. Whoever did it entered through the door. I left the room and locked the door. I knew no one should go in again till the police and police doctor turned up. I decided to make sure that no one did. I came down. The telephone, as you know, is in the dining room. Most inconvenient. It should be in the hall. Passing the drawing room door I listened, to hear what you all were talking about. I heard Mrs. Mayton say, 'I wonder where Mr. Wainwright's gone?' You, Smith, answered, 'Did he go?' And Mrs. Mayton replied, 'I thought I heard the front door close'. Then I went into the dining room and telephoned the police. And then I joined you."

Flushed and emotional, Mrs. Mayton challenged him.

"Why did you sit here for three minutes without telling us?"

"I was watching you," answered Penbury, coolly.

"Well, I call that a rotten alibi!" exclaimed Mr. Calthrop. "Who's to prove you were out all that time?"

"At half-past eight I had a cup of coffee at the coffee-stall in Junkers Street," replied Penbury. "That's over a mile away. It's not proof, I admit, but they know me there, you see, and it may help. Well, who's next?"

"I am," said Bella. "I left the room to blow my nose. I went to my room for a handkerchief. And here it *is!*" she concluded, producing it.

"How long were you out of the room?" pressed Penbury.

"Five minutes, I should say."

"A long time to get a handkerchief?"

"Perhaps. But I not only blew my nose, I powdered it."

"That sounds good enough," admitted Penbury. "Would you oblige next, Mr. Calthrop? We all know you walk in your sleep. A week ago you walked into my room, didn't you. Have *you* lost a handkerchief?"

"What the devil are you implying?" exclaimed Mr. Calthrop glaring.

"Has Mr. Calthrop dozed during the past hour?" pressed Penbury.

"Suppose I have?" he cried. "What — what damned rubbish! Did I leave this room without knowing it, and kill Wainwright for — for no reason at all during forty winks?" He swallowed, and calmed down. "I left the room, sir, about twenty minutes ago to fetch the evening paper from the dining room to do the crossword puzzle!" He tapped it viciously. "Here it is!"

Penbury shrugged his shoulders.

"I should be the last person to refute such an emphatic statement," he said, "but let me suggest that you give the statement to the police with slightly less emphasis. Mr. Smith?"

Monty Smith had followed the conversation anxiously, and he had his story ready. He had rehearsed it three times in his mind, and he was not going to make Mr. Calthrop's mistake. Speaking slowly and carefully — he knew that if he spoke fast he would stutter — he answered,

"This is why I left the room. I suddenly remembered that I'd forgotten to return Mr. Wainwright's key. He'd lent it to me this afternoon, when I lost mine. But when I got as far as the first floor I met Mrs. Mayton, who asked me to help her with the curtain of the landing window. It had come off some of its hooks. I did so and then returned to the drawing room with her. You'll remember, all of you, that we returned together."

"That's right," nodded Mrs. Mayton. "And the reason *I* went out was to fix the curtain."

Penbury looked at Monty hard.

"What about that key?" he demanded.

"Eh? Oh, of course," jerked Monty. "The curtain put it out of my mind. I came down with it still in my pocket."

"Then you've got it now?"

"Yes."

"And you didn't go up to his room?"

"No! Thank goodness!"

Penbury shrugged his shoulders again. He did not seem satisfied. But he turned now to Miss Wicks, and the old lady inquired, while her needles moved busily.

"My turn?"

"If you'll be so good," answered Penbury. "Just as a matter of form."

"Yes, I quite understand," she replied, smiling. "There's no need to apologize. Well, I left the drawing room to fetch some knitting needles. The steel ones I'm using now. My room, as of course you know, is also on the second floor, the little side-room, and after I'd got the needles I was just about to come down when I heard Mr. Wainwright's cough ——"

"What! You heard him cough?" interrupted Penbury. "What time was that?"

"Just before nine, I think it was," said Miss Wicks. "Oh, that irritating cough! How it gets on one's nerves, doesn't it? Or I should say, how it *did* get on one's nerves. Morning, noon and night. And he wouldn't do anything for it. Enough to send one mad."

She paused. The tense atmosphere grew suddenly tenser.

"Go on," murmured Penbury.

"I'm going on," answered Miss Wicks. "Why not? Your door was open, Mr. Penbury, and I went in to ask if we couldn't do something about it. But you were out. You've just told us where. And suddenly, when I heard Mr. Wainwright coughing again across the passage — that awful clicking sound it always ended with —

well, I felt I couldn't stand it any more, and I was knocking at his door almost before I knew it. It was my handkerchief you found in your room, Mr. Penbury. I must have dropped it there."

She paused again. Again Penbury murmured, "Go on."

She turned on him with sudden ferocity. Mr. Calthrop nearly jumped out of his chair. Monty felt perspiration dripping down his neck. Bella twined her fingers together to prevent herself from shrieking. Mrs. Mayton sat rigid.

"Will you stop interrupting?" shouted the old woman.

Penbury moistened his lips. For a few moments Miss Wicks knitted rapidly, the steel points of the needles making the only sound in the room. They seemed to be doing a venomous dance. Then she continued, in a queer hard voice.

" 'Come in,' called Mr. Wainwright. 'I'm coming in,' I called back. And I went in. And there he stood smiling at me. 'You haven't come to complain of my cough again, have you?' he asked. 'No,' I answered. 'I've come to cure it.' And I plunged a steel knitting needle into his heart — like this!"

She stretched out a bony hand, and, with amazing strength, stabbed a cushion.

The next instant there came a knocking on the front door.

"The police!" gasped Mr. Calthrop. But no one moved. With tense ears they listened to the maid ascending from the basement, they heard the front door open, they heard footsteps entering. . . .

A moment later they heard Mr. Wainwright's cough.

"Yes, and I heard it when he went out ten minutes ago," smiled Miss Wicks. "But thank you very much indeed, Mr. Penbury. I was as bored as the rest of them."

Editor's Note

Now that you have finished "Waiting for the Police," you understand how Mr. Farjeon combined humor and horror in an apparently orthodox detective story. It is a brilliant example of what the English call a "leg-pull" — in this instance, a homicidal hoax. This type of detective-crime story is exceedingly rare, but some of them are gorgeous illustrations of the literary practical joke.

From time to time we shall bring you other specimens. Naturally we won't be able to warn you in advance, except in the most subtle terms. "Leg-pulls" depend for their effect almost exclusively on the element of last-minute surprise; they must be written "straight" — in the parlance of the theatre, completely dead-pan; but when successful, they are classic criminological coups.

One of the most unusual and delightful books of short stories to be published in many a moon is AUTHOR'S CHOICE, *by MacKinlay Kantor. This volume contains 40 stories, arranged chronologically and representing Mr. Kantor's work in this field from 1922 to 1944. Each story is followed by a supplementary comment of extraordinary interest. You'll understand the nature of these auctorial sketches and anecdotes by digesting the following subtitle of the book: "With copious Notes, Explanations, Digressions, and Elucidations; the Author telling frankly why he selected these Stories, why they were written, how much Money he received for them, and of his thrilling Adventures with wild Editors in their native Haunts." After reading that delicious subtitle, how could anyone resist plunging into Mr. Kantor's personal anthology?*

In addition to stories of grandmothers and soldiers, of Ozark cats and Scottish pipers, of ghosts and moths and Western outlaws and movie queens, Mr. Kantor has also included a few of his early detective stories — two written for "Detective Fiction Weekly" and one for "Real Detective Tales." Of one of the two written for DFW, then edited by Howard Bloomfield, Mr. Kantor says: "My cops-and-robbers tales sprang out of the old Chicago days . . . I think 'The Trail of the Brown Sedan' has a kind of sharpness and pungency not always found in pulp magazine material; it is the best of a series of stories which I wrote about the fictitious Glennan brothers."

Your Editor — as you know, a passionate and indefatigable literary excavator — dug into those detective shorts written by Mr. Kantor in the early 30s. At the risk of offending Mr. Kantor (although that's nonsense: he's much too big not to know that honest difference of opinion is the salt of living), your Editor is compelled to report that he does not share Mr. Kantor's opinion that "The Trail of the Brown Sedan" is the best of the Glennan saga. "The Trail" is, as Mr. Kantor says, a sharp and pungent story, and we hope to bring it to you; but we liked certain other Glennan tales better, and we prefer to start a "new" Kantor series with those tales which, in our humble opinion, are really the best detective shorts Mr. Kantor wrote back in his salad days and in the middle period, so to speak, of one of the most distinguished and successful careers ever achieved in the short story field; for today Mr. Kantor is one of the most sought-after and highly-paid contributors to American magazines — a writer who can fuse literary quality and popular appeal so expertly that with equal ease he can satisfy editors all the way from the detective-story substratum, through

"Collier's," "Cosmopolitan," and "Saturday Evening Post," even to those rarefied upper reaches of "Harper's" and "Atlantic Monthly."

There are more MacKinlay Kantor tales to come, and with each one we will dip into AUTHOR'S CHOICE *and bring you a pertinent anecdote relating to Mr. Kantor's old 'tec days. Meantime, get out your mental machine-gun and join "The Hunting of Hemingway."*

THE HUNTING OF HEMINGWAY

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

INSPECTOR BOURSE looked very tired. He had been awake all night, and he was not as young as he had been in the days when he wore a gray helmet and sported a walrus-mustache.

The two young men and the two blowsy, over-dressed women crowded close around him as he sat crouched in the deep, gaudily upholstered chair.

Bourse asked, "How's your watch, Ricardi? And yours, Nick Glennan?"

Coonskin cuffs slid back from two husky wrists, and for a moment there was silence.

"Eight-eight, sir."

"That's me, Inspector. Eight-eight."

"You ladies" — he slurred the word — "got your guns in your pocket-books?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then," said old Inspector Bourse, "I'd like to know what's keeping you. Go to it. Don't give 'em a break. They never gave a break in their lives, least of all Hemingway. And remember them vests. Shoot 'em in the kisser."

Said one of the women, whose name was Cohen, "That reminds me —"

"Shoot him in the pants," nodded the old chief, "the coat and vest is mine. All right, gentlemen."

They went out through the kitchen, and a uniformed patrolman opened the rear door. They went down two flights of bleak stairway and crowded into a red and black taxicab which had been waiting at the alley entrance with idling motor. Nobody said anything. The driver seemed very husky for a taxi driver — he should have been able to command an occupation more fitting to one who scaled two hundred and eight pounds and whose shoulders were all steel and wire.

At the Balmoral Street end of the alley, the taxicab turned left, and left a second time at Dorchester Avenue; now it was heading east and parallel to the alley where it had stood waiting a moment before. This block was lined almost solidly with apartment buildings of the less-than-first-class variety, though here and there an old residence stood out solidly, resisting the cheap encroachment of red and yellow brick walls.

"Right here," said the youngest, handsomest man, and the cab slowed

to the curb in front of Number 1441.

The street looked innocent enough. It was then about eight-thirteen of an ordinary week-day morning, and Dorchester Avenue was an ordinary week-day street if ever there was one. A milk truck was parked ahead of the taxicab, and an express delivery van across the street. Protruding from a nearby delivery lane was the rear end of an Eclipse Laundry truck, and its driver was nowhere in sight. Apparently he had taken his little collapsible cart and vanished within the nearest building, where no doubt he was gathering loads of soiled linen or distributing the unsoiled variety. From behind the flimsy, opaque curtains of an opposite apartment, Inspector Bourse looked down at all these things and called them good.

He knew, as well, that behind 1441 Dorchester Avenue a junkman was driving through the main alley and was just about to have an altercation with a city garbage truck which blocked his way. He knew that not all the tenants of 1441 were still asleep or sitting over early breakfasts. No, at least a dozen of those tenants had taken occupancy during the previous day and night — slyly, carefully, silently — and just now they would have firearms ready to hand.

In the stupid four-and-a-half story building which was numbered 1441, a young man sat in the tiny sun parlor of Apartment 327. He would have been exceedingly interested had he known that Inspector Bourse was watching his windows. He was not a nice young man. His face was the color of the paper in which your butcher wraps meat, and his mouth had come down directly from a remote ancestor who served as a torturer for a Louis.

He was twenty-seven years old; he had killed men in Chicago, Dallas, Saginaw, Fort Wayne, Kansas City, Tulsa and in the town where he now sat. Mail trucks and banks had been levied upon, women had been forced to bestow their caresses upon him, and strangely enough some of them didn't have to be forced. The man's name was Chester Hemingway, and he had a personal, cash estate of three hundred and fifteen thousand dollars.

The young man was chewing something. His thin jaws worked knowingly, cruelly, and not with the comfortable carelessness of the habitual gum-chewer. They went crunching up and down, pulverizing some mysterious food between their gleaming white teeth. It was horrible but forever fascinating, to watch Chet Hemingway chew. He was always chewing.

"Chet," came a voice from the next room.

Without turning his head, Hemingway said, "Yeah?" There was a scowl upon his face whenever he spoke.

"What's down there?"

"Cab. Couple of broads with two college boys in coon coats."

"They was making a lot of noise. I just wondered —"

Chet Hemingway told his companion, "Well, I'll do all the wonder-

ing that's done around here. Sure they're making a lot of noise. Anybody's making a lot of noise that's fried. These folks are fried — especially the two broads." He leaned an inch closer to the window and his icy green eyes stared down at the gay party advancing toward the court entrance directly below. "And broad is the word," he muttered to himself. "I like mine thinner than that."

He thought of Lily.

"Tomsk," he called, "where's Lil?"

"Still asleep, I guess."

"I wish to hell she'd get up and get us some breakfast. Tell her to get up."

He heard Tomsk mutter to Heras, and Heras went padding down the short hall to knock at a bedroom door. "Hey, Lil. Get up. Chet says for you to get up." Lil's fretful voice came back after a moment: "Oh, for God's sake!" She yawned. "Oh, all right," she said, "I'm comin', tell him."

Hemingway smiled. If one of those monkeys ever made a pass at Lily, he'd shoot his teeth out of his ears. Really, he must be getting fond of Lil — fonder than he'd ever been of anybody. That wouldn't do, to get fond of her. One of these days he'd have to get rid of her, one way or another. But for the present —

He heard the party of four — coonskin college boys and fat, painted women, come lumbering up the stairway. His hand went to his belly-gun, then away from it. Drunks. Hell-raising punks with a couple of alley-cats they'd picked up during a night of revelry. Nobody to be alarmed about . . . Two Railway Express deliverymen came across the street, carrying a heavy box between them. Far down the hallway, a milkman clinked his bottles. There was the mutter of rubber tires close at hand — that laundryman was coming down the hall, knocking on doors as he came.

The radio mourned: "*Laaaast Round-Up . . .*"

Chet chewed and swallowed, swallowed and chewed. To the next room he called, "Hey, Tomsk. I hear the laundry guy coming. Tell Lil to get ready to go to the door. You scram, you and Heras." With sullen boredom, he lifted his eyes to the ceiling above his head. How long, how long would they have to stay in this damn building, this damn town? But it was too hot to try for South America, yet. Maybe another month —

At that moment, he had the first notion that it might be a good idea to take Lil along with him when he went. He had meant to ditch her in New Orleans — give her a roll, if he felt she was safe, but ditch her. If he felt she wasn't safe, he could always put a hole through her and drop her off a bridge with an old steam radiator wired to her neck and legs. That had happened before, too. But not to Lil. That was Jenny. Jenny had never turned up again, either — the quicksands down deep in the river took care of that. It was one rap they'd never have against him.

Actually, Chet Hemingway was falling in love with Lil, and didn't

realize it. It was funny: after all these weeks, and on this day when she was to be killed, that he should fall in love with her.

"*Git along, little dogies, git along, little dogies*—"

In the short stairway between the second and third floors, Detective Nick Glennan said to Detective Pete Ricardi, "Okay. Dave will be opposite that little service door in the side hall. Horn will go down there as soon as we pick up the Tom-gun."

One of the women, whose name was Cohen, gave a shrill and alcoholic laugh. He shone in the annual police vaudeville, did Benny Cohen. The other woman, whose name was Detective Barney Flynn, laughed even louder. But it was a coarse bellow; Flynn didn't make as good a woman as Cohen.

"You'll be bringing them out here, armed to the teeth," muttered Nick Glennan. "You sound like a hippopotamus, Barney. Okay," he said again, as they reached the third floor. Nick wasn't a sergeant yet, but he was commanding this squad, and if nothing went wrong he might very soon be a sergeant.

Detective Horn came trundling his laundry cart down the hallway. He bestowed one solemn wink on the inebriated college boys and their blowsy companions; his face was rather pale. Ricardi leaned forward and lifted a Thompson submachine gun from under the pile of soft blue bags in the little cart. His coonskin coat slid from his shoulders; his slim hands moved capably from drum to trigger and back again; Ricardi was the best machine gunner in the entire police department.

The women were doing things to themselves. Their coats and henna wigs vanished — the dresses were brief and sketchy and wouldn't bother them much, though they lost their rhinestone-buckled shoes in a hurry. They emerged from their disguises looking like nothing on land or sea, but they had .38's in their hands.

All this conversation, whispered as it was, and all this hasty disrobing and assembling of armature, took about three jerks. Horn ambled ahead, laundry cart and all, and vanished around the turn into the side hall where Sergeant Dave Glennan, Nick's fat brother, would be waiting inside the door of the opposite kitchen.

It didn't look like Hemingway and Tomsk and Scummy Heras had much of a chance. Across the street, Inspector Bourse and Chief of Detectives Moore were having a severe case of the jitters. Another minute, another two minutes —

The two Railway Express men dumped their box inside the vestibule on the opposite side of the court, and turning, drew their guns. In the alley at the rear, three detectives on an odoriferous garbage truck and two more detectives on a junkman's wagon, all became embroiled in a vituperative argument, which made it necessary for them to descend and gather opposite the back stairways

A milkman came along the hall. He wore white and had an account-book, but his name was Detective Kerry. Silently the four other officers crept down the hall beside him. Kerry jangled bottles in the little wire basket he carried. "*Git along, little dogies,*" said Chet Hemingway's radio, "*git along* —"

They were on each side of the door of apartment 327. Nick Glennan pressed the little pearly button; Ricardi motioned for Kerry to jangle his bottles again, and under cover of the musical tinkle he made ready with his machine gun.

They heard a distant blatting of the kitchen buzzer; that was Horn.

"Milkman," chanted Detective Kerry.

"Laun-dry . . ." droned Detective Horn, far around the corner.

"*Laaaast Round-Up . . . git along, little dogies . . .*" Somewhere inside there was a woman's voice, and a man replied.

"Who's there?"

"Milk-mannn . . ."

The door opened a crack. Cohen reached up with his foot and shoved it back; the man inside was Two-faced Tomsk, and if indeed he had possessed two faces he couldn't have looked any more surprised.

"Stick 'em up, Tomsk," whispered Glennan. "You haven't got a chance."

They heard Sergeant Dave Glennan's voice from the kitchen door: "Look out, Horn!" and they heard the sharp report of a small automatic. Lil wasn't taking any chances, either — she must have carried a gun with her when she went to the door.

Two-faced Tomsk threw himself forward in a dive, wrenching out his revolver as he came. Scummy Heras had been lying flat on the high-backed davenport, out of sight, but he came up with a .45 in each hand.

Tomsk had fired once and his bullet went between Kerry's arm and the side of his body, and then Tomsk continued forward to the floor with two of young Nick Glennan's Police Positive souvenirs in his head.

Scummy Heras was more of a problem. The stool pigeon hadn't lied when he talked about bullet-proof vests. Ricardi's machine gun dusted the davenport in a quick staccato, but all it did was bruise Heras' ribs. One of the gangster's guns was empty by that time; he had put a bullet through Barney Flynn's chest, and a lot more too close for anybody's comfort.

Through the kitchenette and little hallway, Sergeant Dave Glennan and Laundryman Horn came roaring in a flank attack. "Drop it, Scummy," they were yelling, but Scummy didn't mind worth a cent. He was backed against the French windows, and he kept going as long as he could. A fistful of slugs from Dave's sawed-off mashed him back against the yielding windows — the panes went crackling to bits, and Heras' body dropped, turning and twisting, to the paved court three stories below.

But where was Mr. Chester Hemingway, who had slain men in Chicago, Kansas City and points east and west?

When the screaming roar of exploded cartridges died down, the little radio was still mourning about the lonesome prairies, but Chet Hemingway wasn't around. Nick Glennan tripped over an upset chair and raced on into the sun parlor; his brother and Horn were diving into bedrooms, and from every stairway came a thunder of feet as the squads converged on apartment 327. But Chet Hemingway was not at home to receive them.

Nick flashed one baffled glance around the sun parlor. There was the radio, and there was Chet's half-burned cigarette already scorching the carpet, and there was — Nick swore, heartily. He climbed up on the table and stepped from there on top of the radiator. A square hole had been sawed in the ceiling, and through that hole it was evident that Chet Hemingway had gone soaring.

"Two apartments," Nick sobbed to himself. "Two! And nobody had an idea about it — 327 — *427*, right upstairs — to hell with that stool pigeon —"

He thrust his hands through the ragged opening and found solid wood still warm and slippery from the clutch of Chet Hemingway's hands. He hauled himself up into apartment 427. A scraping sound, somewhere — and, sure, he might have had a bullet through his head if Chet Hemingway had lingered to give it to him . . .

The apartment was furnished, like the one below, but it was evident at a glance that no one lived here. They had rented it for only one purpose — the very purpose which it had served. With a little more warning, the whole gang would have climbed through that square hole and disappeared.

The door into the hallway was wide open — Nick ground his teeth. A ladder stood against the wall at the end of the hall, and a trap in the roof was opened. To think that those devils would have anticipated the whole thing — ladder and all! He paused only to bellow at the men below him, and then swarmed up the ladder.

He came out into a glare of cold sunlight, and a bullet screeched beside the trap door. Nick Glennan growled, and raised his gun. On the next roof but one, a slim figure in white shirt and black pants was vaulting over a three-foot barrier. Nick had one unexploded shell left in his cylinder. He spread his feet wide apart and took careful aim; the gun banged. The distant figure fell forward, recovered its balance, and sprinted ahead with torn shirt fluttering.

"Those *vests*," sighed Nick, "those inventions of the devil . . . and to think he wore it under his shirt . . ." All this time he was racing across the gravel and jumping narrow chasms and leaping low walls, like a runaway maniac. He came to the last building of the row, and looked over the edge to see that mocking figure dropping from the last rung of the fire escape. Nick whistled; he yelled and beckoned to the other cops who were swarming out of the distant trap door; he threw a perfectly good gun which smashed on the pavement, missing Chet Hem-

ingway's head by only six inches.

But it was all too late, now. Hemingway went up on one side of a taxicab; he thrust his gun against the driver . . . The detectives started after him one minute later, but that minute made about a mile's difference. And in crowded city streets, a mile is a mile. Still chewing and swallowing, Hemingway rode out of the detectives' lives. Temporarily. . . .

For all the secrecy with which this coup was planned, there had been a leak somewhere in the department. The press had been tipped off, and for once the press had not gummed things up. Men from the *News-Detail* and *Tribune* came swarming eagerly into the building from Dorchester Avenue; already flashlight bulbs were flashing in the dim courts and alleyways, and reporters were clamoring.

Inspector Bourse and Chief of Detectives Moore fought their way through the crowd and up to apartment 327. With grim satisfaction they contemplated the prone body of Two-faced Tomsk and the shattered window where Scummy Heras had taken his last tumble. But when they looked around, hopefully, for another corpse — and found it — they were not so pleased. Miss Lily Denardo was the other corpse.

"Well," said the old Inspector. He looked down at the pretty, white face and the ridiculous folds of stained crêpe-de-chine which swathed the slim figure. "How'd this happen?"

Sergeant Dave Glennan's jowls trembled slightly. "I don't know. I'm afraid it was me."

"Had a gun, eh?" Bourse's foot touched the little automatic. "I don't think we'll be blaming you for this, Dave me boy."

The sergeant said, "That wasn't it. She did take a crack at Horn and me, but her gun jammed or something. Just one shot, and no more. She started in here — Scummy was shooting at the whole world, and I ups with my shotgun —"

Bourse looked at him. "And kills the girl with a .45 caliber bullet?" he asked, calmly.

Glennan blinked. "Thank Heaven for that! I never realized, sir. Yes, that hole does look like a .45. I — thought —"

"Never mind what you thought. Let's find the bullet."

"Here it is, sir," said Horn.

The bullet had drive through Miss Lily Denardo's heart, with the sad artistry of which that caliber is capable at close range, and had lodged in the wall. They dug it out.

"Who was shooting .45's?" barked the Inspector.

Kerry scratched his torn sleeve. "Nobody except the Tom-gun — Ricardi. We all had regulation guns. And Ricardi's bullets would have had to ricky-shay to hit her where she was a-standing. No, sir — take a look at Scummy's guns. There's one on the floor, and I guess he took the other with him when he went through the window."

The ballistics expert established it

later in the day; Scummy Heras had shot Lily, by design or accident. They never knew just how or why. It didn't matter. All the detectives were glad that none of them had killed her. She was too pretty.

"And so," Inspector Bourse grunted, at three o'clock that afternoon, "you let him get away. The meanest devil this side of hell, and you let him slide through your fingers."

Every man who had taken part in the Dorchester Avenue raid — except Flynn, who lay in the hospital — was in Inspector Bourse's office.

"Mind," he said, "I'm blaming not a mother's son of you — individually. You all worked hard and had your nerve with you. Young Nick Glennan especial. I'll say that. When he went kiting through that hole in the ceiling, he took a mighty chance."

Nick sat there and looked at his shoes. He felt his cheeks burning.

"But nevertheless, there you are. We had the best shots of the Bureau up there this morning, and we had the edge on that gang. And we let Hemingway get away. Sure, we didn't know about that apartment upstairs. Nobody did. The stool pigeon didn't. But our job was to get Chet Hemingway, more than any of the rest. We didn't get him. *Your* job was to get Chet Hemingway. *You* didn't get him. There it is. Eat it up; may it make you sick at the stomach."

His desk telephone jangled. Slowly, Bourse reached down and lifted the bracket. "I told you not to bother me," he growled at the operator. "I — What? . . . All right," he said, "connect me."

He looked at the rows of faces across his desk. "A man," he said. "Claims he has something important about this morning."

A new voice came on the wire. The eyes of Inspector Bourse froze bitterly as he listened.

"This," said the voice, "is Chet Hemingway —"

"Yes," said Bourse. His voice crackled. His hand slid across the transmitter as he snapped at Ricardi, who sat directly in front of him, "Get on a phone. Trace this call! . . . ."

"You didn't get me this morning," came Hemingway's voice, "and I'm still in town. Listen, you dirty flat-foot — you had to kill that little frail — she was a peach of a kid — she —"

Bourse said, "We didn't kill her, Hemingway. Scummy did it."

"Yeah?" snarled Chet. "Listen — I'm not going to stay here long enough for you to trace this call. But I read the papers. Every damn sheet in town was shouting the praises of the noble detectives you had up there — and by *name* — get that? By name. I'm going to stay in town until I get every last guy who was in on that job. And you, too! I'll get you all."

There was a click.

Bourse leaped to his feet. "Did you get it?" he roared through the open door where Ricardi had gone.

No, no. There hadn't been enough time . . .

Briefly and pointedly, Bourse told

the men what Hemingway had said. They weren't much impressed; most of them had heard that story before. "Go out and get Hemingway," said the old man in dismissal. And they went, hopefully.

But it wasn't so funny an hour later. Chief of Detectives Moore came in, with no ceremony. "Ricardi's dead," he cried. "He was crossing the street at Comanche and Main, and a car came past and hit him. Head on. Dragged him three hundred feet."

Bourse kneaded the cigar-stub in his fingers. "Must have been an accident," he muttered. But in his heart he knew that it wasn't any accident. He turned around and looked at the window.

"Hit-and-run?" he asked, over his shoulder.

"Yes," said Moore. "Hit-and-run. They got the car ten minutes later. It was a hot car. But the driver was gone."

The Inspector sat in silence for a time, drumming on the desk with his fingers. "We traced Hemingway how far?"

"Well, he took the taxi driver's coat and cap, and made him get out of the cab at Fourth and Mississippi. They found the cab about eleven o'clock on Mulberry Street. It had only been run nine miles in all, according to a check. We can't say definitely that we traced him to Mulberry Street, as we don't know what happened in between —"

Bourse nodded. "I'm thinking I'd better talk to my stool pigeon."

"It may mean his life, now," said the chief of detectives.

"So it may. His name is Adamic. Know him?"

"No. Who is he?"

"A pawnbroker and loan-shark down in the Delta. On Sage Street, to be exact.

Moore wagged his head. "I remember, now. George Adamic. A small, gray fellow with black eyes."

"Yes. It seems that he knew Two-faced Tomsk from 'way back, and had disposed of some bonds for him after that Western Savings stick-up. Adamic is as close as the tomb. We could never have sweat nothing out of him; he came to me voluntarily, and made me swear —" Bourse made a wry face. "We both belong to the same lodge, and it's one to which you belong as well. He made me swear I wouldn't turn him in."

Moore asked, "Why was he singing about Hemingway?"

"He knew they was in apartment 327 at 1441 Dorchester Avenue, and that was all he knew, except that they had a young arsenal and wore vests. Moore, it seems that Hemingway pushed over a man named Kolchak in Chicago last month. And Kolchak was George Adamic's brother-in-law. Family ties — nothing less. That's the only reason he talked."

"You'd best talk to Adamic now," nodded Moore.

Bourse took up his phone.

"If he's still alive," added Moore, softly.

And when George Adamic didn't

answer the telephone which rang so long and stridently in his narrow little shop, Inspector Bourse sent Squad Sixteen whistling in that direction. Sergeant Dave Glennan and Detectives Horn and Kerry found the store unlocked, and it was a wonder that folks in that scrubby neighborhood hadn't looted the place of every last thing. Only their inherited terror of George Adamic and the power he wielded over their sad little lives, had kept them from raiding his shop, unguarded and defenseless as it was.

Detective Horn it was who found George Adamic in a dark washroom behind the rows of second-hand overcoats. Adamic was shot through the heart and the medical examiner estimated that he had been dead since about nine o'clock that morning.

Dick Glennan's handsome face was a bit drawn. Inspector Bourse's harsh accusation was still ringing in his ears; he felt that he had failed, miserably enough, when circumstances demanded the most of him. And now, to be sent for — private and special — Maybe old Bourse was going to ask him to turn in his gun and badge. And after being promoted to plainclothes only last fall! Well, heaven knew that he must have deserved it.

"Sit down, Nick," said the old inspector.

"Begging your pardon," murmured Nick, "I'll take it standing up."

There was a sudden, misty twinkle in the older man's eyes. He saw that his door was locked and the heavy shade drawn over the window, and then he sat down behind his desk and looked at Nick. Distantly a chiming clock announced that it was five-thirty.

"Glennan," asked Bourse, "do you know why I sent for you?"

"I'm afraid I do. But I hope I don't."

Bourse grinned wearily. "Pshaw, why are you a-worrying? That was a bad break." He smoked in silence for a moment. "Nick, you're young —"

"Yes, sir. I'll be getting over it as rapidly as possible."

"You've got nerve."

"I hope so, sir."

"And brains."

"Well," said Nick.

"Every man in my department has nerve, and most of them have got a brain or two. But you have something else. You showed it when you was a rookie cop and helped clean out that gang on Acola Street; and you showed it when you ran down those Kentucky gorillas that had us all stumped, in the fall. That's the reason you're wearing plainclothes. You have that strange and fortunate thing which you have through no fault of your own: instinct, my boy. A nose for it."

Bourse wrinkled his own pug nose in demonstration. "Your big brother Dave is a good sergeant; I wouldn't be asking for none better. But he ain't got the hunch that you have — the kind of natural, hound-dog notion of being a good detective — smelling things out. Nick, did any of your ancestors, rest their souls, have second sight?"

Nick wriggled. "I've heard that my father was the seventh son of a seventh son, sir. But I'm only the second son of a seventh son."

"However that may be, what would you do about Hemingway?"

"I'd like to get him, sir."

"I want you to tell me, me boy."

Nicholas Glennan stood looking at the carpet for awhile. "We haven't much to go on, sir."

"Mulberry Street is right near Adamic's place. You know about Adamic? Very good. Hemingway must have ditched his cab, walked in there, shot Adamic, and walked out again."

"Yes, sir. But not in taxi clothes."

"What would he have done?"

"At least he would have put on a good suit and hat, and maybe taken a suitcase or traveling bag. The store was full of 'em, and some not half bad. Hemingway's always been one to take life easy and comfortable, sir, or so his record shows. Probably he had money on him. Maybe a belt, under that bullet-proof vest."

Bourse nodded slightly. "I'm 'way ahead of you, boy. But he wouldn't show that face around town — not with the papers full of it, and a million people gasping for the reward."

"But he wouldn't have had time for much disguise, sir. Not a hair-bleach or nothing like that. It would have to be quick and simple."

"The usual? Glasses? Mustache?"

"That's my notion, Inspector. This loan-broker had whole cases full of bankrupt notions — glasses of various kinds, even false whiskers, perhaps."

Bourse sighed. "Blue goggles and green whiskers! I thought better of your perspicacity, me boy."

"It's doing fine, sir. My per — what you said."

Bourse played with a pen-holder. "And then?"

"The witness to the killing of Ricardi said that a young man with glasses drove the car, sir."

Bourse hunched his shoulders, as if expecting a bullet to come through the window behind him. "Do you think he'll make good his boast, and stay around town long enough to get every one of us, as he promised?"

"No," said Nick, promptly, "when he's cooled off he'll see that the average is ag'inst him. But he might try to get another one or two."

"You feel certain of it?"

"He's a mad dog, they say. What the stories call a Lone Wolf. A red-hot killer, and always has been. And like all of them, he is what you call an ee-gow-ist. He'll want to write his name in large letters before he leaves town."

Bourse slammed up out of his chair. "I'm afraid we're getting nowhere. What do you think is the best bet? What would you do if you had your choice and was playing a free hand? I've got men all over town, a-raiding here and a-raiding there, and every cop on every corner is on the look-out. But what would you like to do?"

"Begging your pardon," whispered Nick, "but I'd like to stick beside the man he's most likely to come after, next."

"And that's —"

"Yourself, sir."

Chet Hemingway looked very dignified and circumspect. He did not look at all like a mad dog, although he might have answered up to Nick Glennan's characterization as an egoist.

"Drive me," he told the taxicab driver, "to 561 Alamo Street."

"Yes, sir." They started away from the curb.

The minutes passed to the feeble ticking of the meter. Dusk was here, and the low-lit auto lights swished past on every side. Alamo Street was a narrow, quiet court a bare mile from the heart of town; it was here, at 558, that Inspector Bourse lived with his plump wife and his plump, old-maid daughter.

The driver set Hemingway down promptly enough in front of the old apartment building numbered 561, and Hemingway paid the bill. He tipped, not extravagantly or penuriously, but in an ordinary fashion; it was not well for the taxi driver to have a too clear memory of his passenger. Then Hemingway stepped into the lobby of the building and examined mail boxes until the cab drove away.

He walked back out to the curb and glanced to the east and west. Couldn't be better. There were only two cars parked in the entire block, and between Number 561 and the next building ran a narrow sluice which led to a rear alley — he could see the lights back there glistening on the lids of garbage cans. Inspector Bourse lived straight across the street. If he had come home before this, he would be going out again. Hemingway's mouth slid back in a bitter smile, his killing grin, as he reasoned how stupid the motive which had prompted Inspector Bourse to have his address and telephone number listed in the directory.

Chet Hemingway leaned among the shadows near the opening of the areaway, and waited. He could wait without jumping nerves or too eager mind; he had spent a good share of his life waiting for men to come, waiting for mail trucks, and bank watchmen. Once he had even waited eighteen months in a penitentiary before his chance came. But whenever the opportunity appeared, the opportunity for which Chet happened to be waiting, no one could grasp it any quicker than he. That was how he happened to have more than three hundred thousand dollars stowed in various corners of the country, and a good fifteen thousand dollars fastened next to his skin, under his expensive silk undershirt.

Two girls passed; an old man; a plump woman; solitary young men. Homegoing folks, bound for dinner and quiet evenings in their apartments. Only one person entered the building at 558, and that was a young girl — stenographer, probably. Idly, Hemingway wondered whether she knew Bourse. He put his hand into his coat pocket, took out his usual food, and began to crack it between his teeth.

He thought of Lily. Sentimental and superstitious, like most of his kind,

he began to think of Lily as a swell dame — a kind of saint — now that she was dead. "I'll get the dirty louse, kid," he told her. This would look good in the tabloids. *Lone Wolf Killer Avenges Murder of Sweetheart Slain by Cops.* It was pretty good stuff.

He stiffened. Here was a cop, a big, stupid patrolman, lumbering down the street with idly-swinging club. He might flash a light into the narrow path between the two buildings, and it wouldn't be safe to hide there. Chet didn't want to bump off a cop. He wanted to bump off Inspector Bourse.

So he bent forward and peered into the gloom. "Kitty," he began to call, softly, "here, kitty-kitty." The cop came closer. Hemingway still called to his cat. The heavy feet ambled past.

"Oh, officer," Chet said.

The man stopped. "Yeh?"

"If you see a black kitten down the block anywhere, would you mind sticking it in the vestibule here at 561? My kid's cat. Run away . . . Here, kitty-kitty-kitty."

"Sure." The cop lumbered away. Chet stared after him with narrowed eyes. Like to let him have it. Now he hoped that Bourse wouldn't appear on the doorstep until the cop was around the next corner.

The patrolman had just disappeared when a big car hummed into Alamo Street from the Avenue. Its brakes crunched; it stopped in front of 558 . . . A department car; yes, Hemingway could see a gong above the running-board. Bourse got out.

Chet swallowed the last tiny morsel in his mouth. He brought out his gun; the belly-gun from inside his trousers — he had two, now — and one had been taken from Adamic's shop that morning. Wait until the car was at least half a block up the street. The old devil would still be fooling with his door key, or at least standing in the vestibule, plainly visible from outside. The men in the car would either have to turn it, or else jump out and run back; that was all the start Hemingway would need.

"Nine o'clock."

"You bet, sir."

A cab was coming from the direction of the avenue, coming slowly, as if hunting for an address. The big department car moved away from the curb — screeched into second gear — went purring away down the block. Chet's left hand went to the automatic, Adamic's gun, and brought it out. He would have to stop that cab before it interfered, though experience had taught him to fear nothing from the terrorized bystanders at such a scene.

Inspector Bourse's portly body was sharply outlined against the vestibule lights. Oh, you old Mick, thought the bandit, I've seen you more than once before this . . . His belly-gun began to stutter. Bourse fell against the door. Those were soft-nosed bullets, and they would play hell with any man's ribs. With his left hand, Hemingway turned his automatic toward the advancing taxicab. One shot in the radiator or windshield — he wasn't particular —

A long, bright smear came from the side of the cab, and something tore at the skirt of Chet Hemingway's coat. He snarled, and stepped back into the narrow court between the buildings. He had fixed old Bourse, but he wasn't expecting this. Bullets squirted all around him, flattening among the bricks. He let his whole clip speed toward the taxicab, then he turned and ran. In his heart he was cursing savagely. Those damn fly-cops — they were half a block or more away, and out of the picture. But this cab — Who in —

A bullet screamed from the concrete beside him, and still he could feel that wrenching blow which had torn at his coat. Just that close . . . He sprinted twenty yards down the alley, dodged between a line of garages, and sped out into the street beyond. It was a through street, and there were plenty of cars, parked or moving. In the distance behind him he heard yells and pounding feet. At the first entrance he found, he dodged inside. Luck. Plenty of it. He needed it.

It was an office building with an L-shaped vestibule opening on the side street and on the avenue as well. Over here the humming traffic had drowned all the affray on Alamo Street. Chet strolled around the corner of the corridor, trying to still the hammering heart inside his body. The one elevator man on duty nodded at him.

Hemingway glanced at the directory on the wall. The little white lines of names were swimming. He picked one out . . . Jacobson, Rudolph. 420. He turned to the elevator man.

"Is Mr. Jacobson gone?" His gasping lungs pushed up against his throat, but he fought them back.

"Yes, sir. It's after six. Most everybody's gone."

"Okay."

He went out to the avenue. A row of waiting taxicabs blurred before his eyes, and distantly he could hear a siren whining. These folks would think it was a fire truck. Well, it wasn't any fire truck.

He stepped into the first cab. "Let's go downtown," he said.

"Yes, sir."

They went toward the bridge, through the evening crush of cars, and Chet Hemingway had the pleasure of watching traffic cops clear the northbound lanes to make passage for a rocketing squad car which hooted its way toward Alamo Street. He fumbled for a cigarette, and found a torn paper of matches ground into the hole in his coat pocket. The bullet of the would-be avenger had come just that close. He swore. But there was his food — a little of it, still left to him. Chet began to crack it between his jaws.

He'd better get out of town as soon as possible. One way or another. They'd have picked men at every station, and the highways wouldn't be very safe. He'd have to think.

He arrived at his hotel safely enough and went without further incident to his room. But during the next hour,

when he sat munching, enjoying a cigarette or two and coldly reënacting the finish of Inspector Bourse, his leaping brain would have turned to jelly had it visualized the steel net which was closing in on him.

Bourse drew a long breath. "Glennan," he said to Nick, "what was that about your being the seventh son of a seventh son?"

"It wasn't me. It was the old man."

"Nevertheless —"

"Heras will be hotter than ever in hell, sir, when he realizes that you was wearing his bullet-proof vest."

The old inspector rubbed his sore body and examined the shreds in his clothing. "It's a wonderful vest, boy. I don't see why hoods always have these things better than the cops, but they do. At least nobody could ever blame you for not dropping Hemingway, up there on the roof."

"I should have drilled him through the head, sir."

Bourse fingered a tiny scrap of limp, gilded cardboard which he held in his hands. "At least you drilled this out of his pocket."

"Yes, but it's twice in one day that I had him under my gun and let him get away."

They stood there together in front of a gleaming spot-light while officers swarmed through every nook and cranny along Alamo Street. Bourse turned to Sergeant Dave Glennan. "No use, Dave. He's gone. But he left his calling card."

The fat sergeant waddled over to the shaft of light. "I'll take you on, sparrow cop," he told his younger brother, "at any shooting gallery in the Palace Amusement Park, when it opens in warm weather."

"You go to hell," whispered Nick.

"Shut up your big gab, Dave," added the inspector, kindly. "Nick was shooting from a moving taxicab, into the dark — shooting at gun-flashes — and anyway, if it hadn't been for him you'd be getting your shoes shined for an inspector's funeral."

He offered the torn scrap of cardboard. "This was over there across the street where he stood, when we looked for bloodstains."

Dave turned the fragment between his big fingers. He spelled aloud, "Diamond Match Com . . . E . . . L. And what's this that looks like the west end of a spider?"

"It's a coat-of-arms, Owl Eyes," snarled his brother, "and that is by way of being his stopping place. You don't recognize the souvenir matches of high-priced hotels, but the inspector does. He says that is part of a fold of matches from the Aberdeen Hotel."

"Just because you found it over there —"

"If you look close, Owl Eyes, you can see the fuzz of lead along one side. The luck of Nicholas Glennan was working; I ripped open his pocket, and half the torn paper of matches comes out."

"But," cried Dave, "that's no sign he's there!"

"He took a suit from Adamic's store, or I don't know where else. And

do them second-hand guys leave matches lying around in the pockets of their suits? No, Macushla. He gathered that up today since he's been on the loose. And not in no one-arm restaurant, but likely enough in a hotel room."

The inspector said, "Get your squad together, Dave. Tell Rhineheimer to get his."

"Yes, sir. But — God — you can't raid the whole hotel. It's got twenty-two hundred rooms!"

"We cannot. But we can soon get a list of the folks who registered today, and their room numbers. And after that, in case we run up against a snag, your kid brother that once was a sparrow cop in a park — well, he's got an idea. And I've observed that his ideas are apt to be good."

"What is this idea that he has, inspector?"

For reply, Nick displayed some very small, silvery fragments in the palm of his big hand. They were egg-shaped bits, crusted with a strange and frosty deposit, and none of them was longer than three-quarters of an inch. "Over there on the sidewalk, beside that alley," his polite voice announced.

"Them!" snorted Dave Glennan. "*Them!* What the hell! What's the worth of those? Nicholas, why don't you turn in your badge and gun, and become a member of the white wings? You scavenger, you."

"Well," said Nick, "I've seen them before. And many of them." He dropped the fragments into his vest pocket.

"We're a-wasting time," Inspector Bourse announced to the listening world.

The chambermaid — Number Seventy-two, she was, of the Aberdeen Hotel — had plenty of nerve. Really she didn't need a lot of nerve, since she wasn't compelled to place herself within the range of direct gunfire. When Nicholas Glennan tapped softly upon the door of Room 1661, and an answering bark came from inside, the woman controlled her quivering throat adequately.

She crouched close beside the thick wall and said, "Chambermaid."

The man inside the room seemed waiting for something. Finally he spoke in a voice full of annoyance. "I don't need you, girlie. Trot along."

For a fatal moment there was silence in the hall, and inside the room.

"Just to clean up your room, sir."

There had been people outside the door, up there in Dorchester Avenue — milkman, laundryman — the door had been opened, and then the law had come. Chet Hemingway wasn't taking a chance in the world.

He snarled, "Run along and peddle yourself some place else!"

Gently, Nick Glennan drew the frightened chambermaid around the corner, past the house detectives and the group of hard-faced officers from headquarters. "What he says is good advice, lady," he murmured. "You'd better go." There was a tense shuffling of feet on the thick rug.

Glennan looked coolly into the eyes

of a brother detective. "It's him?"

"Sure. His voice. I was a witness in K. C. when they had him up for trial. Know it anywhere."

"Okay," breathed Nick Glennan.

He said, "Hemingway. Are you going to come out, or do you want to be carried? Last fall we said that to some hoods, and they decided to stay. We carried them out and embalmed them. What do you say?"

In 1661, Chet Hemingway took out his two guns and turned toward the door. He fancied how it would look, in the headlines. "I say come and get me, if you're man enough!" He put a heavy slug through the door.

"I am," responded Nick, "and here — I — come."

A machine gun was lifted, but Nick's gesture stayed the ready finger. "No," he muttered, "I missed him — twice. This time it's me or him."

He took care of the lock with his first three bullets, and heavy pebbles of lead gouged whole strips out of the veneer as he kicked against the wrecked door . . . Inside, there was the distant slam of the bathroom door, so Glennan braced his whole body against the big slice of wood which blocked his way. He crashed to the floor, the sundered hinges flying wide. The bathroom door opened a crack, and in that crack was a jet of dancing flame . . . turned out the lights . . . well, one or the other of them, there in the dark.

Flat on the floor, with the air splitting beside his ears, he took steady aim at a point above the flashes, and scattered his three remaining bullets there. There was sudden silence — a cough, and then the sound of a body falling into a bathtub.

They switched on the lights, and sniffed in the doorway.

"He got Glennan."

Bourse groaned from the hall, "Oh, the black-hearted —"

"The hell he got Glennan," said Nick. He climbed to his feet and pushed the bathroom door wide. For one in Hemingway's messy condition, the bathtub was a very good place for him to be sprawled.

Inspector Bourse looked at the corpse. "You must have second sight," he muttered.

"No indeed, sir. It was the shells."

He found them in his vest pocket, and juggled them in his hands.

"Pistachio nuts," somebody said.

Nick Glennan nodded, soberly. After all, Hemingway had been a man and now he wasn't anything. Rest his soul, if possible . . . "The nut shells was all over the sun parlor, up on Dorchester Avenue," he said. "They was also scattered on the sidewalk tonight where he waited for the inspector. He was a pig for them, it would seem. When the bellboy said that the man in Room 1661 of this hotel had sent twice for pistachio nuts during the day, it had to be Hemingway and no other. Probably he's feeding on them this minute, wherever he's gone."

"I'll answer that," remarked his brother, grimly. "If Hemingway is eating pistachio nuts this minute, he's eating roasted ones."

In our last issue, March 1946, we announced with regret that "P. Moran and the Poison-Pen" would probably be the last of Percival Wilde's "gorjus" Pete stories. The day after the March issue went to press, what happened? A new P. Moran story came in! That's what we like about good detective-story writers and good detective stories — they're both so unpredictable!

But let's not quarrel with our luck, especially since the new tale, "P. Moran, Diamond-Hunter," is in many respects the finest of the series. We think you'll agree that Pete reaches new heights as a genuinely comic character. Read how, at the suggestion of Marrylin (who took a "cause" in the "Art and Craft of the Detective Story" at college), Pete enlists the aid of other detective-story writers — Conan Doyle, John Dickson Carr, Edgar Wallace, Gilbert K. Chesterton, Nick Carter, Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, and even Ellery Queen himself — in his earnest attempts to find the missing rose-diamonds.

Further comments after you have finished chuckling your way through "P. Moran, Diamond-Hunter."

P. MORAN, DIAMOND-HUNTER

by PERCIVAL WILDE

TELEGRAM.
CHIEF INSPECTOR,
ACME INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE
CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL,
SOUTH KINGSTON, N. Y.

TELEGRAPHING YOU ONE DOLLAR
PLEASE DESCRIBE HOW TO FIND
DIAMONDS.

OPERATIVE P. MORAN

From: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.,
To: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.

Your telegram is not clear by which we mean it might mean this or also that and then again it might mean something else, and if you had paid for more than ten words we might know which. We deduct you want to find diamonds. If they are lost, advertise for them, offering a reward. If they are stolen, a good detective should be hired right away, but since nobody would mistake you for a good detective and hire you as same, we deduct they are not stolen.

Perhaps you would be satisfied if you found any diamonds, blue ones or yellow ones, big ones or small ones. So would we, because diamonds are worth money. We have looked in the encyclopedia. It says diamonds are found in mines in S. Africa. They are also found in S. America. They have also been found in S. Carolina, N.

ditto, Ga., and Va. Observation tells us you also find them in jewelry stores, and our secretary, who likes what she calls good music but which we can't stand because it makes our ears ring, says you will see many diamonds coming in during the second act of the opera — any opera. Observation also tells us they are plentiful on chorus-girls, actresses, saloon-keepers, oil-men, gamblers, race-track touts, prize-fighters and big-shot politicians, but that is only when the graft is good and people are hiring offices on the 40th floor for the view, not for jumping. When times are hard diamonds are most generally lost for advertising, but they may be fakes.

We think it would be a good idea if you took a trip to S. America or S. Africa, preferably S. Africa, because it is further away, to find some diamonds. Let us know when you start. P.S. We are keeping the One Dollar which Western Union handed us because it pays for the time we wasted answering your fool telegram.

J. J. O'B.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,
To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, you certainly had a nerve keeping my One Dollar, because your letter was not worth it and your time ditto, and Marrylin, which is the name of the new hired girl we have taken on at the house because she is working her way through college, and the dough she makes in the summer sees her through the winter, read your letter and she laughed and she says she will bet another Dollar this is the first time you ever opened a encyclopedia and you should break a bottle of wine on the bow and crissen it. Marrylin is a smart girl and she is quick as a flash; but maybe I should tell you about Mr. Burton Findlay and Mr. William Underwood Junior and Mr. & Mrs. Arnold Gaylord and Mr. Cutler and Mr. A. E. Erskine-Bevin and the other amebas and the eleven rose-diamonds.

Sunday morning the boss sends for me. "Peter," he says, "come in, close the door, and keep it under your hat."

I says, "Yes, Mr. McRae."

"Peter, are you acquainted with Mr. Burton Findlay?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you know about him?"

"Well, sir, he is a rich man, and he has done lots of hunting."

The boss screws up his face in a way he has. "Peter, he is more than a hunter: he is an ameba."

I didn't know that about Mr. Findlay, though he has owned a big house right here in Surrey for a good many years. I says, "Mr. McRae, he always registers as a Republican."

"That may well be, Peter. Do you know what an ameba is? It is a round animal. When it sees something it wants, it surrounds it — and it wants everything it sees." The boss puts two ashtrays on his desk. "One of these is the ameba: it doesn't matter which. The other is the object. The ameba

flows up to it. It throws out part of its body on the left. Then it throws out part of its body on the right. Do you follow me, Peter?"

"Yes, sir: I deduct the ameba is left-handed."

The boss laughs. "Could be; could be; but whichever part reaches the object first, meets the other part, capturing the object, which may be a work of art, or a country house, or somebody else's wife."

"What happens to the object, Mr. McRae?"

"It becomes part of the ameba, which digests it. Then the ameba sees something else it wants because it is always wanting something, and it repeats the process ad infinitum, which are two Latin words meaning till hell freezes over, and it becomes a very big ameba. That is why the Hobby Club met at Mr. Findlay's last night."

I waited for him to go on. "Yes, sir."

"The Hobby Club is a club of people who collect things. They are small amebas. They meet at Mr. Findlay's because he is the biggest ameba. Mr. Seymour collects stamps. He showed four he bought at auction and they are worth a lot because the airplane has been flying upside down for years and the pilot hasn't fallen out yet. Mr. Cutler collects buttons. He showed some which belonged to George Washington he said but I would not believe it if George swore to it himself. Mr. William Underwood Junior collects etchings. He brought two which Whistler left unfinished so they are worth more than if he had finished them, which teaches us never to do today what we can put off till tomorrow. Mr. Pomeroy, who plays the stock-market, showed eleven rose-diamonds which he always carries in his pocket to bring him luck. I wish he had broken his neck and had stayed home. Mr. Erskine-Bevin had a particularly rare first edition: he collects them. So does Mr. Jones. He exhibited his, and they said they were friendly rivals, which means one of them will not stick a knife into the other excepting on a dark night. I have the sporting prints you may have seen in this room. I brought them. Arnold Gaylord, who married one of Findlay's granddaughters, doesn't collect anything because the great-grandchildren have been coming pretty fast and it takes every cent he makes to keep them in shoes: I hear Findlay gives them nothing but free board and lodging over the summer. They thought it would be a good joke on the rest, so they showed their newest baby. Mr. & Mrs. Gaylord are not amebas."

"No, sir, anybody could see that right off."

"We all had dinner."

"The baby, too?"

"Yes — privately. After that it gurgled and smiled and shook its rattle, and we all loved it. Then Mr. Findlay, who collects everything, stamps, and etchings, and paintings, and first editions, not to mention stocks and bonds, and is a great hunter and a great fisherman besides,

showed some motion-pictures he had taken when he was collecting fish in the Gulf Stream, which he would collect also only it is too wet. The pictures were exciting: there was one in which a shark almost collected Mr. Findlay, and I was disappointed when the shark lost out. The butler worked the motion-picture projector."

"Hewitt, sir?"

"You know him?"

"He is a big man in village politics."

"So I have heard. After the lights went on again we all applauded, and Mr. Pomeroy went up to Mr. Findlay and told him quietly that his eleven rose-diamonds, which had been left on a table with the other exhibits, were missing."

"Oh!"

"What would you have done, Peter?"

"If those diamonds had belonged to me I would not have been quiet. I would have hollered blue murder."

"Mr. Pomeroy speculates in Wall Street, and he takes his losses without bawling about them. I mean, what would you have done next?"

"I would have locked the door, and I would have searched the members of the Hobby Club."

"We discussed that and we decided against it. It is done in all good detective stories, and they never find the loot that way. No, Peter, we decided we would not be primitive. First we invited the guilty person, whoever he was, to put the stones on the table from which he had taken them while we turned out the lights again. When that didn't do any good, we concluded a search would be undignified and fruitless."

"Which, Mr. McRae?"

"Mr. Pomeroy spoke for all of us when he said, 'The man who took the diamonds is prepared to be searched. Therefore they are not hidden on him, or in his pockets, or anywhere we might expect to find them. If we search each other, we'll find nothing, and we'll annoy the ladies, who won't want to be searched, even by the other ladies. Why waste the time?' "

"I wouldn't call it wasted time, Mr. McRae."

"The opinion seemed to be unanimous, Peter. We looked here and there: under the rugs; in the upholstery of the furniture; under the table. We searched just one human being: the baby, and we did that because somebody might have planted the stones on it in the dark. After that it was all we could do to get the ladies to dress it again: it is only five months old, and if we had left them alone, the ladies would have spent the night playing 'This little piggie went to market' with its toes."

"I deduct you didn't find the diamonds, Mr. McRae."

"Your deduction is correct, Peter."

"Maybe Mr. Pomeroy put them back in his pockets without thinking."

"Somebody suggested that, so Pomeroy turned his pockets inside out.

"Unfortunately there are no detectives in the Hobby Club. We're all afraid there'll be a story in the papers if Mr. Findlay hires a regular de-

tective. How would you like to run over and see him?"

I thought quick, like I always do. 'Is there a reward?"

"We haven't discussed it, but you can depend on us to do the right thing. But if I were you, Peter, I would ask Mr. Findlay to pay you for your time by the hour, win, lose, or draw. After more than a dozen bright men and women tried to find those stones and gave up, surely you can't expect to be successful."

I says, "Mr. McRae, like you told me, there are not any detectives in the Hobby Club. I am all through with this case already, and I am busy thinking about the next."

He says, "Holy Smoke!"

I says, "Yes, sir, because that is the way my mind works, especially after I got 60% on Lesson II, which is Observation."

The boss gives me a queer look. "I don't know what you could have observed because you weren't there, and I have just been telling you the story in my own way and I have doubtless left out some of the most sensual details; but if it is as easy as you say, you must lose no time making tracks to Mr. Findlay's house, where Mr. Findlay will be delighted to see you."

I says, "I am not so sure of that, but I will hurry right back," and I mean it, because I have got a date to take Marrylin to the movies they are having at the Stuart Theatre in Lakeville the same afternoon which is Sunday, but the boss only says, "Now I will ring up Mr. Findlay and tell him you are on your way."

Well, Jim Hewitt lets me in, and he says, "Gosh, Pete, I certainly am glad you are here, and maybe I wasn't excited last night when they talked about searching everybody!"

I says, "Jim, I hear they didn't search anybody excepting the baby."

"That's right."

"Not Mr. Findlay?"

"Why should they search the boss?"

"Or Mr. Pomeroy?"

"He turned his pockets inside out, and we all watched, you can bet." Jim gives me a dig in the ribs. "I was sorry they didn't search Mr. Seymour. I know the colored lady that does his laundry, and she says he is so stingy he makes her sew big patches on his underwear till it falls apart. Now I am not like that, Pete. I change right down to the skin once a week whether I need it or not, and you can bet there are not any holes in my union-suits."

I says, "That is neither here nor there, my good man. You may now lead me to your master."

He says, "You are snootier than you used to be before you became a detective," but he knocks on the door of the living-room which is locked, and when somebody growls, "Confound it, what is it, humpf?" he answers, "Mr. Findlay, Moran has come."

I says, "Mr. Moran, you dumn cluck," but Hewitt kicks me on the shin acidental on purpose, and then I hear the lock opening and Mr.

Findlay says, "Come in, Moran, come in! Confound it, don't stand there in the doorway making a draft! Come in and I will lock the door."

Well, Mr. Burton Findlay does not look like a ameba, because he is about 75, and he is tall and bony, and he has skinny hands and also bushy white eyebrows which look like he knitted them himself; and he is smoking a cigar which cost One Dollar straight if it cost a cent, and he does not offer one to me though I can see plenty more in his outside pocket. And the room is pretty messy, with ashtrays everywhere full of cigar stumps and cigarette butts, and dirty highball glasses and bottles of Scotch and siphons and some of those bottles have not been opened yet, and the movie machine is set up at one end of the room with the screen at the other, and there is a baby-carriage in the corner. There are some flowers wilting in a tall green-blue glass which is on a table and there are some silver trays with sandwiches and they do not look so hot because they are dried out and curling up at the edges, and the baby's bedding and the baby's toys are in the baby-carriage, and there are some buttons and some stamps and some books and Mr. McRae's prints and some other things on another table, and the windows are shut and the air is so thick you could cut it with a knife. And the room looks like a museum, with thick carpets, and glass cases with more books, and jars, and vases, and clocks, and there are also statues and paintings which do not have any clothes on them so I do not look at them except when Mr. Findlay is not watching.

He says, "Come in, Moran, confound it, humpf!" and he talks a blue streak while we are walking around. "You will see everything exactly as it was last night excepting the guests have gone home if that was where they went when they left here. These are the buttons Cutler showed: he offered to leave them because they unscrew and they have been used to smuggle precious stones. We took them apart and you can see they are empty. Here are Seymour's stamps: you couldn't hide a diamond in a stamp, could you? — and I've got rarer stamps in my own albums. Here are McRae's sporting prints: don't tell him, but I've got better ones. Here are the first editions two of the members brought: they aren't a marker on those in the bookcases right behind you. Sometimes the insides of a book are scooped out so you can smuggle dope in it: these are regular books, and we know because we looked. We searched the ladies' handbags, and we made them take them home with them, though they offered to leave them. There is the baby-carriage which was occupied by my great-grandchild: I asked to have it left here, and it was left. The motion-picture screen is exactly where it was last night. There is the projector, with the film still on the reel. There are the cans of film Hewitt showed first: we've gone all through them. The gadget next to the projector is the splicer: if the film breaks,

you mend it right there. The can on the splicer used to hold cement: we opened it and poured out the little there was left to be sure there was nothing else in it, and you can bet your life it is empty."

I says, "Mr. Findlay, I can deduct you suspected Hewitt."

"Confound it, we suspected everybody, humpf!"

"What's this little pile of pebbles near the movie machine?"

"Out of one of the pots, I suppose. You'll see plants growing at all of the windows."

"Have you looked through the cigar and cigarette butts?"

"No, but you can if you want to. Confound it, how can a man hide a diamond in a cigar and then put the ash back on top of it?"

"Have you examined the sandwiches?"

"Moran, eat as many as you wish, if that's what you're hinting at."

Well, I eat eight or ten of those sandwiches, and he goes on talking: "After the guests left I locked the doors of this room and I slept on the sofa. Hewitt put my breakfast outside the door on a tray and I have just eaten it: see the shells of the soft-boiled eggs? Nothing that came into this room yesterday has gone out of it except the people, and we agreed there was no use in searching them as I believe Mr. McRae has told you. That door there opens on a bathroom: that's where I'm going to shave and clean my teeth if I ever get around to it. Well, Moran, speak up! McRae tells me you can name the guilty man. Who is he?"

I says, "First I got some questions to ask."

"Shoot!"

"How much is the reward?"

"Humpf! Humpf! Well, the eleven diamonds were worth about five thousand dollars: the rose-cut kind isn't as valuable as the others. I offered him six for them."

"Wait a minute! You offered him six — who?"

"Yes — when he lost them — Pomeroy. I would have paid him to keep quiet and have no scandal. He wouldn't accept."

"You mean he wanted more than six thousand bucks?"

"Confound it, man, he didn't want money! He wanted the diamonds: he's superstitious about them. He says that before he buys or sells anything he puts his hand in his pocket, picks up some stones, and counts them. If the number is odd, he follows his hunch; if it's even, he does the opposite. Since eleven is an odd number, he generally follows his hunches, and he's generally hard up. . . . Moran, shall we say that a one-thousand-dollar reward, one-fifth the value of the diamonds, will satisfy you?"

"O. K. — if you put it in writing."

He does that, while I walk around the room, looking at the hundreds and hundreds of things he has got in it, and eating some more sandwiches. "It would take a year to search this place."

"Yes, confound it! Well, here's my agreement to pay you the reward — *if* you find the stones. Now tell me the man's name."

I fold the paper careful and I put it away in a safe place because I remember what the boss said about amebas, and I do not want Mr. Burton Findlay surrounding that there paper. "Mr. Findlay," I says, "you collect things."

"Yes."

"What things?"

"I've told you about them, and you've seen them here: paintings; sculpture; vases; books; prints —"

"Rose-diamonds, too?"

"I've got a couple."

"Show me one."

He puts two fingers in his vest pocket, and he shoots a big stone to me like it was a marble. "That's a rose-diamond."

I look him straight in the eyes. "O. K. Where's the other ten?"

"What do you mean?"

"Probably you tried to buy Mr. Pomeroy's diamonds before last night."

"No: they're not good enough."

"When he missed them, you tried to buy them again."

"As I told you, I would have paid well to prevent a scandal."

"In the dark, when you were having the movies, you could have found the table where he left the stones, because this is your living-room and you know it like you know the palm of your hand."

"Confound it, Moran, what are you getting at?"

"When somebody says, 'Let's search everybody,' you says, 'No, don't do it.'"

"It was Pomeroy who said that."

"It was you who agreed. Well, come across: maybe you could fool the Hobby Club which has not got any detectives in it, but you cannot fool Operative P. Moran."

For a minute I think he is going to bite me. Then he starts to laugh, and it is a real laugh or I will eat my hat. "Moran," he says, "I should have guessed what was in your mind before you spoke. I saw it coming, and I just couldn't believe it. But you're barking up the wrong tree, my good man! Do you know what a carrot is?"

"They grow in gardens."

"Not this kind. This kind is used to weigh diamonds. Pomeroy's diamonds were little ones, one carrot apiece or thereabouts. This one here is more than nine carrots: I mean it weighs nearly as much as all of Pomeroy's put together, and what is more, it is a famous stone which was worn by a cardinal five hundred years ago. Why, there are dozens of experts who will identify it."

Sometimes you just know when a guy is telling the truth, and I could see this was one of them.

"That isn't all, Moran," he goes on. "You said the room was dark while the pictures were being shown. Well, it was, in a manner of speaking, because the only light came from the projector. But I was standing next to the screen all the time, telling the members of the club what the pic-

tures were about, and if I had moved, everybody in the room would have noticed it. The others could have gone where they pleased: I couldn't." He is just as friendly as a big ameba can be, I guess. "Don't be too crestfallen, Moran. *We* couldn't find the diamonds either; it is too much to expect you would succeed."

I was feeling pretty low in my spirits. "I guess," I says, "I guess I better give up."

Mr. Findlay walks over and slaps me on the back. "Confound it, Moran, never say die! I think better of you because you accused me right to my face. You are a brave man, and you rushed in where angles fear to tread." He goes on with a queer grin: "In many ways you remind me of a gorilla that walked up to me so slow and so friendly that I was almost ashamed to shoot the poor thing. But even my enemies will tell you that while I might steal a bank or a railroad, I would draw the line at a handful of small diamonds."

He was too much for me. "Mr. Findlay," I says, "I guess you had better send for a regular detective."

He stops grinning mighty quick. "Moran, I'll shoot the first that sticks his ugly nose in this place, so help me God, I will! There is a gun-room in this house, and if one of those professional gumshoes shows himself around here, I will fill him full of copper-jacketed bullets! Remember, Moran: no publicity; no scandal! The reward holds good. Call again when you have got a better idea: I mean one that works. And by the way, give me back my big rose-diamond before you go. I know you're taking it with you absent-mindedly, but I will relieve you of it in the same absent-minded fashion."

After that I slink out of the house, and if I was a dog, my tail would be between my legs. I have got a date to take Marrylin to the movies, like I wrote, but it is O. K. with me when the boss says, "Peter, I'm sorry if I'm interfering with any plans, but you'll have to drive me to the train this afternoon." Then he says, "Oh, by the way, how did you make out at Mr. Findlay's?" and I says, "I report progress, Mr. McRae," which is not true, but it is the best thing to say.

Please send me a telegram that a regular detective is coming right away.

TELEGRAM.

PETER MORAN, C/O MR. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN.

COLLECT. TO BE SHOT QUESTION MARK NO THANK YOU PERIOD.

CHIEF INSPECTOR, ACME INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surrey, Conn.,

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y.

Well, I kind of figured in advance you would not send a detective or maybe come yourself if you were not sure you would get paid, but the

reward is bigger now than it was at first and I guess you will change your mind when you know about that.

Your telegram did not come till pretty late this afternoon which is Monday, and I was out driving the missus so Marrylin took it over the telephone and she wrote it out for me, and when she gave it to me she was all set to ask questions, but I read it over three or four times first, and then I had my dinner, and then I had to drive the missus to a party, and when I put the car away it was near midnight, and there was Marrylin and she was waiting in the garage.

She says, "Well, Peter?" and I says, "Marrylin, I am in trouble and I need a friend," and she says, "What kind of trouble?" and I says, "Rose-diamond trouble," and I spill the story.

I can see her eyes shining while I am talking, and she does not ask any questions till I am all through, because all she is saying is "Peter, go on! Don't you dare stop! Oh, go on!"

Then when I am finished, she says, "Peter, how perfectly divine and how lucky you came to me with your little problem! When I was a junior last year in the college they have got for girls in Mt. Holyoke, Mass, I took a cause in the Art and Craft of the Detective Story, and this sounds like one of the tests they used to spring on us juniors when we were least expecting it."

I says, "Isn't that fine, Marrylin? Well, who swiped the diamonds?"

She hoists her shoulders up and down. "Elementary, my dear Peter, elementary!"

"Is it? Then how did he do it?"

"You make me laugh. Peter, I am almost ashamed to put my little gray cells to work because it is so easy."

"O. K., so it's easy, because I figured it out myself; but where did he hide them?"

"That, Peter, is the crux." I have not heard that word before, so she spells it out for me, like she spells out the names she starts shooting at me in a couple of minutes. "I can see everything in my mind's eye. Oh, Peter, it is really so simple! I just want to ask you one question."

"Go ahead."

"Who wrote the story?"

"Why, Marrylin, what story?"

She laughs, and I must say she has a nice laugh. "Peter, after three years of college, don't ask me to believe stories write themselves! Any girl who is innocent enough to believe that would get suet in her eyes looking for Sandy Claws in the chimney at Christmas! Tell me who wrote the story, and I will tell you where the diamonds are hidden. If it is by Conan Doyle, there is one answer; if it is by Dashiell Hammett there is another; if it is by Ellery Queen there is a third. For instance — Wait a minute, Peter! You said Mr. Findlay has a gun-room."

"That's right."

"With guns in it?"

"What would you expect to find in a gun-room? Pianos?"

"And a cannon? Now if Ellery Queen wrote that story, the jewels

would be in the shell Mr. Findlay is going to put in that cannon when he lowers the flag every sunset, and he will fire the shell into the river where a confederate is waiting for it."

"You mean the diamonds will be in a shell and he will shoot that shell?"

"That's the idea, Peter. Isn't it super?"

I thought a couple of seconds, "It's no good, Marrylin."

"Why not?"

"I wouldn't put it past a big ameba like Mr. Findlay to have a cannon because he has got about everything else there is in the world, but if he shot it off excepting on the Fourth of July folks would be kicking about the noise because folks are like that in New England, and anyhow there is not any river in Surrey, and there are not any confederates on this side of Mason and Dixie's line."

That doesn't stop her long. "Peter, does Mr. Findlay keep geese?"

"Geese?"

"Especially a white goose with a barred tail?"

I says, "No. He don't keep geese for the same reason he don't shoot a cannon, and you cannot put silencers on poultry."

"That is too bad," she says, "because if he kept geese, and if Conan Doyle wrote that story, you would find the blue carbuncle — I mean the rose-diamonds — in the crop of the goose I told you about which is a good three pounds lighter than the other goose, I mean the big white one they fattened for Christmas."

I says, "What's the use of talking, Marrylin? There were just amebas at that meeting of the Hobby Club, which are round animals and left-handed."

But she is just beginning. "Peter, tell me quick: is there a stuffed wildcat over the mantel?"

"Maybe there is a stuffed wildcat over the mantel in the gunroom where I have not been, but on the mantel in the living-room there is just the head of a man with a very white face."

"What a pity! I'm sorry there isn't any stuffed wildcat because if John Dickson Carr wrote the story that is where you would find the diamonds or maybe it would be the bullet the wife of the German scientist shot through the window before she shot the German scientist with another bullet. But wait a minute, Peter! My little gray cells!"

I wait.

She laughs that nice laugh of hers. "I have got it, Peter, and just like I said, it is obvious."

"You said that before and it didn't help."

"I mean I have found the solution of this case."

"That makes two people that have soluted it, only it don't stay like that."

"That is because you have not been to college, Peter. Have you got your little note-book handy? Well, make believe I'm the perfessor, and make notes while I'm lecturing. . . ." She talks for more than an hour, I guess, and now and then she reads

things she gets out of books she has brought with her to study on her vacation, she says. "And now, Peter, do you think Mr. Burton Findlay will be glad to see you when you ring his bell?"

I look at my watch. It is almost two A.M. in the morning, so I am driving past his house first till I see there is a light in the living-room, and then he answers the door himself. "Confound it," he says, "so it's you, Moran? Come in, come in, humpf! Don't keep me standing here in the draft where I'll catch my death of cold. I suppose you want to go to the living-room?"

"Yes, sir."

He unlocks the door and he locks it again after we are inside. "Speak up, Moran! Don't keep me on tender-hooks!"

I says, "Mr. Burton Findlay, I have found the answer to this case." I look at my notes which I wrote while Marrylin was lecturing, and I says, "Mr. Findlay, have you got a clean white cloth?"

"Will a towel answer?"

"If it is a clean white cloth." We spread it on a table, and I lift up the head of the gentleman with the white face which is over the mantel and I put it on the clean white cloth.

"And now?" he says, looking at me hard, "and now?"

I look at my notes. "If Mr. Doyle wrote this story, like it says in what I have got written here, this would be a bust of Napoleon."

"It is a bust of Napoleon."

I have put a heavy hammer in my coat pocket before I started out. I bring it down on the head of that bust, good and hard, and Napoleon breaks into more than a dozen pieces.

Mr. Findlay screams, "My God!"

I says, "That is correct, because it says in my notes, 'He gave a loud shout of triumph.' "

He screams, "That wasn't triumph, you confounded idiot!"

I says, "Wait a minute," and I read from my notes: " 'The famous black pearl of the Borgias was fixed in one splinter like a plum in a pudding.' "

"Well, is it?"

By now I have finished mashing up all the big pieces into little pieces, and I do not see any pearls or any diamonds. "Mr. Doyle did not write this story."

Mr. Findlay drops into a chair and holds his head in his hands. "I paid nine hundred dollars for that bust at auction and it was a bargain."

I didn't waste time. By one of the windows is a plant which is growing in a red vase, and the leaves of that plant are turned away from the window and not towards it. " 'If the story was written by Mr. Wallace there could be a long line of pots and when you see the leaves of one plant turned away from the light you will know somebody turned it when he hid the diamonds there because if you leave a plant alone it will turn its leaves to the light like a regular plant.' "

He says, "Stop, Moran!" but I am

too quick for him.

Whang!

Mr. Findlay jumps about four feet which is a pretty good jump for an old guy who is not in training. He says, "Moran, do you realize what you have done? You have smashed a sang de beef vase right out of the finest Ming period! The Metropolitan Museum tried to buy that vase from me but I would not sell it, and the leaves of the plant are turned away from the light because it is an artificial plant!"

But I am not listening to him. I am hunting through the pieces of the vase and the pot which was inside the vase and the dirt which was inside the pot for the eleven rose-diamonds, and I guess Mr. Wallace did not write the story because all I am finding is one bottle-cap and two worms.

Mr. Findlay is kneeling near the window picking up the pieces, but I am reading in my notes, " 'There is a story by Mr. Chesterton and you can't see the diamonds because they are in the water in a glass, and sometimes diamonds are invisible when they are under water, but always in detective stories.' " Well, you remember the tall blue-green glass and the flowers that were wilting in that glass the last time I was here, because I wrote about those flowers and if you have forgotten you can read my letter again.

Whang!

I guess Mr. Chesterton did not write this story, because all there is is hunks of glass and flowers and water and more hunks of glass, and I am lucky I have not cut my hand. Mr. Findlay looks like he was going to bust out crying. "Moran," he says, and this time he is real quiet, "Venetian glass — yes. Venetian glass — sixteenth century. A piece which simply cannot be replaced."

"I am sorry," I says, "but you are talking to a student in the Acme International Detective Correspondence School which is in South Kingston, N. Y., and our motto is, 'Let the Chips Fall Where They May.' " I do not know if we have got a motto like that, but the idea came to me just then and I think it is a good idea.

Mr. Findlay comes over, and he is handing me one of those One Dollar straight cigars. "Light this, Moran, and let me take care of your hammer for just a couple of minutes. I am afraid you will damage it if you are not careful." He strikes a match for me himself. "Moran, yesterday I offered you a thousand dollars to find the eleven rose-diamonds."

"Yes, Mr. Findlay, that is true."

"Today I will offer you two thousand dollars not to find them."

"Mr. Findlay, let me get this straight —"

"Moran, you heard me right the first time. I'm offering you twice the amount of the reward to drop the case."

I couldn't make head or tail out of that. I says, "Why should you do such a thing, Mr. Findlay? It does not sound honest to me."

"I mean to be honest."

"Are you going to give back the

diamonds you swiped?"

He gives a sigh. "Moran, I repeat I did not steal them. I didn't touch them. I don't know where they are."

"Then why are you making me that offer, Mr. Findlay?"

He gives me a funny look. "Moran, if you cannot guess why, after you have destroyed some of my most cherished works of art, I am not sure I can explain. Do you see that painting on the wall back of you? It is worth a couple of pecks of rose-diamonds. Do you see that marble statue in the corner? No, don't look at it, please! I would not like you to smash it up next because Nick Carter, the Demon Detective, once found some jewelry hidden in the body of such a statue."

"Why not?"

He opens a drawer in his desk and he locks up the hammer in it first. "Look, I will write you a check for two thousand dollars if you will solemnly swear never to darken my door again. Is it a bargain?"

I like two thousand dollars, which is more than one thousand dollars, but I do not want to take it because you will blow me up like you did once before when you wrote, "Accepting money makes you an accomplice if a crime is contemplated," and I do not know what crime a big ameba like Mr. Findlay is contemplating, so I says, "Before I take that check I will have to get permission from the Chief Inspector."

"The Chief Inspector? A regular detective?"

"Yes, sir; in South Kingston, N. Y."

"A regular detective coming here and spilling the whole story to the newspapers — after what you've done already?"

"I am afraid there is no help for it."

He laughs. "You are right to be afraid, Moran! Come with me. Come, Moran!" He unlocks the door, locking it after us, and he takes me into a room which is down the hall. "My gun-room," he says. "I have used these guns to shoot everything from antelopes to zebras, from chipmunks to crocodiles. This is my Ross thirty-thirty. It shoots a bullet which expands which means it gets larger after it hits you, so it makes a small hole when it goes in but it takes your liver with it when it goes out. This is my elephant gun which I used in Burma, where I shot both cobras and elephants. You will see it has two barrels. One barrel is for the female elephant and the other is for the male which always coils up in the same spot when you have killed its mate. I have not shot an elephant recently, so I would get back into form gradually, starting with the Chief Inspector and saving the second barrel for you. This here is a four-oh-five automatic rifle. It is a brutal weapon but any jury would acquit me. This is a Russian bazooka which will nail the Chief Inspector even if he comes in a tank. I have lots of ammunition. And now, Moran, let me escort you to the front door, which will be locked, bolted, and chained after you go out."

I says, "Mr. Findlay, you cannot scare the Chief Inspector!"

He licks his lips like he was hungry. "I look forward to meeting him. He will look pretty over the sights of the bazooka. Mention that when you write, and add that I may drive over to South Kingston one of these days even if he doesn't come here. Goodby, Moran."

Please telegraph me right away when you will arrive so I can wise you up about Mr. Findlay who is a peculiar man and I think I should tell you more about him.

TELEGRAM.

PETER MORAN, C/O MR. R. B. MCRAE, SURREY, CONN.

CHIEF INSPECTOR LEFT TO ATTEND HIS GRANDMOTHER'S FUNERAL IN MEXICO IMMEDIATELY AFTER READING YOUR LETTER AND DATE OF HIS RETURN IS UNCERTAIN STOP A COPY OF THIS TELEGRAM GOES TO MR. BURTON FINDLAY STOP I AM SIGNING IT BECAUSE OF MY LOYALTY TO CHIEF INSPECTOR COMMA MR. FINDLAY COMMA BUT I AM A DEFENCELESS WOMAN AND I APPEAL TO YOUR CAVALRY.

M. M. O'R, SECRETARY TO J. J. O'B.

From: Operative P. Moran, c/o Mr. R. B. McRae, Surry, Conn.,

To: Chief Inspector, Acme International Detective Correspondence School, South Kingston, N. Y. Please forward.

Well, I showed your secretary's telegram to Marrylin, and I says, "What does she mean, 'Your cavalry'? Mr. Findlay has not got any horses," and she says, "She meant 'chivalry,'" and I says, "I do not know that word," and she says, "No, I did not think you did or you would have told me what happened before you wrote that long letter, and then you nearly drove me mad by refusing to open your mouth until the telegram came in reply."

Well, I wipe off a chair in my office which is in the garage, and she asks me more than a million questions, and I have got to tell her my story over and over again.

By and by she shakes her head and she says, "If this was part of that cause I have been taking in college I guess they would give me 'F' which stands for Flunk. Peter, why did you have to be so drastic? You could have examined the bust of Napoleon without smashing it to bits."

"Mr. Holmes smashed his, it says in my notes."

"Yes, but he paid for it first."

"Don't be ridiculous, Marrylin. Where would I get nine hundred dollars, and if I had it do you think I would spend it all for the head of a gentleman with a pale face?"

"Then, too, you could have examined the earth about the plant without ruining the vase, and you could have turned the tall Venetian glass upside down very carefully and poured the water out of it."

I says, "Here are my notes which I made while you were lecturing, and the fellows in those stories were not extra careful."

"But Peter, you are not a regular detective, and I expected you to have more common sense! When I think of the beautiful things you have de-

stroyed, I could cry! Well, let's get going to Mr. Findlay's."

"Marrylin, are you crazy?"

"Maybe I was when I didn't read those notes you were making, but I batted out an 'A' in 'The Art and Craft of the Detective Story,' and I am not crazy now. What a fool I was not to think of her!"

"*Her?*"

"Dorothy Sayers, silly! Everything about this story has a woman's touch. Come, Peter."

"Not on your life."

"Are you a quitter, like the Chief Inspector?"

"You bet I am."

"Well, 'fraid cat, I won't need you. I can drive a car myself."

"O. K. Here are the keys."

"Goodby, Peter."

"Goodby, Marrylin."

So five minutes later we are ringing the bell at Mr. Findlay's house, and Jim Hewitt, the butler, is opening the door.

He says, "Pete, I am under strict orders not to let you in."

Marrylin says, "He's with me."

Jim shakes his head. "Orders is orders. If I see you I am to set off the burglar alarm, and then I am to reload Mr. Findlay's rifles as fast as he fires them."

Marrylin says, "Peter has got no hammer with him this time."

"No, and I want to get mine back. Mr. Findlay locked it up in his desk, and I will be needing that hammer."

"So it's you again, Moran, humpf?" The door of the living-room opens about an inch, and I can see Mr. Findlay looking out. "Moran, remember what I said!"

Marrylin pipes up, "Mr. Findlay, it's only me."

"Good Heavens! The Chief Inspector — a woman?"

"I'm not the Chief Inspector, Mr. Findlay, or any other kind of inspector — and I could have cried when Peter told me what he did."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I think I can find the diamonds for you. Peter, put your hands up."

"My hands up?"

"And keep them up. That way you won't do any more damage."

Mr. Findlay opens the door of the living-room further. "That is the first sensible word that has been spoken to me since Moran darkened my threshold. Hewitt, you may let them in."

We go in the living-room and he locks the door after us. Marrylin looks hard at the movie machine, which I do not understand, because I did not touch that at all; and then she looks at what is left of Napoleon — and the sang de beef vase — and the Venetian glass. "Oh, Peter, I could kill you!"

Mr. Findlay bobs his head up and down like he was pleased. "That is the second sensible word. Shall I lend you a rifle, Miss — Miss —?"

"Don't call me 'Miss,' Mr. Findlay. Call me Marrylin. Surely you must have heard of me through your granddaughter Helen, who is my classmate at Mt. Holyoke."

The old man smiles. "Of course!

Of course! She has mentioned you in nearly every letter. You play on the basketball team together."

"That's right."

I says, "Can I take my hands down now? My arms are getting tired."

They both yell, "No!" and Marrylin says, "Keep away from the walls, Peter, because you might touch one of the paintings. Just stand in the middle of the room, and act like the Statue of Liberty holding torches in both hands." She turns to Mr. Findlay. "Mr. Findlay, the mistake Peter made is obvious."

"He made nothing but mistakes."

"He did not recognize, as I do, that this story has a woman's touch."

He shakes his head, because he is not understanding any more than I am understanding, and that is not anything.

"Dorothy Sayers wrote a story how the stolen pearls are pinned to the mistletoe and they look like extra berries. Nobody notices them."

Mr. Findlay is still shaking his head. "My dear young lady, we are not concerned with pearls, and it is not customary in New England to put up mistletoe in August."

"I am just explaining the general idea, Mr. Findlay. If Dorothy Sayers wrote this story, we will find the eleven diamonds in a place so obvious that you would never think of looking there."

"Such as?"

"Peter mentioned a little heap of rounded pebbles — small pebbles, all about the same size — lying on the stand next to the motion-picture projector. Are they still there?"

"Everything that was in this room Sunday is still here."

Marrylin walks over and comes back with the pebbles. "All about the same size, as Peter noticed. Could I ask you, Mr. Findlay, if they are just a little larger than the diamonds?"

Now I am getting the idea, also, but Mr. Findlay beats me to it. "Marrylin," he says, "since you want me to call you that, they are indeed just a little larger."

They are nodding and smiling at each other. "Mr. Findlay, a hammer might do damage."

"It has already done damage."

"How about an instrument with which we might crack one of these stones?"

He hurries to a side-table. "Would a nutcracker answer?"

"We'll try it."

Their heads are close together, and I hear the stone go "Crack!"

"It's just an ordinary stone!"

"Moran, keep your hands up!"

"Yes, sir."

"Let's crack the rest."

Well, they crack them, one after another, and when I look over their shoulders I can see the inside of those stones is like the outside, and you can find stones like that all over Connecticut.

Mr. Findlay shakes his head. "I'm sorry, Marrylin."

"So am I. What is worse, I'm ashamed. I did so well in that cause in college, Mr. Findlay."

"What cause?"

But she gives a little yelp. "Why lidn't it come to me right off! The voman's touch! Another woman vriter! Not Dorothy Sayers! Agatha Christie!"

Now Mr. Findlay is getting interested. "I, too, have read many of Miss Christie's books, but what is the point?"

Marrylin is getting excited. "In a Christie story, the guilty person is always the least likely suspect!"

Mr. Findlay nods. "I follow you now, but Moran, strange as it seems, has already acted on your theory. I have no reason to steal. I am the least likely suspect. Moran accused me of taking the diamonds."

"But dear Mr. Findlay, you are *not* the least likely suspect! Think back who was here Saturday night."

"All right." He checks them off on his fingers. "Mr. & Mrs. McRae. Mr. Seymour. Mr. & Mrs. Underwood. Mr. & Mrs. Erskine-Bevin. Mr. & Mrs. Cutler. Mr. Jones. Mr. Pomeroy. Mr. & Mrs. Gaylord. I."

"But it isn't all."

"Hewitt, my butler."

"That isn't all."

"I have mentioned every person who was in the room —"

"Except the least likely suspect!"

I get a bright idea, and I says, "Napoleon!" but Mr. Findlay says, "Marrylin, I give up. You mention him."

"The Gaylord baby."

"My great-grandchild? How utterly ridiculous!"

"The least likely suspect!"

He swallows hard. "The baby was the only human being in the room who was searched. Why, the ladies took off every stitch of its clothing!"

But Marrylin has the bit in her teeth now, and there is no stopping her. "Then where do you think somebody — somehow — obtained the little pile of pebbles which we have just cracked, Mr. Findlay?"

They walk over to the baby-carriage together.

Mr. Findlay says, "We searched it."

"I know. And you laid this to one side."

"What?"

They are carrying it back to Mr. Findlay's desk, and Marrylin is shaking it while she walks, because it makes a cheerful sound. "The baby's rattle," she says. "Look at it! It is celluloid, and it has been cemented together badly, because you can see where some of the cement spilled over in the dark! And remember that while you were looking at the motion-pictures, it was just a few steps from the stand where the projector was running — automatic after you start it — to the baby-carriage — and there was a can of celluloid cement handy!"

Mr. Findlay is not saying anything, but he is nodding, and he is breathing deep. He sits down at his desk, and he opens his pen-knife. He takes the rattle in one hand and the knife in the other — and then he stops. "Young lady," he says, "I be-

lieve it is your honor . . ."

She slices through the rattle like it was so much putty. The halves of the ball spring open, and a shower of sparklers runs all over the desk. "Mr. Pomeroy's diamonds," she says.

"Eleven," says Mr. Findlay, "count 'em."

It is no use trying to catch Jim Hewitt, because it turns out he had his ear at the keyhole, and he lit out when he saw the jig was up; and Mr. Findlay has written me a check for Five Hundred Dollars, and he has written another like it for Marrylin, and while it says on that paper I have got in my pocket he will pay me One Thousand Dollars if I find the diamonds, I guess I will not make a fuss, because Marrylin is just a young tot who is working her way through college, and she is not a detective who has had lots of important cases like me.

Mr. Findlay and Marrylin are sitting at his desk, laughing and drinking sherry, though I do not like to drink out of those little glasses which break so easy if you handle them rough, but it is all the same to me because they will not let me take my hands down and they are beginning to weigh a ton, especially the one which is holding the check.

Mr. Findlay is bobbing his head like he is satisfied. "So Hewitt stole them, with the baby's assistance."

"Or the baby stole them, with Hewitt's," she says.

He stares at her hard. "I can see that the pebbles, which were round, and small, and about the same size, obviously came from the baby's rattle — so obviously that nobody thought of it excepting you — and that Hewitt made the substitution in the dark, taking it for granted we wouldn't give the pebbles a second glance; but there must have been clues which told you who was the guilty man long before that."

"Peter supplied them."

I says, "Yes, I supplied the clues," but Mr. Findlay says, "Keep your hands up, Moran," and then he says, "Go on, Marrylin."

"Hewitt told Peter that while Mr. Seymour's underwear was in ribbons, he — Hewitt — was wearing a union-suit which had no holes. In other words, long, long before the crime, he was ready to be searched."

Mr. Findlay bobs his head some more. "So he was, confound him!"

"If he was ready to be searched, he expected to be searched: therefore he wasn't a gentleman, don't you see? The gentlemen agreed at once that a search would be humiliating and useless. The one man who wasn't a gentleman hadn't foreseen that."

"Go on."

"The thief hid the stones in this room — obvious again . . ."

"Yes, I was sure of that."

". . . and he planned to recover them next week — next month — next year — whenever you got tired of keeping the room locked. Therefore he was a person who would have easy access to this room — alone!

Now that we know where he hid the diamonds, the rest of the pattern fills itself in. Eventually the rattle would be given back to the baby, and the thief would steal it — or open it again, and make a second substitution. There were three or four different lines of reasoning, but they all led to the same man."

"Hewitt, confound him!"

"And Peter didn't believe when I told him I knew right off who was the thief."

"He wouldn't believe: naturally not!"

"No, naturally not."

They are both laughing, but they stop all of a sudden when I ask a question. "You will have to explain one thing, Marrylin! You said what put you on the right track was the woman's touch! Well, where was it?"

She folds Mr. Findlay's check and puts it away before she answers. "I made many inquiries before I came here," she says. "The baby — the least likely suspect — is a girl baby. After that, Peter, it was elementary."

EDITOR'S NOTE

It might be interesting to identify the cross-references which Percival Wilde made to other detective-story writers and other detective stories . . .

First, the vanishing-diamond situation: When they disappear in the dark and when the thief is invited, again in the dark, to return the stones, Mr. Wilde is harking back to Owen Johnson's classic tale, "One Hundred in the Dark," in MURDER IN ANY DEGREE *(1913); a similar situation occurs in Viola Brothers Shore's "Opals Are Bad Luck," which appeared in EQMM, issue of January 1943.*

Next: The Ellery Queen disposal-of-gems-by-sunset-gun is the main point of "The Adventure of the Treasure Hunt," in THE NEW ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN *(1940); this story also appeared in EQMM, issue of Fall 1941.*

Continuing: The John Dickson Carr stuffed-wildcat-idea is to be found in "The Proverbial Murder," published in EQMM, issue of July 1943. (Deduction: Surely Percival Wilde is a reader of EQMM from 'way back!)

The two references to Conan Doyle are easy to spot: precious-stones-in-the-crop-of-a-goose can only stem from "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle," in THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(1892); the bust-of-Napoleon-hiding-place derives from "The Adventure of the Six Napo-*

leons," in THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *(1905). (Further deduction: Mr. Wilde knows his Holmes too!)*

Diamonds-concealed-in-a-flower-pot, attributed to Edgar Wallace, draws a complete blank in your Editor's memory. We can recall no such story by Wallace. Similarly, we have no recollection whatever of a tale by Chesterton in which diamonds, placed in a glass of water, become invisible. (Still further deduction: Is Mr. Wilde beginning to pull our legs? Shame on you, Mr. Wilde!)

Nick Carter, according to Mr. Wilde, once located some jewelry in the body of a statue. This could easily be true. The first Nick Carter story appeared in 1889 and old Nick is still going strong. After 57 years of wild and woolly wonderworking, and as the hero of literally thousands of thrilling adventures, it is six-two-and-even that somewhere along the bloodhound trail Nick once discovered jewels inside of statuary. So we concede that citation, even though we cannot identify the exact source.

The stolen-pearls-pinned-to-mistletoe-to-look-like-extra-berries is traceable to Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey story, "The Necklace of Pearls," in her book HANGMAN'S HOLIDAY *(1933).*

The allusion to Agatha Christie cannot be laid at the door of any specific Christie story; it refers, of course, to Agatha Christie's plot technique, especially to her masterly manipulation of the least-likely-suspect device.

So endeth Mr. Wilde's salmagundi of secret hiding places. We voice only one regret: that it did not occur to Mr. Wilde to give Mr. Findlay a Chinese servant. Had he done this, Mr. Wilde could have borrowed another leaf out of the golden book of detective lore. Imagine P. Moran chasing the Chinese servant, grabbing his pigtail with one hand and slicing it off with a huge pair of scissors in the other hand — and there in the thick part of the pigtail nestle the missing diamonds! If you don't believe it, see Sax Rohmer's story, "The Pigtail of Hi Wing Ho," in TALES OF CHINATOWN *(1922).*

(Continued from other side)

autiful woman wearing only a thin nightgown d holding a gun—*from which one shot has just en fired!*

That's the *first* predicament in which PERRY ASON suddenly finds himself. Then the lady ands before the court. Accused of *murder*. Ma- n, now her lawyer, is the only person in the orld who believes her to be innocent. So what oes the lady do? *She FIRES him!*

Why? And why is everyone so anxious to get e oil leases when *there is no oil* (or *is* there?). Who is measuring Perry Mason for a snug defa- ation of character suit . . . or is it a COFFIN? Why is the millionaire yacht-owner trying to row away $15,000? DID the "half-wakened ife" murder her husband . . . or was it some *com- letely*-awake killer?

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A scream! A splash! A shot! Then the cry, "Man Overbo-o-oard!" And you find yourself clutching a

(Continued on other side)

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