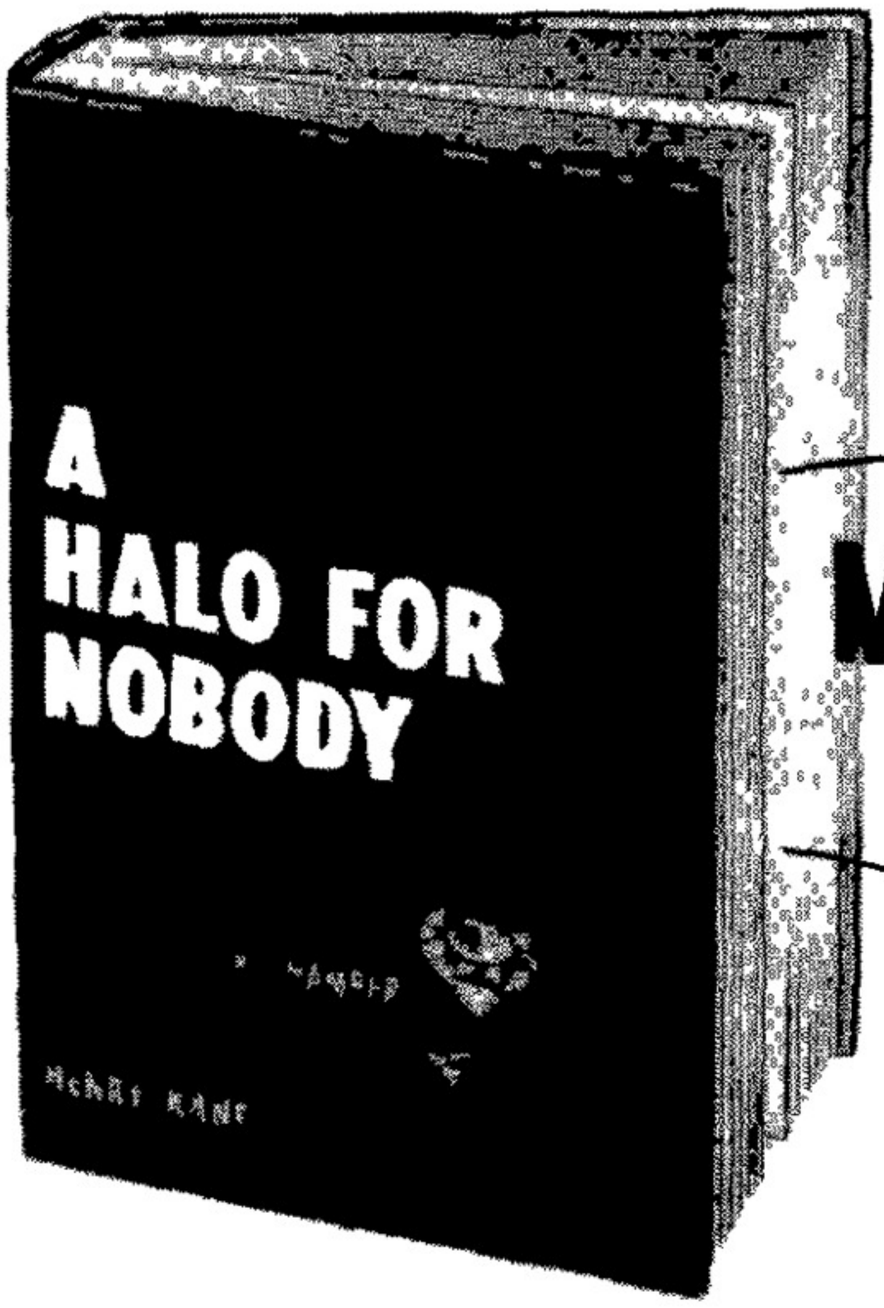
ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

An American Mercury Publication

25 Cents

★ Number 39

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD



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the new bombshell

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A HALO FOR NOBODY

BY HENRY KANE

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHER: *Lawrence E. Spivak* EDITOR: *Ellery Queen*

Vol. 9, No. 39. FEBRUARY 1947. *Published monthly by The American Mercury, Inc., at 25¢ a copy Annual subscription $3.00 in U. S. and possessions and in the countries of the Pan-American Union; $3.50 in Canada; $4.00 in foreign countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.*

Entered as second class matter August 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Published also in a Talking-Record Edition by The American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, Kentucky. Manufactured in the United States of America.

Cover and Typography by George Salter

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Dear Readers:

Owing to unforeseen production difficulties — press-time bottlenecks, distribution tie-ups, paper shortages, and other post-war hardships which unfortunately still plague us — we were unable to delay this issue long enough to receive all the answers to our first Monthly Prize Contest. The 31 winning solutions to the problem of who killed Zelda the Snake-Charmer, in Clayton Rawson's "The Clue of the Tattooed Man," will be announced in our next issue, dated March 1947, on sale early (we hope) in February 1947.

The Editor asks your continued patience for another month — the circumstances causing this delay were genuinely beyond our control. You might say, it's an Act of the Gods — the Gods of Industry.

With sincere regrets,

ELLERY QUEEN

MONTHLY CONTEST NUMBER 3

WITH ANOTHER $250 IN CASH PRIZES

Step right up and unriddle the third in our series of reader-participation Prize Contests, based again on a short-short by Clayton Rawson about his famous magician detective, the Great Merlini. For the benefit of those who did not compete in the two previous contests, we give you a résumé of the conditions and rules: At that point in the story where the Great Merlini announces he knows who-did-it, we break the story off abruptly, omit the author's own solution, and give you a golden ($250 worth) opportunity to play Armchair Detective; figure out the answer, write it on typewriter or in longhand (50-to-100 words will do the trick thoroughly) and mail your solution to the address below. The best job of detecting will win First Prize of $100; the thirty next best will be sent $5 each; in the event of ties duplicate prizes will be awarded.

The judges are the members of EQMM's editorial staff. All contestants agree that the decisions of the judges will be accepted as final. We guarantee that every entrant has an equal chance to win and that every entry will receive the judges' personal consideration — we cannot undertake, however, to return any submissions.

The awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — which means (1) on the accuracy of your solution, and (2) on the simplicity, clarity, and soundness of your reasoning.

And that's all there is to it. The rest is up to you and your little grey cells. You will find that Mr. Rawson's criminological conundrums are neither too easy nor too hard. You do not have to qualify as an "Information Please" expert; on the other hand, it is unlikely that grammar school students will walk off with the lion's share of the prizes, unless they are either "Quiz Kids" or have high I.Q.'s. In other words, Mr. Rawson has conceived and executed his little posers with a subtle blend of malice aforethought and lovingkindness.

The answers to this month's case must reach Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, New York, no later than February 10, 1947, and we shall announce the winners in our May 1947 issue, on sale early in April 1947.

So dive in — the murder's fine!

One more point: the continuation of these monthly contests depends

wholly on their popularity. If you like them, if enough readers respond, Mr. Rawson will be delighted to keep challenging your wits, and EQMM will be delighted to keep offering its readers $250 in monthly cash prizes. This is a 'tec triangle — but you've got to do your part!

THE CLUE OF THE MISSING MOTIVE

by CLAYTON RAWSON

I WONDERED if you'd be questioning me," the Great Merlini said as he opened the door at 13½ Washington Square North and admitted a scowling Inspector Gavigan and an even glummer Lieutenant Malloy. Merlini indicated a headline in the newspaper he had been reading:

PHANTOM GUNMAN SHOOTS UNIDENTIFIED MAN
$30,000 in Cash
Found on Corpse

"A man gets killed at dusk last evening just across the street in the park — a hundred feet or so from my front door. Scores of people there, as usual, and one man actually saw the victim as he fell. Yet no one saw the murderer or heard the shot. I'm a magician. So I suspected you might suspect me."

Gavigan sat down wearily. "Have you," he asked, "ever been in Hillsdale, Oklahoma?"

"Of course," Merlini admitted. "I'm an old circus man. When I was with the Kelley & Edwards Combined Shows in '18 we had a bad 'Hey Rube' in Hillsdale and —"

"That," Malloy said in a tired voice, "makes you our No. 1 suspect. None of the others ever heard of the burg before."

"What," Merlini asked, "does Hillsdale, Oklahoma have to do with an invisible gunman taking potshots at an unidentified man in New York City's Washington Square park?"

"If," Gavigan said, "I knew the answer to that I'd know what the missing motive was and which of the suspects next door is guilty."

"Next door?"

"Yes. You see, James J. Vanpool, the man who was in the park and saw the victim fall, phoned the police —"

"The paper," Merlini put in, "says he lives across the park on Washington Square South. I think I've seen him going in next door. Is he a short, fat, middle-aged man — the jolly, effervescent type — horn-rimmed glasses, military mustache?"

"That's him. Son of old man Vanpool, the Wall Street Wizard, who left James and his sister, Mrs. Elsa Blackwell, a couple of million dollars apiece. She lives next door — an invalid widow who's been bed-ridden for years. Vanpool comes over nearly every evening and plays cribbage with her. And this morning he showed up in my office with a single-shot target pistol equipped with a silencer.

Said he suspected it might be the death weapon. Ballistics checked it. It was."

"He says," Malloy added, "that he figured the absence of a report at the time of the shooting indicated a silencer. He had seen one on a gun in his sister's house; he looked, found the gun had been fired recently, and trotted in to us with it. Apparently no one saw the killer because he fired from a window in the Blackwell house."

"And the gun," Merlini said, "belongs to Elsa's daughter and Vanpool's niece — Diana Blackwell."

"Yeah," Malloy nodded. "But how did you —"

"I read the papers," Merlini explained. "Diana's a leading light in café society and holder of the women's skeet shooting championship."

The Lieutenant nodded. "A glamor girl and an Annie Oakley combined. And she's engaged to Count Alexis Corvoisier, a fashion designer with an accent and waves in his hair. Uncle James wants us to throw him in the can because he was in the house when the shooting occurred and could have used the gun. But that goes for Diana and her mother too."

"Why," Merlini asked, "does he put the finger on the Count?"

"Claims he's a fortune hunter," Gavigan said. "Says he checked up and discovered the Count has a wife and three children in Biarritz. He ordered Corvoisier to clear out a couple of days ago, threatening, if he didn't, to tell Diana."

"Which means," Merlini said, "that the Count has reason to take a pot-shot at Uncle James. And Uncle, to save the family honor, might be tempted to do the same to the Count."

"And that's not the half of it," Gavigan added. "Mrs. Blackwell's will leaves everything to Diana, and the old lady claims her daughter and the Count have been trying to poison her. Diana says her mother has delusions, that ten years of confinement in a bed has given her a Grade-A persecution complex. Could be. The old lady won't let anyone come up to the third floor where she lives, except brother James."

"That dough," Malloy said, "is a terrific motive just the same — two million bucks worth. And if the old lady thinks Diana and her boy friend are trying to get her, she has a motive too; she might try to save herself by getting them first. Also, if Diana has heard, as Uncle James has, that her fiancé is already married, I can see her giving the Count the business."

"A situation," Merlini said, "almost as explosive as nuclear fission. Vanpool, Diana, and her mother have motives to kill the Count; the Count has reason to knock off Vanpool, and Diana and her mother each have a reason to polish off the other. But you said something about a *missing* motive, Inspector? Seems to me you've got more motives now than you can use."

"I know," Gavigan growled. "Motives for a lot of people who didn't

get killed — at least not yet. But wait until you hear who the victim was."

"I've been wondering when you'd get to that. You've identified him?"

Gavigan looked unhappier than ever. "I'm afraid so. We showed the old lady a photo and had the others view the body. They all swear they never set eyes on the guy before. So we gave them all lie-detector tests and got exactly the same answer, plus the fact that none of them has ever been in or anywhere near Hillsdale, Oklahoma."

"And that," Merlini asked, "is where the victim hails from?"

"Yes. When we found the guy's mustache was a phony and his hair was dyed grey, we figured his glasses might be part of a disguise too. Then Malloy remembered a teletype message describing a wanted embezzler: Name: Wilbur Sloan; Age: 49; Height: 5 foot 2 inches; Weight: 193; sandy hair, mole on left hip, and so on. It all checked. Wilbur took it on the lam out of Hillsdale with thirty grand a week ago just one jump ahead of the bank examiners. They found his accounts shy another fifty thousand over the last six months and evidence that some of his best friends were bookmakers. We've established that he arrived in New York the morning of the day he was murdered and it's the first time in his life he's ever been out of Oklahoma."

"I see now," Merlini said, "what you mean by a missing motive. Nearly everybody next door has motives for killing off each other but nobody has one for killing Wilbur. And yet one of them shot him dead. But what bothers you, Inspector? That obviously means that he lost his life for the same reason he lost all that money on the horses. And, of course, that tells you who killed him."

"Huh?" Gavigan shook his head dizzily. "I don't get it . . ."

Who killed Wilbur Sloan, the embezzler? Was it
James J. Vanpool
Mrs. Elsa Blackwell
Diana Blackwell
Count Alexis Corvoisier

And what are your reasons? Mail your solution at once to Contest Editor, ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, *570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, New York. $250 in cash prizes for the 31 best solutions!*

Recently your Editor went out on one of his periodic hunting trips — hunting for old stories worthy of reprint. As every true fan knows, the excitement of the chase is just as intense in an armchair as in the jungle primeval. On these forays into old ferretry your Editor is a combination hunter, explorer, researcher, and archaeologist: we track down, blaze forgotten trails, seek among lost ruins, and excavate for Queen's treasures. And at the end of every expedition we invariably have "new" discoveries to pass on to loyal EQMM readers.

Would you like to know the results of our latest safari into sleuthdom? Here is the record of our most recent "finds":

1 detective story by J. B. Priestley
2 crime stories by William Irish
1 Christmas story by Ngaio Marsh
1 detective story by Stephen Vincent Benét
2 detective stories by Rufus King
2 detective stories by Cornell Woolrich

Happy hunting, indeed! And all these "unknown" tales will come to you in future issues of EQMM — all except one. That one we are going to give you now — "You Take Ballistics" by Cornell Woolrich.

The story of Detective Harvey is "so round, so firm, so fully packed, so free and easy on the draw" (a perfectly relevant quotation, as you will learn for yourself). It is not one of Mr. Woolrich's tales calculated to breed goose pimples or induce shivers — admittedly, the Woolrich master touch is his extraordinary talent for evoking terror, especially the terror of the commonplace. "You Take Ballistics" is straight detection, and as such, one of the most satisfying short stories Cornell Woolrich has ever concocted.

YOU TAKE BALLISTICS

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

HARVEY walked down the night-shaded street without seeming to have any objective. That is to say, not fast, not tautly, not staring around him much. Just a man drifting somewhere without urgency. Youthful appearing, about thirty, it would have been hard to say what he was. Bank clerk, auto salesman, or some sort of a contractor. Gray suit of some fuzzy material, couple of seasons behind in cut; snap-brim felt hat; one hand carried in his pocket. The glow of a street light washed over his face as he passed under it, faded out again. Gave a snapshot of virile, intelligent features in perfect repose, eyes straight ahead.

Ten shadow-bisected doorways ticked past him. In the eleventh from the corner, the shadow was bulgy, not

a clean-cut diagonal from lower left to upper right. Harvey didn't seem to look at that doorway any more than he had at the previous ten. But suddenly he wasn't moving any more. You couldn't say he'd stopped short, nothing as abrupt as that. He just was staying in one place now, in a line with that doorway.

He said, as though talking to himself aloud: "He made any move out of the apartment?"

The shadow answered, "Nope, hasn't left the place once."

Harvey seemed to have expected the sound of a human voice to reach him from that doorway, didn't start in surprise or anything the way a casual passerby should have. Instead he looked thoughtfully over at a small old-fashioned apartment building on the opposite side of the way. The face of it was a chessboard of alternate black squares and yellow squares. You couldn't really tell which of the lighted windows in particular he was looking at, not without a surveying instrument to measure the angle of inclination of his eye. Years of sleuthing had bred this manner in Harvey.

"Still up there, eh?" he murmured. "How about a back way?"

"Peters is covering that, from the yard of the next house over. . . . There's his shadow on the shade, anyway — see it just then?"

Harvey didn't say whether he had or not.

The doorway shadow said, "Did you get any orders, or do we just keep watching a while longer? I think he's set for the rest of the night."

"No, you won't have to stand here any more," Harvey said. "I'm pinching — now. That's what I was sent over for. Come on up with me and let's see what we've got."

The doorway shadow became a man that walked across the street with Harvey, striking himself twice just below the hip as he walked. "My gams are coming off."

"I know. I've had to do enough of that lamppost stuff, myself. At least it was warm tonight."

They went in a cheap mosaic-floored foyer lighted by amber bulbs. A colored lad put the two front legs of his chair back on the mosaic, regretfully discarded a pink racing-form. "Yeah-suh, gents," he yawned dolefully.

"Coleman; take us up," said Harvey, in a voice that brooked no argument.

A vintage elevator that shivered as it rose, slowly toiled to the third with them. The man from the doorway glanced into the warped strip of mirror, stroked his face.

"I need a shave," he murmured irrelevantly.

"How long's he been living here?" asked Harvey.

"Coleman? Two year, about," answered the boy lethargically.

When they got out he started to point.

"We know our way," Harvey assured him.

He sank slowly from sight, already reading the racing sheet again.

Harvey pushed a flat white button and it jangled cheaply on the other side.

He murmured, "What a dump this is!" with a flick of his eyes upward at the hallway ceiling. The other man was grimly undoing the lower button of his coat.

Harvey said, "Naw, that'll be all right about the gun — I don't think he'll give us any trouble," with a dissuading gesture.

Three footfalls sounded, each one clearer than the one before, and the door opened unhesitatingly.

A man in shirt-sleeves and unbuttoned vest looked out at them without much interest, with even less surprise, and with absolutely no fear in his face or manner. He didn't say anything.

Harvey touched two fingers to the snap brim of his hat, in a salute not meant to be taken too seriously. "We're from Headquarters, Coleman," he said.

Not a muscle changed on the face looking out at them.

Kaska, the stake-out, steadied the already open door with the back of one hand, as a hint that it should stay that way.

Coleman opened it even wider. "You want to come in, or you just want to talk to me where you are?"

"We want to talk to you downtown. But first we want to come in."

"Come ahead in; nobody's stopping you," was the toneless answer.

One on each side of him, he went down the short hall into the living room. A small cheap radio was making faint noise on a table. A pencil stub and a newspaper lay on the seat of an easy chair across from it. The newspaper was open at a crossword puzzle. About half the time-killer had been filled in. A lighted cigarette was burning on the edge of the table. The first thing Coleman did was pick it up and thriftily go ahead with it.

"Sit down," said Harvey. Coleman removed paper and pencil, sank down in the chair. He glanced at the puzzle, finished penciling in a word he'd been working at when they interrupted him, then pocketed the pencil and put the paper aside.

"I wanted to get that one down before I forgot it," he explained, unasked.

He raised his arms and clasped his hands behind his head.

Kaska, without seeming to rush around, had already been in and out of the flat's kitchenette, bathroom, and hall closet, and was now in the bedroom. Harvey said, from where he was, close to Coleman:

"Find it?"

"Nope," his mate called back.

Harvey asked, "You own a gun?"

"Why, sure," said Coleman, untroubledly, head still pillowed against his hands.

"Where is it?"

"Tell him to look in the bottom drawer of the bureau, in there on the right hand side, under my winter underwear."

If there was derision in the remark it was by implication rather than ex

pression. Harvey flicked a look at him to show that he'd gotten it even that way.

Coleman waited a minute, till Kaska had already started back toward them. Then, languidly: "I've got a license for it too. You don't seem as anxious to find that as the gun. Sorry to disappoint you, but they go together."

He smiled at the molding high up on the wall.

Before the weapon was even in the room, Harvey said: "Fired it lately?"

"Yeah, sure thing." With a calm, condescending nod, elbows still up behind him.

Kaska came in with it pillowed on one of Coleman's own handkerchiefs and handed it to Harvey. Harvey whiffed it.

"Vanilla," jeered Coleman.

Harvey broke it with the handkerchief. "One out, eh?" he said. He fitted it together again, wrapped it, pocketed it. "Thirty-eight," he remarked. Then to Coleman, "When'd you fire it last?"

"Right last night." An amiable shrug. "Why should I lie? You're going to give me the nitrate test as soon as you get me downtown, anyway."

Harvey's lower jaw shot out at him like a bureau drawer. "Into Edmund Lombard's body. Right?"

Coleman didn't even blink his eyes. "Wrong. Into the floor — here." The corners of his mouth only hinted at a smile.

"Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?"

Again that shrug. "I only know what I know. Can't do any better than that for my own brother."

"We know what we know too."

"We should get together sometime," was the insolent answer.

Kaska, the less experienced of the two, played into his hands, asked him what he wanted to be asked. "If you fired it into the floor, where's the crease?" Harvey had known he'd be able to produce or he wouldn't have brought the point up.

"See that little scatter rug over there? Just kick it aside. I can do better than a crease. Use your penknife and you'll probably be able to get out the slug."

Kaska squatted down on his heels over the cavity, gouged at it, finally disinterred the bullet.

Harvey felt like saying. "Don't made a sucker out of yourself," but let him go ahead.

He didn't like this kind of arrest; he was bull enough to want a little anxiety shown by the suspect. Even bluster was all right. But not this self-assurance; it left him feeling slightly at a loss. "Take your hands down from behind your head," he said curtly. "Get your favorite hat and start moving toward the door. You're coming with us."

Coleman obeyed, smiling openly now. "Can I consider myself under arrest?"

"If you've gotta have a name for it — not yet. But you're going to be our guest for the rest of the night."

"And I suppose have the hell beaten

out of me." But he said it contemptuously.

"Ask for it a couple of times and you might," Harvey promised darkly, locking the door after them.

The colored lad came up slowly, eyes still fastened on his racing form. Going down, Coleman said affably, "Say, tell me, Archie, have you picked a winner *yet* off that thing in the two years I been living here?" To show how untroubled he felt, Harvey supposed.

Harlem split his face. "Naawsuh!" he chortled.

Harvey let Kaska take their man out in the street ahead of him, hung behind a minute with the hallboy. "A gun go off anywhere at all in this building last night?"

"Yaasuh. *His* did."

"What time?"

"'Bout one o'clock. Folks on the flo' below done foamed me down, say we done heard a shot, better go up see if anybody's hurt. So I rung his bell, but he was all right, only kinda scared. Says, 'Whew! I had a narrow shave that time, Archie. I ain't gonna touch that thing no mo'.' So I move the rug over it fo' him, so landlo'd won't catch on."

"Where was the gun?"

"Lying right where he drap it when it go off like that an' give him a fright."

Harvey had been hoping it would still be in his hand, proving his "fright" to be phony, a stage effect. No soap. He moved on disgustedly toward the door.

"He in trouble?" the hall-boy quavered after him anxiously.

"No, we're giving a little party for him." He didn't like this thing. It hung together too well. He caught up with Kaska and Coleman walking along together toward the corner, Kaska gripping the other tightly by the slack of his sleeve just below the elbow.

They hailed a cab at the corner, took him uptown, not down, to one of the outlying precinct houses. They didn't book him. They tossed him in the back room, cleaned him, and left him there for a minute.

Harvey turned the .38 over to Leffinger, his Captain, who had been waiting for them to show. Kaska delivered the bullet he'd dug out of the floorboard.

"You bring him in?" Leffinger asked.

"Yessir. He's in back. Claims he was fiddling with this and it went off into the floor, at one o'clock last night."

Leffinger, Harvey could see, didn't like this any more than he had himself. "Beat us to the paraffin test, eh? Well, he could have fired it into Lombard, gone home with it, reloaded, and fired again into the floor so things would match up." Leffinger was a tall, powerfully built man, with graying hair but charcoal-black eyebrows. "Turn these over to Ballistics."

"They reported yet on the one in Lombard?"

"It's probably on its way now."

"While we're waiting we'll go in

and ask him a few. You take charge of the witness, Kask. One buzz, throw the elevator boy from Lombard's place in on him; two buzzes, the other guy."

Coleman, when Harvey went back with the Captain, was sitting calmly puffing away on one of his own cigarettes.

"Good evening," he remarked imperturbably.

"You'll find out how good it is before we're through," scowled Leffinger.

Harvey pulled the cigarette out of his mouth, snapped on a glaring shaded light. "Get over there," he said. He put the original light out. A cone of blind whiteness drenched Coleman. The rest of the room was dark.

Leffinger started in a minor key. "Suppose you tell us what you were doing last night?"

Coleman said: "I left my place at nine, and walked down to Oriole and State streets. I made a telephone call from the cigar store there on the corner."

A pointing finger dug into the hollow tent of white light.

"Who to?"

"To Edmund Lombard."

There was a slight hitch; on their part, not his. Barely noticeable; a catch in the rhythm of the questioning, as though it had tripped over itself.

"Go ahead," was rapped out.

"He wasn't in. I hung around, stood outside of there a solid hour, then I called him back. I got him the second time. Told him I wanted to see him. He knew what about."

"We don't."

"He had a cute little racket. He collected bets on the nags. Didn't turn them in. Pocketed them instead. The horses never came in anyway, so who knew the difference? He did it once too often. A long shot I'd bet on came in, twenty to one. He was caught short, couldn't pay me that much out of his pocket in time, so he lammed. I got wind of him again only last week. Anyway, last night — he said sure, okay, he'd come down and meet me. I told him where I was. I told him I'd give him half an hour."

"So he didn't show?"

Coleman shrugged.

"I didn't give him a chance not to. I was in the lobby of his hotel five minutes after I'd hung up. I've been around. I rode up in the car and when I knocked he took me for the porter come to get his bags. He let me in pretty. He was all set to move out. I said, 'Trouble you for that two thousand and I'll be on my way.' He saw he was cornered, took it philosophically. Snickered and said, 'You can't blame a guy for trying, anyway,' and came across then and there, right out of his inside pocket. He asked for a receipt for it, so I couldn't come back at him twice. Fair enough; I gave him one, on the hotel stationery."

In the dark beyond him, Harvey's eyes met Leffinger's for a second. They'd found that receipt on the body.

"Wind it up. Let's hear how good you can make it," the Captain grunted remorselessly.

"That's all. I said, 'We're clear now,' and I backed out. He even began unpacking his things again before I closed the door, said he might as well stay where he was now."

"So that's how it was?" Leffinger purred. "Sure you didn't leave out anything?"

And then with a bang like a firecracker, Harvey's bellow: "Why'd you leave out about killing him? We wanted to hear that too!"

He jolted, but just with the noise, not with guilt. Came back with plaintive calmness:

"Because it belongs out. Because I didn't."

Harvey's face loomed palely out of the encircling darkness at him, barked, "You didn't have a gun on you when you went up there?"

"You're damn tooting I did!" Coleman ejaculated.

Again that slight jolt in their teamwork at the flat admission, when they'd been keyed up to run into a barrier of denial. "Why'd you go up there with a gun — if you didn't intend to shoot him?" The Captain's voice rebounded, but with a trace of lameness.

"I took it up there with me to keep him from shooting *me!* Think he'd'a come across so easy if he didn't know I had one on me? Think he'd'a let me get out that door with two thousand bucks, if he didn't lamp my hand near my pocket the whole time?"

"Don't lie. Whaddye take us for? When we bring you in here we want the truth!" Harvey spaced the words, took a grip on the long hair of Coleman's scalp from behind, pulled his head down over the back of the chair so that his face was turned straight up into the blinding light. "You shot him first without asking any questions, then you collected your dough, then you wrote out your receipt — to a dead man! Ain't that it? Answer me! Ain't that it?"

His head wobbled against the chair top; he was trying to shake it negatively.

Harvey saw Leffinger's great fist come hurtling, corkscrewing, out of the opposite darkness, beyond the light; suddenly pushed the head upright and into it, to meet it halfway. The impact went all up Harvey's own arm.

The fist withdrew, he let go from behind, and Coleman faded slowly sidewise off the chair like something made of rubber.

Leffinger went around to the door, opened it, growled: "Never mind those witnesses. He's spiked them for us! Come in here, Kask, and give us a hand with this."

Harvey had him up again, pinned there on the chair under the light, like a fly they were pulling the wings off; one hand stiff-armed into a pronged fork against the base of his throat. He was reviving him by slapping him backhand across the eyes. "Come out of it! Wait'll we give you something to keel over about! When

you met the hotel porter on the way down, why'd you tell him Lombard had changed his mind and was staying?"

"Because" — faintly — "I was afraid Lombard might take him to be me and let fly at him."

"No! Because he was already lying plugged behind that door, and you wanted to get out of the building into the clear before he was found."

"If I did, I didn't go very far. I spent the next ten minutes in the coffee shop on the ground floor of the hotel, right off the main entrance."

He had; he'd been seen in there, taking his time over a cigarette and a cup of black coffee. The night counter man was one of the witnesses they'd been holding in readiness outside the door.

Kaska put his oar in, with all the rookie's confidence in verbal traps. "Where'd you put the two thousand you took from him after you shot him?" The last four words quickly slurred over.

Coleman was still dazed and heaving from the blow and the fall. But he managed to sidestep the trap instinctively. "I put the two thousand he *handed to me still alive*, to my account at the bank, first thing this morning."

They knew that already! He'd been under surveillance all day, while they marshaled and checked their witnesses against one another, and got ready for him. The way he'd avoided the pitfall just now, half groggy as he was, didn't improve their tempers any. Harvey was inclined to think they'd jumped him too soon, hadn't been anywhere near as ready as they thought they were. But at the time, the knowledge that he'd banked the two thousand had seemed plenty strong enough for a springboard, and now they'd even added the gun to it, picked up at his own flat. And still the thing wouldn't jell.

Leffinger came outside with Harvey disgustedly, left him to Kaska and another guy for a while. "I better get out. If I hang around here much longer I'm going to hurt him!" Leffinger said.

"This'll keep up all night and all day tomorrow," he lamented in his office, drawing his sleeve across his forehead. "I know the type. One of these squirmy cusses that don't give you a grip."

Harvey said, "How does it look?"

"It's him all right. But we haven't been able to trap him into a single discrepancy. He beats us to the rap, d'you notice, all along the line? Admits he called him, admits he went up there, admits he took a gun. I thought sure we'd get him on one of them, and the rest would come out like a tail to a kite. But he admits everything but the actual killing itself, and that's the one point we can't stretch our witnesses far enough to cover. We've got a case against him on circumstantial, but those kind don't stand up five minutes in court and I won't send him through the mill so he should turn around and have the laugh on us afterward. I'd rather turn him loose now of my own ac-

cord. And if we whack a confession out of him, all he'll have to whisper is 'police brutality,' and the jury will throw it out. They always do, the soft-hearted slobs. The way the System is run in this state, the police have two strikes against them. All the breaks are the criminal's."

Harvey said: "Funny the shot wasn't heard. That alone would pin it on him."

"Peters was working on that all morning. It's an old building with thick walls. The room on one side was empty and there was a souse in the one on the other. Unless somebody happened to be passing the door at the time, and I guess no one was, not much chance of it attracting attention." Leffinger sat down wearily, with the dejected air of a man who's done the best he can and has nothing to show for it. "Go over there and case his flat. I don't know what I expect you to find that'll do us any good. We've got the gun and we know where the two thousand went and we're still right where we were — but try your luck anyway. Give it a good workout; you won't be missing anything much around here. I can tell by one look at him he's primed for a long hard winter. That's why I think he's the McCoy."

"'Kay," said Harvey glumly.

The ubiquitous Archie was funnier than he intended to be when he looked up from his dope-sheet, assured Harvey solemnly: "Coleman didn't come back yet since the las' time he went out with you, boss."

"Don't hold your breath till he does," was the grim answer. "Upsy daisy. I've got the key."

"I ain't suppose' to leave folks in without the tenants being 'round."

Harvey hitched up the lining of a vest pocket disgustedly. "Rub your nose against this."

Archie just said, "Umn-*Umn.* I shoulda figured that in the fust place," with a pessimistic wag of his head.

Harvey closed himself in the room, put on the lights, took off his coat, and did a microscopic job. He hated this stuff, "drudgery" he called it. It almost never turned up anything, copy-books to the contrary. It didn't this time either.

In the living room, items: the crossword puzzle, the pencil, the cigarette butt Coleman had been smoking when they rang the bell. Also the package the latter had come out of, half full.

In the bathroom, items: fifteen discarded razor blades. He evidently kicked them under the tub when he was through with them.

In the kitchenette, items: a can of chile, three empty beer bottles, and around thirty or so roaches, assorted sizes.

In the bedroom, items: three drawerfuls of personal linen, and a closet containing three suits. One was the gray he'd had on last night when he'd called on Lombard. Its pockets produced a Canadian dime, a faded snapshot of some grapefruit — no, a blonde — and a little booklet of cigarette papers. The pockets of the other

two suits, not even that much.

It took him fifty minutes. He wasn't a slouch; he was thorough. He went away telling himself somebody had put the Indian sign on them in this case, from beginning to end. But then as Leff had said, what more could they expect than the gun itself and the two thousand entered on his passbook? In most cases, that would have meant the axe; here it didn't seem to mean a thing.

"How's he doing?" he asked Leffinger when he walked back into the office.

"How should he be doing?" the Captain snapped. "*We're* the ones getting the works, by the looks of it! What'd you get?"

"Roaches and razor blades. There's not even a circular addressed to him in the place."

Leffinger gripped the desk and prepared to rise. "Well, I'm going to let it coast through on circumstantial, then. Ballistics'll probably match the slug from Lombard's hide to his gun, and that ought to make it stick. Come on. We'll go in there and give him something to holler 'third degree' about before we —"

The phone rang, and he said, "Yeah, it's me." Then he said, "Well, it's about time." Then, "Well, you knew where to reach me. I left word we were bringing him out here." Then he didn't say anything more. Not a word. He just swallowed a couple of times. His face took on a very sick look. Finally he leaned forward, elbows on desk, and held his head dismally with both hands.

Finally he said; "Ballistics. Coleman's revolver is a .38-caliber —"

"I know that," interrupted Harvey tautly.

"You know that!" raged Leffinger unreasonably. He wasn't sore at Harvey. He was sore at the world in general, and Harvey was the nearest member of it at hand, that was all. "Well, maybe you know this too! The bullet they took out of Lombard is a .32-caliber! Where does that leave us?" he demanded ferociously.

Harvey looked down at the floor. "In the doghouse," he mumbled. After a while, out of their mutual misery, he asked half-heartedly, "And the one we dug up out of the floor of his flat?"

"A .38-caliber, like it should be to go with the gun," snapped Leffinger, making a tent out of his hands and staring at it gloomily.

Harvey shook his head to the four walls around him, as if looking for moral support. "He's our meat. He's the guy. You can't tell me different."

"I ain't telling you different, but Ballistics is," said Leffinger sourly. "Ballistics don't lie. You setting yourself up above Ballistics?"

"You take Ballistics. I'll take what I know about human nature. That don't lie either."

"If you mean you think he did it with a .32 and then ditched it afterward on the way home, I don't; it would have turned up by now. You can't get rid of a gun that easy along well-lighted city streets. And he sat

in that coffee shop on the premises ten minutes after he came down. You think he would have done that with a hot gun on him? It won't wash." His voice trailed off wistfully, "And yet I coulda sworn —"

"And I still can," Harvey said stubbornly. "It's a natural. It's written all over it. It's — it's got everything I've ever been taught to look for, in telling guilt by. Opportunity, motive, probability — everything!"

"Except," said Leffinger morosely, "the goods."

The bedeviled dick started to do a Hamlet. "We ring the doorbell, and his face don't change. I've called on aldermen, yes, and State Representatives too, and had 'em show a *little* scariness when I said 'Headquarters.' He was waiting for us. He was waiting for us to show up that whole day, before we did. He went back and he deliberately completed a word in a puzzle diagram under our noses. That rang false. You don't do that even when your caller's just a book peddler. He was calm and collected, but he was *too* calm and collected. Don't you get me, Cap? He overplayed his hand. He was so hipped on not showing guilt that he went to the other extreme, entirely muffed the average, normal person's reaction in between the two. If he *hadn't* killed him, he would have been all the more afraid of it being pinned on him, especially after he'd been up there with a gun and took two thousand dollars off the guy. The fact that he wasn't afraid showed that he *did* kill him, and was ready for us — was way ahead of us, knew all along that we were going to come up against this. He's our guy, I tell you, he's our guy."

"Well go out and prove that he is!" Leffinger roared in ungovernable irritation. "That's what I want! I'm going to have to turn him loose by daylight. Can't keep him forever without booking him, you know."

"Don't take it out on me, Cap," remonstrated Harvey, backing out. "I feel as bad about it as you do."

"Say it with results then! I hate my own grandmother, right now!"

"Hold him for me at least until noon, will you, Cap?" Harvey almost pleaded. "Gimme a chance. I never in my life had such a strong feeling before."

"You're going to have a stronger one yet, where you sit down, if you don't leave me alone to enjoy my misery," was the last thing Leffinger said.

Harvey looked in at the torture chamber on his way out. They'd about given up. Kaska was taking short turns and encores around the room, reduced to the point of trying to reason with him now.

"We know you did it," he was whining. "Why don't you make it easy for yourself?"

"Make it easy for you people, you mean, by admitting to something I never did." They could change his exterior, but they couldn't change the unshakable calm of that voice.

Kaska came over at Harvey's ges-

ture. "Pitch him in a cell. Let him rest a while," the latter whispered.

"Cap's orders?"

"No. But the bullet in Lombard turned out to be a .32, there's no point in going ahead with this any more. Get Leffinger's okay on it if you want to, only it's as much as your life is worth to go in there right now." What he really wanted was to be able to get Coleman's normal reaction to something — what, he didn't know himself yet — and not this keyed-up defense mechanism the grilling had reduced him to.

J. Truhoff, cigar store clerk, was very surprised at seven the following morning when he showed up to unlock his store, to find a customer already waiting for him outside the door. A customer wearing a once-gray suit, the sleeves of which looked as if he'd been plunging his arms up to the elbows into garbage cans and whatnot. Could it be, wondered J. Truhoff, that he'd needed a smoke so badly he'd been reduced to hunting for snipes?

J. Truhoff had already been thoroughly questioned the day before (which had given him an increased sense of his own importance) about the two phone calls made from his store by a man the previous night. He didn't, however, connect his sleepwalking ghost with that. He looked more like a bum who had been out on a tear.

"Yessir," he said disapprovingly, putting on his store jacket.

"Headquarters," said the ghost weakly.

J. Truhoff put on a long face. One day's novelty is the next day's nuisance. "What? Again? I *told* them I couldn't overhear his conversation. He was all the way in the back."

"I'm not asking about his conversation now. I'm asking something that was overlooked. You say you knew him by sight, that he bought all his smokes from you?"

"Yes, regularly once every two days, nearly, he'd stop in."

"Well then, what was his brand? I know you're dishing them out all day long, but see if you can separate him from the rest."

"That's easy," said J. Truhoff with an air of professional superiority. "He's been dealing here for two years now." He pointed. "This."

"Machine-made cigarettes, in other words."

"Sure."

"All right, what did he buy from you night before last — while he was killing time between those two phone calls?"

"Why, the same as —" J. Truhoff began with an air of conviction.

Harvey was holding in an extended palm the little booklet of papers he'd taken out of Coleman's gray suit. It seemed to act as a spur. "No!" the clerk contradicted himself hastily at the sight of it. "Those! I remember now! I would have forgotten if I hadn't seen them in your hand. He asked me for those for a change. For the first time. Mentioned something

about he was wanting to cut down expenses."

"*Did you sell him any loose tobacco to go with them?*"

"No. Now that I think of it, I didn't. He didn't ask me for any, so I took it for granted he had some up in his place."

There hadn't been any anywhere around Coleman's flat, not a grain of it even in the seams of the pockets of his clothes.

The sleepwalking ghost had turned into a dynamo all of a sudden. "That *does* it!" he shouted deafeningly, nearly pounding his fist through the glass counter. "Got it now!" From the doorway on his way out he flung back ungratefully over his shoulder, "And I hadda wait until seven for you to open up!"

J. Truhoff stared out into the street after him, scratching the back of his head wonderingly. "I don't see what that gave him. Funny business, being a detective. I'd rather be a cigar store clerk."

Harvey came bolting back again for a moment. "Nearly forgot. Gimme a can of that mixture to go with these."

J. Truhoff refused the proffered coin with lordly up-ended palm. "I'll put it in the till myself. If this comes out in the papers, you could — you could mention my name."

Leffinger had spirited Coleman to still another precinct house, shortly after dawn, to keep a jump ahead of the twenty-four-hour detention-without-arraignment law. It took Harvey half an hour to locate and catch up with him. That and a couple of little things he had to attend to himself.

"Well, Bright Eyes," was the Captain's tired greeting, "where were you all night? His next move is out."

"His next move is arraignment, after what I'm going to show you."

"I'm just in the mood for stereopticon slides."

"For a curtain raiser, I want you to watch the way he rolls one of his own cigarettes. We don't really need that, but it may help to play it up to you — and break him down. Can I have him in here?"

"You can have him altogether."

Coleman was led in yawning, his eyes still small from recently interrupted sleep. "If you woke me up just to smuggle me to another hideout, why don't you catch on to yourselves? You know you've got to let me get in touch with a lawyer sooner or later."

"All right, forget it," Leffinger said gruffly. "We're turning you out. But first you're going to sign a waiver, that not a hand was laid on you."

Coleman threw a shrewd, baleful look at them. "Trying to get my John Hancock on a confession by switching papers — is that it? I'm wise to that stunt. I'm not going to sign anything."

Harvey caught Leffinger's eye, said soothingly: "We've got the guy that did it. You've got nothing more to worry about. We don't want to be liable to any suits for false arrest, that's all."

"You're giving me ideas," was the

smiling answer. But he wasn't friendly about it.

"Let's have a smoke and talk this over," said Harvey placatingly. He was spilling a few grains of tobacco into an outstretched paper. He deftly centered it, ran his tongue along the edge of it, furled it with one hand. He was holding sack and papers toward the prisoner now. "Smoke?" he offered.

"Not them —" began Coleman scornfully. Then he checked himself abruptly. He got a little white for a minute, as though he'd just remembered something. Just for a minute. Then his color came back. He seemed for some peculiar reason to change his mind about the wisdom of refusing, displaying fear.

It was painful to watch him try. The tobacco would fall out one end and he'd roll a hollow tube, or he'd put too much on and get a lumpy barrel shape that would open of its own girth. After he'd used up half a dozen papers Harvey took them away from him.

"Not very used to it, is he?"

He said it to Leffinger and the rest, not Coleman.

The latter for once had nothing to say for himself. Sat there very mum, like a man on thin ice, afraid to move or even breathe.

"And when a guy isn't very good at it," Harvey's voice went on, "it means he's never tried his hand at rolling them before."

"All right, send me to the chair for that." Coleman scowled sulkily.

"But he bought a folder of them just the same — in that cigar store between calls to Lombard two nights ago. The clerk just told me. First time he'd ever bought them from him in two years. *Without any tobacco to put in them.* And there was none up in his place. He hasn't thrown out a razor blade in six months up there; if there'd *ever* been a tin of tobacco up there at any time, the container probably would have still been kicking around."

It was coming out on Coleman's face now.

"Why did he buy papers, without anything to put in them? I'll tell you. No, I'll show you why." Harvey took out a large sealed manila folder, tore it open. "Here's his .38 slug. Ballistics turned it back to me just now at my request." He took out a small pasteboard box, opened it, dumped a lot of gleaming little shapes on the table. "These are .32 caliber bullets I got from them. Identical to the one removed from Lombard except of course that they haven't been fired. Watch how it goes."

Coleman's face was ghastly.

Harvey picked up a bullet, wrapped it tightly in a leaf of the cigarette paper, as expertly as he had the tobacco a while before. "Three, I think, ought to be about right. Now we'll see how it'll go."

He broke Coleman's revolver, carefully eased the swathed bullet into the chamber. A push of the ball of the thumb and it bedded flush.

"Now watch how a .38 will fire a

.32 bullet. I'll put it into that baseboard over there if you'll shift aside a little."

He leveled it, hooked the trigger; it crashed, flamed; the wooden baseboard reverberated like a bass drum and erupted into a little feathered bullet-hole.

A shell dropped out at Harvey's feet, and a few shreds of scorched paper with it.

"He must have carefully picked those up from the floor in Lombard's room," he said. "Left the shell for us to find but made sure he picked up the half-burned wadding — even before he reached for his two thousand blood money. He'd loaded in the cigar store booth before he called the second time, I guess."

Coleman's lips were moving soundlessly — praying maybe, or cursing — but they didn't really have to hear what he was saying. It was written all over his face.

"A ten-cent can of cheap tobacco," Harvey told him almost pityingly, "to go with that folder of papers — and you never would have been sent to the chair!"

It was Kaska who remarked later, when the hubbub had died down: "And if we'd'a listened to Ballistics we'd'a lost him. He'd'a slipped right through our fingers."

Leffinger said proudly: "You take Ballistics. I'll take a bull like young Harvey, any day in the week."

Most detective-story writers are just that — detective-story writers. They don't pretend to be anything fancier in the domain of literature and belles lettres. They stick to their plot-knitting and many become excellent craftsmen — within the limitations of the true detective story. Only a few — and more power to them! — succumb to the Don Quixote impulse to tilt their typewriters at the windmill of so-called "serious" writing. On the other hand, many famous literary figures have walked boldly into the arena of the detective story and pitted their skill against the Gladiator of Gore. As we once pointed out, some have merely "stooped to conquer," but others — a surprisingly large number — have won notable victories. Such stellar story-tellers as Mark Twain, W. Somerset Maugham, Arnold Bennett, William Faulkner, H. G. Wells, John Steinbeck, Thomas Burke, Theodore Dreiser, Frank Swinnerton, Christopher Morley, Jack London, and O. Henry have produced memorable tales that are now landmarks in the history of the genre, and all these world-celebrated authors have appeared in EQMM. And such veritable titans as Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Anton Chekhov, Robert Louis Stevenson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James M. Barrie, Bret Harte, Voltaire, Alexander Dumas, to say nothing of a gentleman named E. A. Poe, have made imperishable contributions to the detective-crime short story — and all these wielders of the mightier weapon will also appear in EQMM as time goes on.

But these great writers, however fine their efforts in the detective field, were — and we should face it — merely dabblers in the form. By no stretch of the imagination can these members of the literary Blue Book be called detective-story writers — or even, Detective Story Writers. True, they wrote occasional detective stories, but they were not and are not "professionals of the blood." Poe invented the detective story, Dickens rendered incalculable service to its perpetuation, even Shakespeare was markedly preoccupied with crime and detection, but no one, not the most fanatical aficionado, would dare mention them *in the same breath with even the very, very best of just plain detective-story writers. The moral is obvious: it is easier for a Big Writer to go slumming than for a detective-story writer to take a long-term lease on Park Avenue.*

So, as we started out by saying, relatively few chroniclers of crime develop a split personality — writing detective stories for a living and in between 'tec thrusts, writing The Great American (or English) Novel. And as small as this group is, even fewer writers achieve substantial reputations in both *fields. Gilbert K. Chesterton did it — surely the brilliant GKC is as famous*

today for his Father Brown stories as for his more "serious" work. And it can be said that T. S. Stribling won a double-header — his Professor Poggioli tales will not perish from the earth. And one thinks with pardonable glow of so fine a writer as John P. Marquand and his THE LATE GEORGE APLEY, WICKFORD POINT, H. M. PULHAM, ESQUIRE, SO LITTLE TIME *and* B. F.'S DAUGHTER; *no one has forgotten or is likely to forget that Mr. Marquand also fathered the Mr. Moto series.*

Which brings us to another author who has won that rare dual success of being, at one and the same time, a topflight detective-story writer and a topdrawer serious writer. Thus we introduce the first appearance in EQMM of Van Wyck Mason. Author of such distinguished historical novels as STARS ON THE SEA *and* THREE HARBOURS, *the latter a bestseller all over the world for a solid year, Van Wyck Mason is also the creator of America's most famous secret service sleuth, Major Hugh North of G-2 — most of us still think of him as Captain North, but The War to End War raised North's rank.*

Van Wyck Mason is no ivory-tower romancer. He has nearly duplicated in real life the fictional career of Major North. Veteran traveler, Mr. Mason has visited Europe, the Near East, North Africa, Central America, and Canada. In the late but not lamented World War II, Colonel Mason served under General Eisenhower on the staff at Supreme Headquarters. At SHAEF Colonel Mason was in charge of secret records for the American, British, and French armies. The creator of Hugh North wears five battle stars on his ETO ribbon and holds a number of foreign decorations.

No wonder, then, that you will find verisimilitude — credible reality — in the background to the events which occur in and around Sidi-Bel-Abbes, against the colorful backdrop of the French Foreign Legion. Here is an exciting, exotic detective story in which the unassuming Captain North seeks to identify a dangerous murderer among some eight hundred legionnaires . . .

THE REPEATER

by VAN WYCK MASON

As he straightened, three rows of campaign and decoration ribbons gleamed like a miniature rainbow on the narrow chest of Achille Garros, colonel commanding *le Premier Regiment de Marche Etrangère.* In his hard blue eyes an expression of real interest had begun to supplant one of polite boredom.

"It is then a murderer you seek, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

"Precisely, Colonel, a very danger-

ous murderer," quietly replied the American, as with alert and deep-set gray eyes he returned the Frenchman's curious stare. "Pablo Mendez is no common killer, sir. He's got lots of brains, and no conscience at all."

Colonel Garros settled back on his chair to seem suddenly dwarfed by the immensity of the scale map of North Africa which, mounted on the wall behind, revealed in a series of bright-headed pins the innumerable *postes* garrisoned by the Legion.

"You can positively identify this murderer, Captain North? Recall the Chinese saying: 'To guess is cheap, but to guess wrong is expensive' — especially in the Foreign Legion. Here in the depot and scattered about Sidi-Bel-Abbes, there are now some eight hundred legionnaires."

"I, personally, can't make the identification, Colonel," North replied in flawless French, "but Lieutenant Ransome can."

The second of the two visitors, an unusually handsome young man, leaned forward eagerly, looking very broad-shouldered in his neat Palm Beach suit.

"Yes, sir. I served in the same regiment with Mendez. I'd recognize him anywhere, even if he'd grown a beard and dyed his skin." The younger American hesitated, then went on a little uncomfortably, "If we find Mendez, you people will surrender him to us?"

Beneath his gray mustache Colonel Garros smiled like an amiable Norman wolf. "But, of course, Lieutenant. Silly novels and *cinés* to the contrary *la Légion* never shields murderers from justice."

Five silver galons glinted on the fierce old man's sleeve, when, apparently struck by a thought, he bent forward and more closely studied Captain North's brown, rather Indian-like face.

"By chance you are not the famous Capitaine Hugh North who did such amazing Intelligence work in China two years ago, and again in Budapest this spring?"

"Well, Colonel, I don't know about the famous part of it, but I did happen to be in those places at the time you mention."

The veteran's bleak smile relaxed. "It is amazing — you are so *tranquille*, so unassuming for such a celebrated figure."

"Hugh never puts on side, sir, but right now I'd be rotting in prison if it hadn't been for him." The younger American's enthusiasm was like that of a boy for his school hero.

"Exaggeration is Lieutenant Ransome's chief fault, Colonel," North said quickly. "Shall I outline the facts of the case?"

"I shall be delighted to hear them."

"Back in 1932 Lieutenant Ransome here was serving at Fort Cook under Captain Pablo Mendez, who is a Spaniard from the Philippines."

"A Spaniard in the American army?" Colonel Garros looked courteously surprised.

"He was a naturalized citizen, sir. This Mendez, though we didn't find

it out until later, got into a nasty scrape with a woman, and had to have some money to get out of it." Captain North's hand crept up to tug briefly at his close-clipped black mustache. "He decided to rob the paymaster's office — there was always a large sum of cash in small bills on hand there. Next, with callous cleverness, he decided to divert suspicion and pursuit from himself. This is where Ransome comes in.

"At that time, my friend here was in love with a lady named Lucinda Wallace, who was in the process of getting a divorce from a brutal and insanely jealous husband. They were to be married as soon as she was free. Wallace, however, was a mean and dangerous sort, and had Ransome and the lady even been seen together he would never have given her a divorce, and might quite conceivably have killed her.

"Somehow Mendez learned that the engaged couple met on regularly established occasions. Cleverly he argued that Ransome, being a gentleman, would never offer an alibi which would endanger the woman he loved. On this theory Mendez went ahead and established an alibi of his own by inviting a brother officer to his quarters. Again he was smart, because he so geared a clock that it would gain twenty minutes in an hour." North broke off. "Please forgive this reminiscence, Colonel, but I want to show you the type of man we are hunting."

Into the small khaki-clad figure across the desk crept a new manner. "Please proceed. The story is of greater interest to me than you imagine."

"When Mendez' guest arrived on the night of the projected robbery he remarked that his clock had stopped, and — mark this — he brazenly borrowed his guest's watch to set it by. As if by accident, he then overwound the borrowed watch until its mainspring broke. When Mendez' caller left, and Mendez went away to commit the theft, the clock read ten o'clock when it was actually only nine-twenty. The one thing the rotter had not counted on was that the paymaster might come in unexpectedly to work on some accounts."

North's voice dropped a pitch or two, but the words issued crisply from his thin brown lips. "Surprised, the thief shot, and a number of people in the post heard the report at about ten minutes of ten. Always a cool one, Mendez finished his burglary, took the money and got away. He even went so far as to plant a package of bills in Ransome's locker."

The Frenchman nodded several times. "I can guess the rest, and I am sorry for you, Lieutenant Ransome."

"If Captain North hadn't been abroad at the time it'd have been all right, Colonel. But, as it was, they had such an airtight case against me, I didn't stand a chance, and the court-martial had sentenced me to life imprisonment. When North got back I told him the story, and before long he proved my innocence."

"Why are you suddenly so inter-

ested, Colonel?" North demanded, while in from the blazing afternoon floated the notes of a distant bugle.

"Recently I have heard of a case in the civilian courts at Oran — an affair so similar it is striking. Of course, it must be merely a coincidence, but it is still interesting."

"Um, a civil case. It may be, as you say, a coincidence — but still ——" North got up to briefly inspect a stand of battle-torn colors which, in a glass case, stood at the far end of the room. "But still it's an old police adage that the criminal always repeats — sooner or later."

"Have you the fingerprints of your fugitive?" Colonel Garros asked.

"Yes, sir, but not of the sort you mean. Please look at this." The Intelligence captain produced a photograph. "Here is a photograph of the ordinary army automatic with which Captain Leeson, the paymaster, was murdered. That blur on the right side of the barrel was made by the forefinger held along its side."

"It is not much of a print, Capitaine."

"I know it, sir, but it's a valuable clue just the same."

The commander interrupted with a raised hand. "The hour of inspection is almost at hand. You have a good photograph of the murderer?"

"Mendez was too careful. All we have is this." North produced a dim, time-yellowed snapshot of a clean-shaven man in the uniform of a lieutenant of infantry. "That's why our advocate general detached Lieutenant Ransome from duty to make the identification for me. It isn't an easy job we've got before us, because Mendez is a fluent linguist. He could have enlisted in the Legion as an American, a Frenchman, or any one of a number of Spanish-speaking nationalities."

"About when would this fellow have enlisted?"

"A year ago," North replied. "That's approximate, of course."

Thoughtfully, Colonel Garros placed the photograph on his desk, and with a sinewy brown hand pressed one of a series of buttons; almost instantly a spick-and-span orderly tramped into the post commandant's white-walled office and stood to wooden attention.

"My compliments to Capitaine Dufour of the 11th Company, Sergeant Villejo of the 16th, and Corporal Crane of the machine-gun battalion. I wish them to report here immediately. Use the telephone."

In answer to Captain North's uplifted brows, Colonel Garros explained in clipped sentences. "These men are of an unofficial Intelligence Corps we maintain within the Legion. They, sooner than anyone, should find your man. A cigarette while we wait, Messieurs?"

Sergeant Villejo, the orderly quickly reported, was today on duty on the rifle ranges, but the others would come at once.

"Then call Sergeant Calles — I want someone who knows our Spanish-speaking legionnaires."

"Crane?" North lingered on the

name. "Is he English or an American?"

"An American, I believe. The fellow enlisted about the time this *maudit* Mendez must have appeared. *Doucement!*" A shadow had fallen across the sedulously scrubbed threshold. "Ah, here he is, *Entrez!*"

At first glance, Captain North became definitely interested in this powerfully built N.C.O. His was a strong, naturally swarthy or deeply tanned face which bore the scars of battles emotional as well as physical.

"At ease, Corporal. You know all the American legionnaires now on duty at the Base Depot?"

"Yes, sir. But some of them not very well, sir." Crane's was a Southern accent, North swiftly decided — sounded more Texan than Georgian. "Since times got hard in the States there have been quite a few American bleues." *

"Have you ever seen one who looked like this?"

The big American corporal had not as yet observed Ransome, a silent figure in the background, and he had picked up the photograph and was studying it when North caught the faint click of a swiftly drawn breath. From the corner of his eye he saw Ransome clutching the back of a chair and trying hard to look unconcerned, while he peered fixedly at the newcomer. The N.C.O., whose facial outlines were blurred by a short yellow beard, shook his kepied head as he put down the likeness of Pablo Mendez.

"No, sir. Reckon I've never seen anybody like that around here, sir."

"*Le gusta à usted la Légion?*" Smoothly North put his query.

"*Pero sí, Señor Capitán,*" Crane returned, then looked more than a little confused to have found himself answering in Spanish.

"Any questions, Captain?" Colonel Garros was frowning now and definitely irritated about something.

"No? Then you may go, Corporal. Orderly! Call Captain Dufour if he has arrived."

Corporal Crane jumped to attention, clicked his heels sharply, then did a smart about-face which for the first time brought him face to face with Ransome. Only an observer trained to notice the subtlest reaction would have caught that fleeting rigidity in the American N.C.O.'s expression. Only Hugh North would have noted the faint, involuntary closing of the big, blue-sashed corporal's hands as, with hobnailed heels ringing loud on the freshly watered red tiles of the corridor, he swung out of sight.

Nor could Captain Dufour make an identification. Sergeant Calles, a slant-eyed Mexican, studied the picture with great interest, however. He even laid a none too clean finger across the lower part of the photograph's face, and squinted at it from jet and glittering eyes. Eventually he shrugged and put it down.

"No, *mon colonel,* never have I seen anyone like this."

*Bleues—literally blues. A Legion nickname for recruits whose faces were supposed to turn blue from their first privations.

"Sure of that?" the D.C.I. officer demanded abruptly.

"Sergeant, if you even think you know this man, you must tell us," Colonel Garros warned, his gray eyes coldly gray as bayonet points. "This is a matter of grave importance."

"He's a murderer," Ransome amplified to be immediately withered by a look from North.

"A murderer, *por Dios!*" the Mexican cried. "Then I am all the more sorry I do not know him, M. le Colonel."

But North, seated in the background, remained doubtful. On that scarred, swart face there had briefly played an expression of positive pleasure.

"You may go, Sergeant." Colonel Garros shrugged sympathetically as he got up, a thin, battle-scarred fighting cock of a man.

"It will not be easy, this mission of yours. You are still determined to find Mendez?"

"We have no choice, sir. Mendez is a clever, cold-blooded killer."

Again a bugle shrilled a call which took Hugh North back some fifteen years. Yes, surely he had not heard *Rassemblement Générale* blown since '19. A major, grotesque because of a hideously powder-burned face, appeared at the door and saluted.

"Sir, the staff is formed and ready."

"Is it not possible," suggested the commanding officer, "that if you gentlemen watched the regiment parade you might see your man?"

North smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid Ransome wouldn't stand much chance of making an identification. I've noticed that lowered kepi straps make it hard to recognize even people who are very familiar."

"True." Colonel Garros silently considered the point while his orderly brought in sword, Sam Browne belt and scarlet-topped kepi. "*Tiens*, perhaps I have the solution. When I inspect the regiment, Lieutenant Ransome shall accompany me and look at the men from close range." He shot the D.C.I. officer a penetrating glance. "You see, I still have that other affair in mind — if the crime was committed by a legionnaire I want him caught."

Turning to the door, the commander of the First Regiment addressed his orderly. "During their stay at the Base Depot, Captain North and Lieutenant Ransome will be my guests. Put their baggage in the quarters of Lieutenant St Onge."

"A thousand pardons, but has *mon colonel* forgotten that Lieutenant St Onge returns to Sidi-Bel-Abbés today?"

"Do as I say," snapped the veteran. "Lieutenant St Onge is remaining two days more. Inform the lieutenant's orderly."

At the name St Onge, Captain North thought he saw several of the staff — they were waiting in the corridor — exchange glances which argued no great love for their absent comrade.

Twenty minutes later Captain Hugh North was standing unobtrusively in an archway listening with no small

enjoyment to the famous band of the Legion. Out there, drenched by the rays of a still torrid North African sun, the famous First Regiment stood drawn up in motionless, erect files of khaki and white. How bravely sunlight sparkled on those wickedly slender bayonets which, on entering, create a cross-shaped wound — a fact deplored by certain Mohammedan enemies of Madame la République.

For a brief space North became no longer a mere man hunter, but an officer gazing with a West Pointer's critical appreciation upon the spectacle of bronzed, perfectly drilled files swinging by line on line, every button agleam, every rifle at an identical angle, and every hobnailed foot taking the cadence in unison. The tricolor swept by — "*Honneur et Fidélité — Valeur et Discipline*" — the golden words flashed bright.

Presently, however, instinct made North revert to his problem. Was Mendez swinging along somewhere amid those hard-bitten battalions? If so, under what nationality had he enlisted? How interesting that Crane understood Spanish — an odd type; dark, vital and primitive, if his face meant anything.

Suddenly the band altered its tempo and struck up "Louis Quatorze," so beloved of the Legion. With a unanimous clatter of calloused hands impacting on rifle butts the First Regiment swung into "Regiment Front" and came to halt, every squad as precisely located as squares on a chessboard.

Of all the hundreds who had marched by, but two faces had given the Indian-like D.C.I. officer food for thought. First the beaded corporal called Crane. The Texan had swung along with lips compressed in a tight and thoughtful line. Then, six paces in advance of his platoon, Sergeant Enrique Calles had tramped by, jet eyes obliquely regarding Ransome, who, a distinctive, well set up figure in civilian clothes, was now standing three paces left and rear of the wiry little colonel.

On the far side of the parade ground had assembled a colorful throng of watchers such as might collect nowhere but in heat-lashed Sidi-Bel-Abbés. Swarthy infantrymen from Algerian line regiments cursed and jostled Turcos and Tirailleurs Marocains, but most colorful of all were the black-bearded Spahis, whose white cloaks, scarlet breeches and neat top-heavy turbans of dark blue captured and held the eye.

Further and in great number there were clusters of towering, childlike Senegalese in old A.E.F. uniforms. North smiled wrily — Liberty Bonds had paid for those garments now clothing Mohammedan savages from the swamps of West Africa! Captain North's military reactions decreased still further — after all, he was here on business other than admiring those flawless counter-marchings.

"Bad, bad," North muttered beneath his breath. "If only the colonel hadn't taken it into his head to drag Alex out for inspection. If the boy

doesn't recognize Mendez *muy pronto*, the brute will have his chance to skip!"

Gradually, North's pulses began to quicken their beat because, far across the heat-shimmering parade ground, the inspecting group had begun to march slowly along the perfectly aligned ranks. Would those two stalwart sergeants marching as orderlies at the rear of Colonel Garros' staff suddenly fall out to seize that cold-blooded murderer who, with subtle cleverness, had doomed a fellow officer to lifelong imprisonment?

North's prominent cheekbones grew still more visible as the inspecting party passed the last of the front rank. Inexplicably, the conviction grew upon him that Ransome would not recognize Mendez among the companies drawn up out there, so, more bitterly than ever, the D.C.I. officer cursed himself for letting Ransome so easily surrender the priceless advantage of the first move. His mood, therefore, was not pleasant when, the inspection being at an end and the regiment having marched off to barracks, he rejoined Ransome, Colonel Garros and the heavily perspiring staff.

A short, blue-jowled captain sauntered over to North and said, "Should Lieutenant St Onge return unexpectedly to Sidi I will be delighted and honored to offer the so famous Capitaine North the hospitality of my quarters." He smiled broadly. "Even in the swamps I have found those who admire your work. Naturally we are all wondering what has brought you to the depot? Some affair of St Onge, by hazard?"

"I regret, Captain, and I am sure you will understand, when I say that the matter is confidential," said the D.C.I. officer smoothly, and again he noted a curious tenseness when St Onge's name was mentioned.

Captain North still was aware of an uneasy premonition nagging at his brain as amid the soft twilight he put the finishing touches to his black bow tie. In the next room Ransome was whistling the catchy chorus of "Louis Quatorze." Good job the boy was cheerful again. Alex had taken those two years at Portsmouth very hard indeed — and no wonder.

His hand was almost on the knob of the door leading to Ransome's room when beyond it sounded the muffled thud of quick moving feet, instantly followed by the dry, staccato crack of a pistol. Wrenching back the door, North saw the room in darkness, but nevertheless leaped inside to grapple with a figure in flowing white robes.

A knife gleamed as the D.C.I. officer aimed a savage right to that dark, dimly seen head, whereupon North abruptly checked his swing to clutch wildly at that descending wrist. Simultaneously he twisted his body violently sidewise, and escaped with a sleeve slashed from shoulder to elbow. Back and forth over the slippery tiled floor the two men wheeled and stamped, until North, in breaking away, managed to land a jolting right jab to the other's chest.

He in the white robes gasped "Oh-h-h!" and staggered, clawing at the air to regain his balance. With the quick relentlessness of a leopard, North leaped forward again to settle the matter, but tripped on one of Ransome's outflung arms, and in falling heavily forward succeeded in knocking out his wind so thoroughly that all he could do was to twist and gasp in helpless agony.

Fortunately, the intruder's one thought must have been flight, for, ignoring the helpless D.C.I. officer, he sprang through a window and vanished into the darkness where startled shouts and queries were echoing among the neat little white-washed houses of Officers' Row.

Half-strangled, and suffering as only a man can when his lungs are temporarily paralyzed, North crawled over to the inert body of the infantry lieutenant.

"Alex," he choked. "How bad is — it?"

But the man in white stirred not at all, just lay as he had fallen. When a little air had trickled into North's tortured lungs he struggled up on hands and knees and, by dim moonlight beating in through the window, stared miserably at a dark stain quickly spreading between the shoulders of his friend's white mess jacket.

"*Bon Dieu! Quelle horreur!*" Lieutenant St Onge's orderly came clattering in with a pair of crop-headed sergeants hard on his heels.

There followed a brief silence terminated by one of the sergeants saying, "*Er ist ganz todt,*" and he rushed out bawling for the guard.

Like a rising wind, the alarm increased. Officers half into their mess uniforms ran in, their voices strident with excitement. Bugles wailed, and then a guard detail with rifles at the ready came up at the double to throw a cordon about the little house. Among the first officers to appear was none other than Colonel Garros, and his eyes glittered like sword points when he beheld young Ransome crumpled in the center of the round grass mat.

"Clear the room," he directed the Officer of the Day. "Lights! '*Cré nom de Dieu*, lights!"

Trembling, the orderly produced a new bulb to replace the one smashed by the fall of the room's single reading lamp.

Poor Ransome. What a wretched end for such a wholesome, open-hearted young fellow. North, still sick and weak, wondered at the ways of providence. Who had dealt him this second and final blow? Bitterly the D.C.I. officer cursed himself for not having immediately questioned his companion concerning the Corporal Crane episode. He should have looked Ransome right up after inspection instead of letting the boy linger at the Officers' Club until almost dinner time.

The Officer of the Day, one Captain Khaniev, a Tartarlike individual with a face sharp as a woodsman's axe, stooped to pick up an automatic pistol lying near that window which, open-

ing from a garden, had afforded an entrance for Ransome's murderer.

"Don't touch it!" North's sharp warning filled the room.

"The work of a native, it would seem." Colonel Garros pointed to the imprint of a bare foot which, hideously etched in blood, was repeated twice before it drew a crimson smear across the window sill.

"Yes, *mon colonel,*" the Officer of the Day agreed swiftly, "Lieutenant Hàtvàny's orderly saw an Arab running from the garden."

"You saw the face of this wretched *indigène?*" queried the Russian captain.

"Nothing, except that he was dark-complexioned, and had a short beard." Captain North, D.C.I., shrugged apologetically. "Sorry I can't help you more, Captain, but I had the worst possible chance of seeing anything useful, because I ran from a brightly lit room to a very dark one. I'd even hate to guess how tall the fellow was."

"But surely," Colonel Garros objected angrily, "you must know that."

"Sorry, but it would be next to impossible. You see, Colonel, when an excited person sees a figure in the dark he always imagines it to be bigger than it really is."

"True, you are right," the veteran conceded, while tugging at his slender mustaches. "Once, when an *aspirant*, I killed a Hanoi pirate — thought he was a giant — but in the morning all I found was a little fellow, hardly bigger than an orang-utang." Colonel Garros broke off, and drew himself up. "And now what? I need not point out that this is a matter demanding attention of the most serious."

Hugh North turned a gaunt face etched with somber lines. "First, we had better look for evidence."

Stooping over what had been not twenty minutes before a vital, laughing being, the American tried to forget the cloying, sweet reek of blood rising from the floor, and narrowly examined that soggy hole between the murdered man's broad shoulders.

"Shot from a distance of about four feet," he pronounced, then, using a handkerchief, picked up the automatic. A low grunt of exasperation escaped him.

"There are no fingerprints," predicted the Officer of the Day.

Before replying, North crossed to the light, and there carefully inspected the killer's gun — an issue automatic of large caliber.

"Right; there are no prints," North said, but failed to mention a faint oval smear visible on the oily surface and parallel to the barrel casing. What was the use? It might mean nothing at all.

Colonel Garros started for the door. "Captain Khaniev, you will request the chief of the civil police to report immediately to Depot headquarters. Also Yousoof Moulai, the chief of the Goums."*

Captain North, whose French was no less fluent than his English, glanced

*Goums — native rural police.

up from the fatal automatic. "Why these preparations, Colonel?"

"I intend to have the Village Nègre combed from one end to the other. We have sharp eyes among the loafers in the *souks*, and a man with a bloodied foot would be noticed."

"Beg pardon, sir, but I don't think such an effort is necessary." North's objection was the essence of deference.

"Eh, and why not?"

"Because, Colonel, I feel very sure the murderer was not an Arab — although it is possible that he may have been."

"*Comment?*" Colonel Garros frowned and his terrible blue eyes narrowed.

"For three good reasons, sir. First, I felt trousers and a heavy belt underneath the killer's robes; second — please correct me if I'm wrong in this — the fellow's wrists were thick and big boned, and I have always been under the impression that most Arabs have peculiarly slender wrists and ankles."

"Monsieur is quite right about that," somberly put in Captain Khaniev, and his manner grew more respectful.

"Well, the man I fought had big hands which must have been gloved — since there were no fingerprints on the automatic. I recall his right wrist was so thick I had a hard time getting a grip on it."

"And the third reason?" Colonel Garros had halted in the doorway.

"When I hit the man he cried 'Oh-h-h!' like a European, and not 'Aiee' like a native."

"One perceives, Captain North, that your reputation is well earned," the Colonel said, and smiled his wolfish smile again. "You should have small difficulty in catching the murderer."

North gazed somberly down upon the flat, blood-bathed body of his friend. "On the contrary, sir, I expect this to be an extremely difficult case." He shrugged. "In fact, my information is so imperfect and meager I may not succeed at all. As you know, the one man who could have identified Mendez is — dead."

Frowning, Colonel Garros nodded once and turned briskly aside. "Captain Khaniev, you will take orders from Captain North as from myself. You, the Goums and the civilian police will give him every possible cooperation — understand? All possible co-operation." He held out a mahogany-colored hand. "Captain North, more than I can say, I am grieved that so terrible a thing should have happened. *Bon soir et bonne chance.*"

North delayed only long enough to bow his thanks, then, procuring a flashlight from his baggage, he set to work. To begin with, he studied the crimson footprint with great care, and felt that his first suspicions concerning the race of the murderer had been well founded. Nowhere to be seen were impressions of the enormous calluses which develop on the feet of persons habitually going barefoot. Um, of course there was a chance of some Europeanized Arab having done the job. His calculations on the proba-

ble height of the man as indicated by the footprint were interrupted by a Danish corporal who came running in to say that a patrol had arrested a legionnaire absent without leave, and in the act of leaving the evil-reputed Village Nègre.

"And who was the man?" Khaniev's tone was metallic.

"An American, sir."

North's head jerked up. "Not by chance someone called Crane?"

The messenger looked definitely startled. "But yes, *mon capitaine*."

"He was in uniform?"

"Yes, *mon capitaine*, but not *en règle* — in order."

"He looked hot — breathless?"

The blond legionnaire nodded vigorously. "He looked as if he had been running."

"Captain Khaniev, will you please order Corporal Crane to the guardhouse?" North requested after brief inward consideration. "I think I'd better talk to him."

"Anything else, monsieur?" The grizzled Officer of the Day drew himself up as if to leave.

"Yes. Please send someone to fetch that Mexican sergeant called Calles; by the way you might also find out if Sergeant Villejo has returned from the rifle range. I need him to help in checking up on these Spanish-speaking legionnaires."

"Villejo is on his way. I left orders for him to wait at the guardhouse," came Captain Khaniev's courteous reply. You could see the old Russian was deeply impressed at being treated as the trusted collaborator of "*le distingué Capitaine Nort.*" Then, lowering his voice, he added, "Pardon, if I suggest there is an important element to this case of which you know nothing."

"By all means, Captain Khaniev, the more to work with I have, the better the possible result."

"Monsieur, it is more than possible that your so charming friend has been killed in error. The proprietor of these quarters, Lieutenant Phillipe St Onge, is — er — not of a high moral caliber. He lies, cheats, and has love affairs of the most deplorable nature. Were he not a superb officer he would not have lasted so long. As it is, St Onge has many enemies both in the garrison and in town." The old Russian's sharp face contracted as his gaze once more fell upon that shiny red pool beside Ransome's body.

"Thank you, Captain — that is a most valuable pointer — in fact, I was wondering just when he joined the Legion?"

"St Onge enlisted less than two years ago — because of his brilliance and our heavy losses in the Atlas campaigns he has risen fast — too fast, perhaps. Again your pardon, there is something more you should know. True, Arabs do have small hands and feet, but many half-breeds have thick wrists and feet as big as those which made the prints."

"You have any definite suspicions?" the American invited.

"None, monsieur." The buckle of Khaniev's Sam Browne glinted as he

shrugged. "But you should by no means rule out natives."

"I am deeply grateful for your suggestions — and tact," murmured North, and felt he had gained a firm ally in this hatchet-faced émigré.

Faces gilded by the reading lamp, they examined the pistol together, and Khaniev pronounced it to be of regular army issue.

"Number AC-37747."

"Um, all sevens — might bring us luck. You might check up on these serial numbers," North suggested at length. "Probably we won't learn much — I suppose a lot of issue small arms find their way into the Native City, don't they?"

"But, yes. Altogether too many. That is one reason why the Village Nègre is perpetually 'off bounds' to legionnaires."

"A good reason, too. Now, Captain, if you don't mind I need to mull this matter over a little while, then I'll join you at the guardhouse."

The ex-czarist nodded and caught up his kepi, but in the doorway he paused. "I trust you are armed, monsieur? If you are not, let me remind you that in North Africa death strikes more quickly and easily than in America."

"I'll take the hint." Characteristically, the D.C.I. officer made no mention of the compact .32 automatic which invariably rested in a shoulder holster beneath his left arm.

After taking care to see that he was not in a direct line with the window, the D.C.I. captain seated himself at a desk in Lieutenant St Onge's sitting room and caught up a pencil, but for several moments remained staring vacantly into space. At last he bent forward, and, as was his custom, began to write quickly a list of salient questions.

1. What, if anything, has Crane to do with Ransome's death?
2. Did Sergeant Calles recognize Mendez from the photograph? If so, why did he lie about it?
3. Has Ransome been shot in error?
4. Is St Onge ——

A faint noise in the corridor sent Captain North gliding across the room with the lithe silence of a jaguar on the prowl. Quite suddenly he wrenched open the door to find standing outside a sergeant, down whose long sunburnt face perspiration was running in bright rivulets until they vanished into his beard. The N.C.O., however, was in no compromising attitude, but standing bolt upright with one hand raised to knock.

"*Monsieur le Capitaine North?*" he inquired in labored French.

"*Sí, estoy el Capitán.*"

The other relaxed and broke into liquid Spanish.

"Sergeant Villejo reports as ordered."

"Why did you come here? Haven't you been to the guardhouse?"

"No, *Señor Capitán.*"

"Then how did you know I wanted you?"

"A message telephoned to the rifle range said that the colonel had or-

dered me to report with all speed to an American army officer staying in the quarters of Lieutenant St Onge." The Spanish N.C.O. smiled in a peculiarly winning way. "When I heard that, Señor Capitán, I hurried. El Capitán sees how warm I am."

"And why should my being in the house of Lieutenant St Onge make you hurry?"

The bearded N.C.O. hesitated, then his dusty blue shoulders lifted in a suggestion of a shrug.

"Someone heard talk in the *soûks* last night — idle chatter, no doubt."

When Villejo hesitated, North said, "I know it's not done for an N.C.O. to discuss his commissioned officers, but you have official permission in this case. Who is this Lieutenant St Onge? Where is he from?"

"No one knows, sir. The lieutenant says he's a Belgian, but no one believes him. He speaks perfect English, excellent French and good Spanish."

"Do you understand English?" North suddenly demanded in that language.

"*Cómo?*" Villejo's dark brows joined in perplexity.

"*Habla usted Inglés?*"

"No, señor, only Spanish and a little French."

"You are a Spaniard, then?"

"Yes, Señor Capitán, of Guadalajara."

"To return to the lieutenant. Has he been in the Legion long?"

"For an officer, a very short time, sir. Perhaps a year and a half."

"Does Lieutenant St Onge ever speak of the United States?"

"Yes, Señor Capitán. He has lived there, I believe."

The aspect of the case in general, North perceived, was growing more complicated, and, as he gazed about the bare white-walled room, he sought for something more than a mental picture of the *soi-disant* Belgian. Significant, perhaps, was the fact that he had found only a single snapshot of the man who called himself Phillipe St Onge. That photograph, however, which was of St Onge posed on a pistol range, attracted North's attention. With a growing deep interest he studied the athletic figure of a man who, effectively outlined against a mass of white clouds, was deliberately sighting his weapon. How long and tapering his forefinger seemed as it curled about the trigger, but how expertly his left arm steadied his left hip, and how graceful was the figure's whole stance.

"Señor Capitán is tired?" suggested Villejo, when a long sigh escaped North's thin lips.

"Perhaps. I'm going now, and I'll expect you at the O.D.'s office in twenty minutes."

Smartly, Sergeant Villejo clicked his heels and saluted, then silently departed.

The stars were flaring and sparkling as they do only in North Africa when Captain North, D.C.I., made his thoughtful way toward the cluster of lights marking the guardhouse entrance. He was, he discovered, rather anxious to meet St Onge. Too bad

that photograph of Pablo Mendez was so wretchedly old and dim. A few pounds or less and the growth of either beard or mustaches would make vast changes in so barely recognizable an original.

To Captain North's surprise he received in the orderly room a note sealed with a twenty-five-centime stamp and addressed to him in an unpracticed handwriting. In effect, it said:

ILLUSTRÍSMO SEÑOR CAPITÁN:

I could not speak in public, but if you will meet me tonight at the bandstand, which will be empty, I will tell you something about this man you seek. I am sure you will feel the information worth a few francs. I will wait from ten to half-past.

Your unworthy servant who kisses your feet.

E. CALLES.

A trap? A fraud? Or a genuine lead? Interesting possibilities occurred to North in rapid succession, and, after considering them in Captain Khaniev's deserted office, he glanced at his wrist watch. The hour being only nine-thirty, he concluded there was time for an interview with the enigmatic Corporal Crane.

He found the Texan occupying a *cellule* in the guardhouse, clenched hands held to his forehead, and staring sullenly at the floor. Crane undoubtedly was not Mendez, or Ransome would have lost no time in denouncing him. Yet there was some strong and unmistakable hostility in the glances exchanged by the two men. Why should this pair hate each other; and why hadn't Ransome explained immediately? Was he afraid to? Perhaps a pointer to Crane's true identity lay in that direction. North's imagination went seeking, probing into the background of the case. Suddenly he paused in midstride.

"I wonder now? Maybe — well, it's worth a try."

North donned his most blank, cigar-store Indian expression as he watched the turnkey slide back the iron-barred door to Crane's *cellule*.

"You don't look so chipper, Legionnaire Wallace," he began in an entirely casual tone. "Is it because you're beginning to realize that killing someone is about the stupidest way of solving a problem?"

At the name "Wallace," the prisoner's sun-bleached head snapped up and he blinked a little.

"I see you know me," he admitted, and nervously continued to twirl his heavy kepi between thick fingers. "I suppose that skunk Ransome has told you."

For reasons of his own, Captain North nodded silently.

"It's sho' mighty queer how things work out sometimes," the Texan went on, with eyes fixed on the stone floor. "Ever since Lucinda left me, I — I've been thinkin' 'bout how I'd kill Alex Ransome. I've been savin' pay to go home and do it, ever since I heard he got off that murder charge at Fort Cook." The big man in khaki and white chuckled drearily. "Yep, it's

funny how things work out. Instead, he came all the way to Africa to give me my chance — the dirty, home-wrecking louse."

"Well, you at least might thank the poor devil for saving you a lot of time and money," remarked the gaunt D.C.I. officer.

Charles Crane, *caporal des mitrailleuses*, otherwise Lansing Wallace, glowered at his visitor.

"My time and money? Say, you don't think *I* bumped Ransome off?"

"I do think just that, Mr. Wallace, and I'm going to see you properly hanged for it."

The prisoner sprang up, hobnails grating on the stone floor, and started for the impassive man before him. "You will like hell! What proof have you?"

"Plenty," North returned coldly. "Your motive is clear, and you were found out of bounds in the Village Nègre, under suspicious circumstances." North hazarded a shot at random. "You were even seen sneaking away from Officers' Row."

The missile must have found a target, for Crane's face seemed to crumple before it flamed a furious scarlet.

"It's a lie!" He yelled so loudly that prisoners in neighboring cells raised a wild clamor. "I was goin' to kill him, but damn it, *somebody beat me to it!*"

North slowly shook his head. "A good act, Wallace, but it doesn't go over. I have yet to meet a murderer who admitted his guilt — to begin with. Don't try to fool me. When the patrol caught you, you'd been running, you could give no account of where you'd been, and, unfortunately for you, there were footprints in Ransome's room made by a man of your size and weight. So you see, Corporal — er, Crane, really, you are in a bad spot."

"Like hell I am!"

"Oh yes, you are. I know plenty of men who've been executed on not half so much incriminating evidence."

From the prisoner's face the color faded until it looked as pale and weather-beaten as a last year's circus poster. "Get out of here!" he roared. "I didn't do it! I wanted to, and I was going to, but I didn't do it! I tell you I didn't!"

North fixed the suspect with a baleful gray eye. "Stop that. You gain nothing by bellowing. Though you probably don't deserve it, you'll have a fair and an impartial court-martial, and if you behave and do one thing I ask I'll see that you get every possible consideration."

"To hell with you!"

But such were Captain North's powers of persuasion that at the end of five minutes the big Texan was sulkily compliant, and even a little curious when the Intelligence officer emptied his .32 automatic and passed it over to the prisoner.

"Snatch this gun out of your tunic pocket two or three times and quickly aim at that center bar in the window."

"I don't see what you're drivin' at, and if you think I ever was a gun fighter, you're all wet. Well, here goes." His huge hand swallowed up

the wickedly slender automatic, and his forefinger practically filled the space between the trigger guard and the trigger itself.

"Too small for me," he grunted, as thrice he pulled out the .32 and as many times aimed at the bar. "That enough?"

"Yes."

"What's the big idea, anyway?"

"To clear up a certain point," North replied, his brows merged into a single thoughtful line. "I'll be back."

Waiting for him outside the guardhouse door was Sergeant Villejo, cigarette nonchalantly adangle from his lips, and thumbs hooked into that wide blue woolen sash which forms the Legion's peculiar and most distinguishing mark.

"How far is it to the bandstand?" the American demanded, once he had acknowledged the N.C.O.'s salute.

"The bandstand, sir?"

"Yes. I've an appointment there."

"Señor Capitán, it is a long quarter of a kilometer from here."

"Then it's lucky we've a cool evening," North commented as they set off past groups of legionnaires, chasseurs d'Afrique, Spahis and Senegalese who, arms linked, swaggered along, sometimes silent, often singing, and sometimes betraying how recently they had quitted one of those terrible *bistros* which dispense appalling liquor to some of the best — and worst paid — soldiers in the world.

"And what did you find out about Lieutenant St Onge?"

"Something of possible interest, sir." The Spaniard's expressive eyes flickered sidewise. "Instead of staying on the range, he left it late this afternoon."

"At what time?"

"About six o'clock, sir."

That, North calculated, would have been about half an hour after they had had their interview with Colonel Garros. Was it possible that Calles, hungry for possible profit, had brought St Onge into town with a mysterious warning? North felt quite sure that the Mexican N.C.O. was not above a bit of sharp trading. Yes, North thought he saw it. Suppose St Onge knew something, had done something better, kept quiet, would he not be willing to pay good money for silence? Undoubtedly. On the other hand, if the American government wanted — in terms of cash — its man more than St Onge wanted silence, well, there'd be a pretty *sou* in it for the genial Enrique Calles. Increasingly, North felt the need of some earnest conversation with the Mexican.

Presently Sergeant Villejo halted, his eyes very white and curious in the gloom, and silently indicated a domed structure dimly seen in the background.

"The bandstand is there, Señor Capitán. Shall I go with you?"

"No, it might scare away my friend."

"As you wish, sir," the N.C.O. agreed quietly, and, pulling out a battered packet of "Gaulois," prepared to wait. "I hope your man will

not keep you waiting — there is much to do. Call me if there is need."

Sergeant Enrique Calles was at the bandstand, but he offered no greetings for the simple reason that his throat had been cut from ear to ear.

Once the alarm had been given and the meager evidence noted, Captain North started back to the commandant's office, experiencing somewhat the sensations of one who labors to make sail on a storm-tossed boat drifting toward a lee shore. How dearly had Sergeant Calles paid for his greed. One indubitable fact stood out — Mendez had taken alarm and would undoubtedly balk at nothing to preserve his secret. When North considered the second murder in relation to the first his puzzlement increased. Certainly Crane, glowering in his *cellule*, had had nothing to do with this second killing, yet it was absurd to think of the crimes as being unrelated.

Having made a formal report on Calles' murder to an acidly outraged colonel, North deliberated his next step.

"I have been informed, sir," he began, "that Lieutenant St Onge left the recruiting depot this afternoon. Would you please see if he can be located?"

"Not at the range!" The colonel's neck swelled and his terrible blue eyes sparkled like a swung sword. "'*Cré nom de Dieu!* He's had no orders to leave it. Marchand! Hàtvàny! order a search —— Ah, Khaniev, you're just in time."

The ex-czarist captain hurried in, saluted jerkily. Excitement had drawn streaks of color along his craggy cheekbones.

"Colonel, I have something to report."

"Let it wait, Captain," snapped the commandant. "Organize your search ——"

Something in Khaniev's manner attracted North's attention, and he risked an explosion by quietly suggesting, "Perhaps, Colonel Garros, it might be wise to hear what the Officer of the Day has to report."

"Well?"

It was to North rather than to his colonel that Khaniev said, "I looked up the serial numbers on that pistol — AC-37747 — and it belongs ——"

"To Crane?" the colonel said quickly.

"No, sir — to Lieutenant St Onge!"

Over the post commandant's office a curious, breathless silence spread with a widening effect. Then all the brown-faced officers turned to Colonel Garros. He sat very erect behind a row of telephones on his desk. Said he,

"Gentlemen, have any of you any idea where St Onge may be found?"

No one spoke, but in the background Sergeant Villejo clicked his heels.

"Well, Sergeant?"

"Possibly, sir, I can find him."

"*Comment?*" Buttons flashed all over the office as everyone turned.

The Spaniard's eyes wavered, looked wretchedly uneasy. "Sometimes I have seen him go into a little house in

the Soûk Khamoun."

"The Soûk Khamoun!" Colonel Garros glared. "That is in the Village Nègre — off bounds. Tomorrow you will remind me of this."

The Spanish sergeant's bearded jaws tightened. "Yes, *mon colonel.*"

"Well, Captain, I suppose you will want a detail?" the wiry little commandant inquired of North.

"No, sir. A detail might cause a commotion — and would perhaps frighten our man off."

"But the Village Nègre is a bad place for white men," protested a hawk-nosed major. "It is worth one's life to go there after dark."

With impressive unconcern North shrugged. "Nevertheless, I prefer to go alone. I trust Sergeant Villejo will be permitted to guide me?"

"Of course," Colonel Garros agreed.

"Would it not be better to wait until St Onge reports at the barracks," suggested Khaniev, nervously fingering a holster strapped above his right thigh. "He does not know himself suspected — and it is really suicide for Captain North to enter the Village Nègre."

"It wouldn't do to wait," North said firmly. "St Onge may be planning flight, and I'd hate to have him slip through my fingers — if he really is the man I want."

"The man we all want," rasped the colonel, looking more than ever like a ruffled gamecock. "Two murders have taken place on this post, '*cré nom de Dieu*, under my very nose!"

Accordingly, half an hour later Captain North, D.C.I., and the Spanish sergeant — complete with bournouses, chechias and heelless slippers — quit the quarters of the man they were about to hunt.

"You — er — are armed, Señor Capitán?" the sergeant demanded.

North nodded. "And you?"

"Yes, sir. As I have explained, we must be very careful. Our danger is double — first, this St Onge is a dangerous man, and second, if we are suspected, we get this." Villejo made a short, sidewise gesture before his throat.

"I'm trusting you entirely, Sergeant," said North, when once the harsh white outlines of the barracks had become lost in the darkness. "But tell me, why should St Onge go to this house in Soûk Khamoun?"

"Because," Villejo said, "he spends much of his time in it. In fact, he keeps there a mistress, an Arab, which is doubly forbidden."

"Very well, lead the way."

White walls splashed by passing camels and begrimed by soiled garments closed in gradually, until overhead only a narrow belt of stars was visible. The odor of decayed garbage grew stronger and surly dogs became more numerous as the two tall figures in white scuffed on. Ere long they plunged into a maze of streets so narrow that, by extending his arms, North could have touched both walls. Here furtive beggars shambled along, or paused to peer hopefully into smoky taverns where dozens of impassive, dingy-robed figures sat about

watching the contortions of some wretched third-rate dancing Ouled Naïl.

In doorways numberless outcasts snored, lean cats cruised everywhere in search of scraps, and swaggering Turcos lorded it over the street. Occasionally burly legionnaires, never less than six in a group, reeled by on their way back from a cheap and illicit evening spent in the enjoyment of the Village Nègre's full-blown pleasures, cursed or brushed contemptuously by the two men in bournous and gandoura. The white walls grew grimier, more decorated with flowing Arabic inscriptions, then seemed to touch overhead.

Not in years had Hugh North been so aware of menace lurking on all sides. Gradually the streets became darker and darker as the ancient human warrens at either side canted more and more to meet each other. Now no language was to be heard save guttural Arabic and less intelligent native dialects.

"In a few minutes, Señor Capitán," Villejo whispered in sibilant Spanish, "we will be in the Soûk Khamoun. Hold your pistol ready, and whatever happens stay close to me; do exactly as I say."

North, filled with sudden misgivings, drew a deep breath. Stick he must, of sheer necessity. It would be next to impossible to find his way back out of this seething human dunghill. Strange odors assailed his nostrils, now the exotic reek of a spice dealer's house, now the erotically pungent smell of a native tanner's shop, and, more rarely, the heavy scent of musk, jasmine and patchouli marked some perfumer's booth. The latticed covering of the soûk admitted very little light, and only here and there could a star be seen.

At last the sergeant's hand, moist with sweat, closed over North's, and he pointed to a door massively clamped with iron. "We are here. Follow me when I signal."

Tiny hairs lifted and tingled on the back of North's neck when, after Villejo had rapped softly, metal rattled, and a light from a tiny porthole gleamed like a demon's golden eye. Abruptly the bright circle became eclipsed as someone behind it peered out into the squalid street. There followed a guttural challenge in Arabic which the Spanish sergeant answered in barely perceptible tones.

"You still want to go in?"

"Yes. I must find St Onge." Hardly had the words left his lips than, like a chill and poisonous fog, a presentiment of impending doom suddenly closed in upon North, just as it had that night before Soissons when a .410 had made a direct hit on the P. C. Accordingly, he slid his hand beneath the sour-smelling woolen bournous and quietly disengaged his .32. Oddly enough, Sergeant Villejo must have shared his presentiment, for he, too, covertly produced a service automatic, and, using his forefinger as a guide, leveled it point-blank at the door.

Just then a hawk-featured Arab

opened the door, and, by the slash of light which leaped across the street, North beheld a face evil as original sin. Other shadows wavered on a clean white wall behind. Should he go in? The thought of young Ransome lying there so flat on the center of St Onge's grass rug decided him. What lay beyond that door? St Onge and his *péri* — battle? Death?

"*Deur reuo!* Come in quickly." Villejo, his bronzed face twitching with excitement, plucked North's sleeve and darted in when the door swung wide enough open to admit the passage of his body. North followed, every sense keyed to its fullest efficiency, and then the big porter instantly shut and barred the door. Without a word, he then shuffled off into the interior of the house.

"St Onge is here — in there." With his automatic he indicated a passage.

"Go ahead," North whispered, and felt suddenly incredibly calm. It was good to have things definite.

The feeble orange-hued rays of a mutton-fat lamp briefly lit the Spaniard's figure as he led on toward a further room. From that direction came voices speaking in an undertone. As they drew near the door, Villejo stepped aside and motioned North ahead.

"You have only now to make your arrest."

The Intelligence captain, however, shook his head, and his cheekbones now stood out in prominent ridges.

"Go in first. You know the way."

"As you wish, Capitán." Tightly gripping his pistol, he set off down the passage with North but a step or two behind.

"*Reudd balhou,*" Villejo called, and stepped into a dim and squalid room. Occupying it were three figures — all essentially dramatic. Two of them, lean half-castes, stood facing the door, their bluish faces taut as they leveled their automatics. The third man — he was in uniform — lay on a grimy Kairouan rug, bound hand and foot.

"Stand steady!" Firmly the D.C.I. officer pressed his .32 muzzle into the small of Sergeant Villejo's back.

"*Qué hay?* What are you doing?"

"Tell those men to drop their pistols *muy pronto!*" North's voice held the quality of a closing trap.

Just then a deafening roar made the room resound, and a dazzling jet of flame sprang toward North's eyes. He who had opened the door had risked a shot over Villejo's shoulder. Even as a bullet went *tchunk!* into the wall not half a foot behind the D.C.I. officer's head North promptly shot Villejo through the shoulder, then dropped flat to dodge a brace of shots, and before the Spaniard's anguished shriek was in the air he shot twice more with uncanny quickness.

As suddenly as it had begun the gun play was over. Coughing because of the bitter powder fumes, North sprang up listening, braced for further dispute, but the two half-castes lay tumbled on the floor, and Villejo could only writhe, curse, and clutch his shattered shoulder.

Quite calmly the prisoner, who ap-

peared to be an officer in the Legion, said in English, "My congratulations, monsieur — that was excellent shooting."

Villejo began screaming curses in English, and when he struggled to his feet his fury was terrible to behold.

"Cut out that yelling, Mendez!" North panted, and his voice was like a raised fist. "Stand still now, you'll bleed to death if that hole in your arm isn't tied up."

The murderer turned, his sweaty brown face contorting like that of a man in a fit. "Why the devil bother? I gambled and thought I'd won, but since I've lost I'm going to die anyhow, so to hell with you, Señor Capitán North!"

North settled the argument with a jolting blow to the jaw which snapped the wounded man's head back, and sent him toppling inert to the body-littered floor.

"Good work," observed the prisoner, this time in French. "*Ma foi!* but I was afraid for you when you started in here."

"Who are you?" North demanded, abandoning his careful scrutiny of the surroundings.

"I am Phillipe St Onge, lieutenant of the Legion." His was a gay, reckless and somewhat dissipated face, but not in any sense a vicious one. "And whom have I to thank?"

Captain North informed him briefly as he freed the lieutenant's hands and feet, then knelt to work over Mendez.

"Will nobody come?"

The lieutenant stopped chafing his swollen wrists long enough to laugh softly. "You forget, mon capitaine, that this is the Village Nègre. Name of a name, but you took a long chance in coming down here! Why did you do it?"

"Collect those automatics, and I'll tell you." While adjusting rude bandages to Mendez' wound North briefly outlined the case. "I suspected Sergeant Villejo from the start. You see his Spanish, though nearly perfect, is not that of Guadalajara, and it still retains certain purely Filipino inflections, especially when he is excited. That's why I always talked to him in Spanish. I wanted to be sure."

"Then you weren't sure?" St Onge demanded as, callously enough, he turned over the ex-porter with a booted foot.

"No, not until we started in the door here."

The lieutenant bent his reckless eyes on this tall American in something like admiration.

"I was wondering what warned you in time to be prepared for the *dénouement* in this room? *Nom de Dieu*, but you are quick with the pistol."

North stooped and picked up Villejo's pistol. "Here's what gave him away." He indicated a blurred finger mark along the right side of the blue-black barrel cover.

"Oh, a question of fingerprints? But how could you recognize it so far away, and in a half light?"

North choked slightly, but said politely enough, "It wasn't the pattern of this print that counted, Lieu-

tenant, it's the position of it."

"Position?" The big young officer in dark blue scowled, and looked uncertain of whether he was being mocked.

"Yes. About one man in five hundred sights a pistol with his forefinger held *parallel to the barrel* in order to better his aim. Such a man squeezes the trigger with his second finger. It's an excellent practice, though I've never learned it myself."

"Neither have I."

"I know that ——"

"How? You've never seen me shoot."

"There is a photo of you in your quarters — fortunately it was taken on a pistol range, and showed your forefinger *on the trigger*. From that moment I doubted whether you were the man I wanted. You see, the guns which killed poor Ransome and the paymaster *both* had a blur alongside the barrel. Crane was suspected, but not by me after I saw him sight my pistol."

"Marvellous! But one more question. Why did you come way in here to make your test?"

The D.C.I. officer's smile was grim as he said, "Two reasons. Knowing what Mendez had done to Ransome, I was afraid for you; and if I asked for a sighting demonstration in cold blood he might take alarm, fool me, and make the case infinitely harder."

"You are indeed amazing, Captain."

"Hardly that, Lieutenant. Shall we go now?"

St Onge shook his darkly handsome head. "No. Better let the quarter wonder about those shots a little longer; then we can slip out."

North smiled thinly. "You seem to know the Soûk Khamoun fairly well, Lieutenant."

"True, Captain, one can find some quaint amusements in this quarter. That treacherous dog Villejo had been useful sometimes, so I didn't question his message that he had discovered a delightful new *endroit*. I left the range around six, and came here direct. But instead of a *péri*, those two *indigène* dogs," he nodded to the collapsed figures, "jumped upon me."

"Had you any idea that Villejo was trying to saddle you with the crimes?"

"Me?" St Onge's jaw sagged open, and he forgot to shut it.

"Yes. Our friend Sergeant Villejo, otherwise Pablo Mendez, left your pistol on the scene of the first killing."

Silently St Onge spat into the prisoner's face, then he said, "Go on."

North sighed a little wearily. "But for that matter of the trigger finger he might as well have murdered two more."

"Two more?"

"Oh yes, you and me. It was rather a neat idea. Incidentally, most of Mendez' ideas are neat. After implicating you in every possible way as bait, he would lead me into the Village Nègre to make an arrest."

North chuckled softly. "He was clever about throwing the suspicion on you not too much — just enough.

Think, Lieutenant, how very simple it would have been for *le bon* Villejo to stagger back to the depot with a story of a terrific fight, of how you, St Onge, had murdered me, and then had made your escape! You would never appear to contradict him, because you would have been murdered the instant I fell. Neat, eh?"

St Onge shivered a little. "*Ma foi*, much too neat! But you said you were suspicious from the first?"

"Yes. Aside from the other reasons I've mentioned, one of the oldest laws of criminology is that a criminal, once he has made a success of a method, *invariably repeats!* Accordingly, in this case I was looking for someone ready and eager to throw suspicion on somebody else. The minute Villejo began it I suspected him."

In 1932 the University of London Press published a two-volume anthology titled MODERN DETECTIVE STORIES. *They are small books, bound in blue pebbled cloth, each containing a mere half-dozen short stories, and they are part of a series called "Treasuries of Modern Prose." Although issued only fifteen years ago, this two-volume anthology seems to have vanished completely from the book-scene; both volumes are virtually unknown to American collectors.*

As luck would have it, we found a copy of the first volume shortly after it was brought out; but the second volume of the set eluded us for a whole decade. We had almost given up, even beginning to doubt the very existence of the second volume, when a London book-scout finally unearthed a copy. And what a desirable copy it turned out to be! One of the six stories in the book is that classic tale, "The Tea-Leaf," by Edgar Jepson and Robert Eustace; and the book itself proved to be Edgar Jepson's own copy, autographed by him on the fly-leaf. Thus, patience is its own reward . . .

Edgar Jepson was one of the Old Guard of English detective-story writers. He is dead now, but his son, Selwyn Jepson, has followed in his father's footsteps. Born in 1899, educated at St. Paul's in London and at the Sorbonne in Paris, Selwyn Jepson is a steady contributor to the best English magazines. To the best of your Editor's knowledge, Mr. Jepson's detective-crime short stories have never been published in America — which is a pity, and an oversight EQMM is now going to remedy. Two of Mr. Jepson's shorts are among our favorite modern English crime stories. We are happy to bring you the first in this issue, and we promise you the second before long.

NOR THE JURY

by SELWYN JEPSON

THE baronet helped himself to marmalade.

"Well, what do you think of *that*, cousin of mine?" Gordon Jaynes read the letter carefully.

"I shouldn't care to have received it myself," he said. "But, then, I'm not a millionaire. I dare say you get used to that kind of thing."

In his voice there was none of the bitterness that was in his heart. He felt that bitterness whenever the wealth of Sir Robert Jaynes obtruded itself to remind him of his own insolvency. He handed back the threatening letter and stared gloomily out of the long window at the wide Langley lawns. They were gracious in the autumn sun.

"If every man who promised to kill me," said Sir Robert, "kept his promise, I would die several times a year.

Naturally, I have enemies. There isn't a rich man who hasn't. The mere fact of his being rich is sufficient reason for quite a number of people to want to put him out of the world."

He laughed easily, and crumpling the sheet of notepaper in his strong hand, he flicked it into the fire.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "I'll pay off that man for you, Gordon. I said last night that I wouldn't, but I'm damned if I can sit around and see your long face."

Gordon Jaynes turned quickly.

"You will?" he cried, inexpressibly relieved.

The baronet nodded and smiled.

"You're my only relative and heir, and I suppose I'm responsible for you. I'll give you a check after breakfast. How much was it — with the interest?"

"Twelve thousand."

"All right. But you've got to give me your word that you'll cut out this rackety life. These expensive women and so on. It's not good enough, Gordon, old man, you know it isn't — and there's always a money-lender waiting for men like you — men with prospects."

Gordon Jaynes examined his buttered toast. He resented the dissertation on morals that always accompanied these debt-paying incidents, but he would have to sit through it. He reflected that as a "prospect" Robert was a failure; the man at fifty-two was young with half an energetic lifetime in front of him.

" . . . but this is definitely the last time I shall help you, Gordon," he was saying. "You have got to learn to stand on your own feet."

His tone was firm but kindly. He did not find it comfortable to talk to a man, a friend and cousin, like that.

Gordon Jaynes made a vague gesture of assent. Half a lifetime in front of the man . . . unless one of those letterwriters kept a promise.

At the moment the idea of killing the millionaire came to him.

He regarded it calmly, with no sense of horror, while Robert changed the subject with the air of a man who has successfully discharged an unpleasant duty. Gordon Jaynes, however, did not notice it. He was fascinated by the idea of a dead Robert.

Dead: out of the world . . . with the law of inheritance.

Even when the estate duties were paid there would still be well over a million for his heir to play with; to enable him to gratify the expensive tastes which so far had been his only possessions.

The risks of murder need not trouble an intelligent man. Motive? As far as he was concerned the payment of that £12,000 debt would remove the possibility of his guilt. Would the police seek to fasten the crime on the man who had just been so generously helped by the victim?

Besides, there were the threatening letters, several a year. Why look farther for the murderer than in the author of one of them?

Everything conspired to make the project feasible.

He finished the buttered toast.

"Must you return to town tonight?" Robert asked. "I am going to pick up a few partridges tomorrow over at Stourey, if you would care to come along. Just ourselves."

Gordon Jaynes hesitated just a fraction of a second. The invitation suggested a remarkable opportunity. Shooting accidents occurred sometimes. . . . It would be so easy. But there would be people to hint at things. No; he decided to rely on the anonymous letter-writer and the £12,000's worth of rescue.

"I should have liked that," he said, regretfully; "but I must get back."

After dinner Sir Robert wrote the check, and Gordon Jaynes posted it. A thought struck him. If Robert died before that check was cleared, payment of it would be automatically stopped. Anybody but a fool would wait a day or so before he committed the murder.

He would be that fool, and dispel the last shred of possible suspicion.

He shook hands cordially with the baronet under the observant eyes of Terrington, the butler, climbed into the car, and was driven the two miles to the station in time to catch the seven forty-eight, the express which did not stop before reaching Euston.

To the porter who put him into an empty first-class compartment he gave a florin that he might, in case of need, be easily remembered, and settled himself down for the three hours' journey.

The moment the train was out of the station, however, he took his suitcase from the rack and moved closer to the door. The town of Langley lay in a valley, out of which the railway track climbed by a steep gradient through a cutting in the hills. The engine, with no distance in which to gain speed, would labor considerably before reaching the top.

He waited for this, and when the high walls of chalk came glimmering in the light of the carriages he turned the handle of the door. As the train came to the stiffest part of the gradient he threw out the suitcase, stood on the step a moment, judging the drop, and then jumped.

The momentum flung him off his feet, and he lay still until the train had passed and thick darkness enveloped him.

He rose, rubbed his knee, and walked down the cutting, groping for the suitcase. He found it, and sighed with relief. One of the most difficult stages of his plan had been accomplished, and he paused for a moment to listen to the remote song of the train as it gathered speed again on the downgrade for its sixty-miles-an-hour run to London.

The train was his alibi. No one at Euston could ever swear, in the unlikely event of questions being asked, that he, one passenger in several hundreds, had not passed through the barrier.

He left the track at the Langley end of the cutting and crossed a field. In the corner he found a gate and a footpath, along which he made his way

quickly in spite of the dark. Years ago, as a boy on holiday from school, he had explored this countryside, and to those early memories he entrusted the task of guiding him to Langley Court.

He knew that he had about six miles to go and that he must cover that distance inside two and a half hours if he was to arrive at the house before Robert retired for the night. He must walk as fast as the ground would permit and keep to the shortest route.

The weight of the suitcase began to trouble him, but he did not make the mistake of trying to hide it. He hurried as best he could and paused but once, and then only when he remembered his railway ticket. He tore it into minute pieces and buried them under a tree in the wood through which he was passing. He strode on through the murk of the October night with a sense of approaching triumph and success strong upon him.

At a few minutes past ten he crept up one of the library windows on the terrace of Langley Court and pressed himself into the thick ivy which grew round it.

A light burned in the room, and at the sight of it he was greatly relieved. Robert had not yet gone to bed. He put down the suitcase and leaned against the wet ivy leaves to regain breath. He knew that half an hour ago Terrington had asked if there was anything Sir Robert required, had been bidden good-night, and was now in his quarters, leaving his master to retire in his own good time.

The household would not learn until morning that Sir Robert had not slept in his bed. Until morning no one would go near the library.

Once again Gordon Jaynes relied on his boyhood memory and inserted the point of his penknife between the double doors of the window, which was hidden from the view of anyone sitting in front of the fire by a Queen Anne bureau.

To his surprise, however, the catch was not down, and the window opened noiselessly under pressure of his hand. He put away the penknife and in the diffused light looked at his watch. A train left Marlesby Junction, twelve miles away, at 2:15, and he had got to travel to London in it. He could catch it, walking steadily.

He stepped into the room on to the heavy carpet and waited a moment behind the concealing bureau. He held his breath and listened, wondering a little at his coolness. His heart was beating unhurriedly. There was no sound save the occasional creaking of the fire. Robert would be reading.

He moved slowly to the edge of the bureau and looked round it. Robert's bald head showed half an inch above the back of the easy chair in which he always sat.

Gordon Jaynes lifted a gloved hand, took a Spanish dagger from the wall where it hung with other medieval weapons, and began to crawl slowly, with infinite attention to silence, toward the easy chair, moving always in the shadow cast by it from the read-

ing lamp. Even if Robert looked round there was every chance that he would not be seen.

But Sir Robert did not look round. He did not stir. Gordon Jaynes reached the chair and rose slowly from his knees. He stood upright and gripped the dagger tightly. He changed his position slightly, so that he could see his cousin's side and the point on the black velvet smoking-jacket under which the lowest rib lay. Below the rib he would drive the sharp blade. He marked the spot and poised the dagger . . .

And hesitated.

He leaned forward suddenly and stared at the place where he had been about to strike.

"*God*," he cried in a thin scream.

The millionaire still did not stir. Gordon Jaynes leaned closer; peered with bulging, terrified eyes.

The hilt of a knife already protruded from beneath that lowest rib.

The next moment his wits returned, and he realized, with a gush of triumph, that what he intended to do had already been accomplished for him. Those millions were his. Robert was dead.

The Spanish dagger was not needed. He became frightened of it and ran to the wall by the bureau, where he hung it to its nail.

An enormous weight seemed to have lifted from his spirit; he could have danced. Better make sure the man was quite dead. Must be with that knife in him. Better take another look.

He went reluctantly back to the chair. Yes. Dead, dead, dead! He stood for a moment looking. Horrible! Better get out of here — Marlesby Junction — long walk ——

But he did not walk to Marlesby Junction that night.

During the small moment he was standing by Robert's chair the door of the library opened and Terrington appeared.

"I thought I heard a noise," he began. "Good gracious! *You* here, Mr. Gordon?"

Behind the butler was a footman; a young powerful footman, with good eyesight.

"Sir Robert! *Look!*" he cried, and took possession of Gordon Jaynes's wrist and arm before the unfortunate man could think of an adequate explanation for his presence.

"Good Lord! You don't think *I* did it, do you?" he said angrily, and wished suddenly that Sir Robert had not burned that threatening letter.

"Well," said the footman, "it's a case for the police. It's them you'll have to convince."

"I'll do that easily enough," retorted Jaynes.

But when it came to the point he found that he could not convince them.

Nor the jury.

To celebrate the annual dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars to be held in January 1947, and to offer devotees of Doyle and students of Sherlock an extra-special New Year's treat, we have put together an unusual (if we do say so ourselves) trio of Holmesian highjinks, two of them never previously published, and the third now appearing in the United States for the first time. This Sherlockian triple-decker is as varied in approach as any three pieces on the same basic theme could possibly be. The first is a radio broadcast; the second is a serious scrutiny of the always fascinating Mrs. Watson-question; and the third is parody fiction the like of which, we guarantee, you have never come upon before. Two of the pieces are by men, one by a woman; likewise, two of the pieces are by Americans, one by an Englishman; from this ratio of two to one, as to the sex and nationalities of the authors, you may draw whatever conclusions you care to make . . .

The first is called "The Case of the Ninety-Two Candles." It was broadcast on January 7, 1946 over the ABC network under the commercial sponsorship of Westinghouse Electric Corporation, which proves among other things that even our mightiest industrial organizations are not immune to the Sherlockian virus. The author is that well-known radio personality and war correspondent, Ted Malone. If Mr. Malone's name seems familiar to you, it is because you have undoubtedly heard his poetic voice more than once in the last fifteen years, intoning the quiet rhapsodies of his famous program, "Between the Book Ends."

"The Case of the Ninety-Two Candles" is no mere spoof: it presents a neat little problem, and if you are a lover and disciple of the Conanical Canon, you should be able to solve it sooner than Dr. Watson did. On second thought, Dr. Watson never did solve the mystery: he had to ask the leading question, as in the good old days of 221B Baker Street . . .

THE CASE OF THE NINETY-TWO CANDLES

by TED MALONE

FIRST Monday of the New Year . . . Christmas trees and decorations were taken down and stored away for another season, and the postman was weighted down with last minute New Year's cards as he plods

along the street. In the bundle left at our house there was one formal square envelope postmarked London, and addressed in the stilted and reserved handwriting of my old friend . . . Dr. Watson!

Yes, sir, a wonderfully strange letter from old Dr. Watson of 221B Baker Street, London — friend, room-mate, crony and biographer of England's most famous gangbuster — Sherlock Holmes!

I'd read all the Sherlock Holmes stories as recorded in the journals of Dr. Watson and I heard many more as we sat before a glowing coal grate in my London flat, but the story he told in this letter was far different from any he'd ever written or told before. Because, according to the good Doctor, Sherlock Holmes was suspected of *committing* the crime instead of solving it!

Yes, sir, Dr. Watson's letter was unusual in more ways than one. He told of mounting doubts in his mind as to the course of life his friend Sherlock Holmes was following since the end of the war, and of his own difficulties in attempting to solve a case on his own involving Holmes as a suspect, a case the good Doctor called "The Case of the Ninety-Two Candles."

"As you know, Malone," (Watson wrote) "one of the scarcest items in all London, due to the blackout during the War, is candles.

"We've all needed them, we've all used them, and the country's supply ran so short we've even had to make them. But even though they've been scarce the government never saw fit to put them on the ration list.

"You probably wonder why I'm devoting so much time to the current candle problem here in the city, but you'll see, as I go along, how it fitted into the theory that gave me the solution to "The Case of the Ninety-Two Candles."

"You see, old boy, we've had a bit of a wave of fires over here starting right after VE Day . . . blooming blazes they were that just seemed to flare up throughout the city wherever the Jerry bombers had got in a lick of work during the blitz. The buzz bomb and rocket sections had their fires too, and though I didn't notice them at first their regularity soon attracted my attention, and I knew we had a terrorist, an arsonist, a — what do you fellows call them? — oh, yes, a blazebug, in our midst.

"I spoke to Holmes about it shortly after the old pub up the street went up in a cloud of smoke and a head of bitters but he pished and tushed my suspicions, took a few more pulls on his pipe, and went on with his reading — a book on famous fires, I might add. The blazes seemed to have no respect for time, coming now in the morning, now at night, and one coming even at the unearthly hour of tea-time! I couldn't understand Holmes's reticence in suspecting foul play, and it wasn't until I saw him at the scene of one of the fires that the terrible truth began to dawn on me.

"It was midnight, if I recall cor-

rectly; an old tenement had just burned down in the dock area, and I hastened down there in a cab to look for clues. You see, I had decided to take on this case myself. There was quite a crowd out in the streets, and though the fire wagons were there no one seemed to have done anything. I edged my way through the crowd, used my Scotland Yard card to slip under the fire ropes, and there, Malone, I received the shock of my long and, I trust, respectable life!

"Standing in the shadows, alongside the now smouldering building, peaked cap pulled low over his piercing eyes, was Holmes himself!

"Quickly I dodged behind a burly firefighter and kept my eye on Holmes's lean, ulster-coated figure. I could perceive that he was scanning the debris littered on the burned building's floor, just a step removed from him through the now open door. Finally he straightened, with that movement I knew so well, stepped briskly forward and picked up an object from the floor. He stuffed it in his coat pocket, then turned and walked rapidly away. I had seen the object well enough to identify it. It was a long, partially burned candle!

"Yes, a candle . . . and candles were often used by arsonists as a means of setting fires, and yet allowing them to be far enough away from the blaze to have an ironclad alibi.

"Holmes picking up a partially burned candle . . . this was strange. But I decided to say nothing, to make no accusations or inquiries until I had obtained further proof.

"The weeks passed. There were more fires and always, somewhere on the inner fringe of the watching firefighters, would be my pipe-smoking friend . . . watching . . . waiting . . . snatching a burned candle from the ruins and with a look of almost sadistic delight, marching off into the night headed back for our quarters. You can imagine the shock this has been to my nervous system, the blow it has been to my faith in Holmes. For years we had lived together, worked together, discussed crimes together, and always he had been the staunchest pillar upholding that old saying 'crime does not pay.' Now, following his own rules of deduction, I could arrive at only one conclusion: Holmes was in his dotage, had studied crime and criminals so long he had at last reverted to the type he had formerly pursued so relentlessly.

"Just look at my clues, Malone, (Dr. Watson continued). Hadn't he been present after every fire? Hadn't he collected in all, by my very own count, 92 partially burned candles? He had, and working on Holmes's own system of gathering evidence and then confronting the suspect, I did that very thing this morning. It was shortly after breakfast when I made my accusation. We had just had our New Year's egg, which we had saved, when I said to him — point-blank and blunt as the very old devil:

" 'Holmes, I hate to say this, but I know that you are an arsonist. I know that you have been setting all

of these recent London fires, and I'm afraid that despite our long friendship I must turn you over to Scotland Yard.'

"Holmes finished reading the news item he was absorbed in, looked at me coolly as he tamped a bowlful of tobacco into his pipe, and then said:

" 'My dear Watson, I have been conscious of your every move for the past six months. I have known of your concern, have seen you watching me at every fire. But I have said nothing, thinking instead to let you have your little game. There is no arsonist, my dear Watson — the authorities set those fires!

" 'The authorities!'

" 'All part of the reconstruction program — they're burning all buildings beyond repair to clear the way for new structures. If you'd been watching the fire companies instead of spying on me, you would have observed that they were there to keep the fire from *spreading*, rather than to extinguish the blaze.'

"He smiled sardonically as he lighted his pipe.

" 'But the candles — the 92 candles you've collected! What in heaven's name would you want 92 candles for?'

"He blew a smoke ring and watched it waft its way to the ceiling.

" 'Elementary, my dear Watson, elementary. As you know, due to the war, candles are virtually unobtainable — *and today's my 92nd birthday!*"

The second contribution to our Salmagundi of Sherlockiana is a reply to Rex Stout's "Watson Was a Woman" and Kurt Steel's "The Truth About Watson," both of which appeared in the April 1946 issue of EQMM. Ruth Douglass, having pondered the revelations made by Mr. Stout and the late Mr. Steel, now gives her explanation — and you will find it both ingenious and provocative — of the famous Watsonian "inconsistencies."

"The Camberwell Poisoner" is a re-examination of the so-called muddled facts left to us by the so-called muddleheaded medico. It warrants your earnest and respectful attention.

Mrs. Douglass is an experienced journalist who served for several years as a news writer on the staff of the OWI. She and her husband, a well-known newspaperman who recently returned from France where he was a sergeant in the U. S. Army, have been scholars of Sherlock most of their lives. Their devotion to the Sacred Writings is amply proved by Mrs. Douglass's "last word" on the Watson trilemma — was Watson a man or a woman or both? Or was Watson just Watson and immeasurably

shrewder than any of us have ever dreamed? Was there, as Mrs. Douglass conjectures, more than one "final problem" in the good doctor's life?

Now read the "truth" about Sherlock Holmes's most "complete failure" and Dr. Watson's most "complete success" . . .

THE CAMBERWELL POISONER

by RUTH DOUGLASS

It is with a heavy heart that friends of the late Dr. John H. Watson will learn the facts regarding the Camberwell Poisoning Case, on which Sherlock Holmes was engaged in 1887.

Because of the aftermath of this tragedy in the Camberwell district of London, Watson became determined to hide the details of his life from future biographers. In this plan he has nearly succeeded. Watson would take bitter pleasure in the way he has duped some theorists, who have gone so far as to suggest that he was a woman or even a brother and sister.[1]

It would well have suited Watson to become an epicene mystery rather than divulge his secret. However, such speculation must end before some new biographer shows himself to be the incredible worm hitherto unknown to science.

Watson's haziness about his private life was an attempt to protect both himself and the woman he loved. This attempt began after he learned the truth about a certain decade — a decade he hoped to keep shameless. However, Watson had already left some clues in the Canon, and he inadvertently left a few more after he had mounted his defenses.

Let us start with his one reference[2] to the Camberwell poisoning. We learn only that Holmes contributed to the "clearing up" of the case by winding the dead man's watch and showing that the deceased had gone to bed within the previous two hours. There is no mention of any murderer being sent to justice.

Some time following (the chronology will be dealt with later), Mary Morstan, soon to become Mrs. Watson, called on Holmes concerning the mystery of THE SIGN OF FOUR. She came from Camberwell, where she was employed as a governess by a Mrs. Cecil Forrester, for whom Holmes had previously unraveled a "little domestic complication."

Mary's charm and helplessness appealed to Watson from the first. By the end of THE SIGN OF FOUR case, he was being rushed into marriage — a union about which Holmes was notably unenthusiastic. A few years later Watson began deliberately obscuring the details of his marriage.

We have some facts, though. Mary Watson was willing to let her husband go off on cases with Holmes. She herself, an orphan with no relatives in England, was on one occasion visiting her "mother" (later changed to "aunt," after Watson was trying to confuse the curious). Mary once forgot her husband's first name and

[1] See *EQMM*, issue of April 1946.

[2] In *The Five Orange Pips*.

called him "James" — the given name of at least one criminal Moriarty.

And no one, without intent, could leave so ambiguous an autobiography as did Watson.

The main clue lies in Camberwell. The poisoner of 1887 was not apprehended. She lived, instead, to pile tragedy on tragedy until Watson realized what had occurred. If Holmes deduced the facts, he preferred that the law not touch the case.

That "little domestic complication" in Mrs. Forrester's household was the Camberwell Poisoning. And the poisoner was — Mrs. Forrester.

She escaped justice and used Mary first as bait and then as a tool. She finally killed Mary. Here is the story:

Mrs. Forrester, in consulting Holmes on the original Camberwell case, was indulging in the same "pure swank" of another, but less clever, of Holmes's clients.[3] Holmes, of the latter criminal, said that such a person could tell any suspicious neighbor, "Look at the steps I have taken. I have consulted not only the police but even Sherlock Holmes."

With the case written off, Mrs. Forrester felt it wise to find a new source of poison. What could be better than a doctor? Watson was an eligible bachelor, easy-going and unsuspicious.

Possibly she thought of setting her own cap for him. There is no mention of a Mr. Forrester, and one fears it was he who innocently wound his watch and prepared for bed one night in 1887. But Mary was a better attraction. Her youthful simplicity, set in the charm of a well-appointed home, could be counted on to appeal to Watson. So Mrs. Forrester set to work.

There is some reason (a matter of Greek e's, to be presented later) for thinking she already knew, when she hired Mary, that a problem requiring detective services was in the offing. In any case, she had perfect bait.

Now listen to Watson describe Mrs. Forrester and her home, when he brought Mary back from the first adventures connected with THE SIGN OF FOUR:

"She opened the door herself, a middle-aged, graceful woman, and it gave me joy to see how tenderly her arm stole round the other's (Mary's) waist and how motherly was the voice in which she greeted her. She was clearly no mere paid dependant but an honored friend. I was introduced, and Mrs. Forrester earnestly begged me to step in and to tell her our adventures. I explained, however, the importance of my errand and promised faithfully to call and report any progress which we might make with the case. As we drove away I stole a glance back, and I still seem to see that little group on the step — the two graceful, clinging figures, the half-opened door, the hall-light shining through stained glass, the barometer, and the bright stair-rods. It was soothing to catch even that passing glimpse of a tranquil English home in the midst of the wild, dark business

[3] *The Adventure of the Retired Colourman.*

which had absorbed us."[4]

Certainly it was soothing. Any woman will recognize this system. For decades the authorities have recommended soft lights, the tranquil home, and the quietly hospitable family as the right setting for getting a certain question asked. The arrangement is effective even if the man has an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents, and it is doubly so if he is sharing quarters with someone so untidy as Sherlock Holmes.

Watson called the next day, as bidden. He was captivated from the first, and the motherly Mrs. Forrester undoubtedly urged Mary to accept him quickly.

Mind that Mary Morstan became Mary Watson with no motive other than true love. Mrs. Forrester had won her trust deftly, and it was some months before Mary learned of the dark purpose in the matchmaking.

The fact that the Camberwell case *preceded* the Watsons' marriage may be easily deduced, even if, as some students suggest, the ceremony took place in 1887. Watson mentioned the poisoning as one of the five cases on which he had notes for that year, and they were only part of a long series. If these problems had come in the first months following the marriage, he would not have been keeping up notes, for the early period of the union was spent in domestic isolation. Of this happy era, Watson wrote:

"My own complete happiness, and the home-centered interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to absorb all my attention. . . ."[5]

Sooner or later, though, building up a practice had to absorb some of Watson's attention, and not all patients are able to wear down the doctor's stair-treads. So Mary began to have lonely evenings, in which she welcomed calls from the kind and maternal Mrs. Forrester.

How simple for a middle-aged woman to hint at ailments which she hesitated to describe to a doctor. How easy to confide her needs to another woman, a doctor's wife. It would be such a comfort to have "just a bit of belladonna, dear Mary, without having to talk to John about it."

Mary knew nothing of medicine, and Mrs. Forrester was well trained to supervise the removal of items from the doctor's dispensary. During Watson's absence from the house, Mrs. Forrester craftily got enough atropine — a deadly alkaloid contained in belladonna — for the use of an entire criminal syndicate. And she taught Mary what items to slip out, and asked her to bring them along on her next visit to Camberwell.

The intimacy between the two women had been so strong that Mary looked on Mrs. Forrester as a relative. Thus when Watson, in the early days of the marriage, said his wife was "on a visit to her mother's,"[6] he was re-

[4] THE SIGN OF FOUR.

[5] *A Scandal in Bohemia.*

[6] *The Five Orange Pips.*

ferring to the woman he and the orphan Mary both called "Mother Forrester."

(Later, in 1892, after Watson learned the truth, he changed her status to that of "aunt.")

As Watson was out of the house more and more, on both his own and Holmes's cases, Mrs. Forrester made increasing requests of Mary. If Watson missed supplies or prescription forms, he put their use down to his next-door substitute, Dr. Anstruther.

Maybe the requests came so often that Mary insisted on her dear friend's having a professional consultation, and a refusal made her suspicious. It is more likely that Mary put together the facts at her disposal. Mary may have been meek and trustful, but Holmes once observed that she had a genius which "might have been most useful" in his work.[7] So she hinted at her suspicions, and Mrs. Forrester involved her in a sort of blackmail: her husband would be revealed as the source of any poisonings she might expose.

Although Mary had an inherent weakness which kept her from taking strong steps (her father had shown a similar lack of courage in letting his card losses pull him into THE SIGN OF FOUR affair), she did try to break away from her guilty partnership. She made new friends and became the source of comfort for people in distress — Watson recalled that in 1889 "folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds to a light-house."[8]

This breaking away, combined with the clues Watson had unknowingly presented in his published stories, convinced Mrs. Forrester that she must do away with Mary. She made her first attempt just before the day on which Watson made the observation quoted above. Mary's constitution was strong, or the dosage weak, for the only effect was to leave her somewhat dazed, so that she called her husband "James."

Apparently she thought that she herself might become a poisoning victim never occurred to Mary — she was the goose who laid the golden egg.

For a two-year period Mrs. Forrester had to bide her time while Mary devoted herself to aiding the grief-stricken, a worthy but tiring occupation. Eventually what the world then noted with sorrow as the year of Holmes's final problem — 1891 — was really that of Mary Watson's final problem.

"Mother Forrester" called on the Watsons and said, "Mary, dear, you're worn out from helping other folk; do come away with me for a rest." Watson, as a medical man, urged the holiday. Mary went, hoping that by threat or argument she could make this visit the last — which it was.

Thus on an evening in 1891, when Holmes asked Watson to come with him for a week on the Continent, Mary was again "away on a visit."[9]

The news that Holmes had died in the Reichenbach Fall in Switzerland made Mrs. Forrester feel secure in

[7] THE SIGN OF FOUR.

[8] *The Man with the Twisted Lip.*

[9] *The Final Problem.*

acting at last. The Holmes-Watson partnership had become too close for her comfort, and the occasional publication of Watson home-scenes had been alarming. Now there would be no great risk: Watson would be a broken, grieving man.

No doubt she was his most comforting friend in his dual loss. What Mary's death was ascribed to we shall never know, nor can we tell how he unraveled the story. It is most likely that Watson was simply a good student of his own Canon. (Also, Mary may have left a note for her husband, in THE SIGN OF FOUR treasure chest, which of course they kept out of sentiment.)

Mrs. Forrester knew she was safe from exposure of her past activities, which involved both the Watsons. She also felt it wiser to drop out of sight, first because of Watson's rising interest in crime, and finally because of Holmes's reappearance.

In the spring of 1894, Holmes returned from his supposed death to find Watson actively following events in the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair.[10] During this reunion, the two made their last recorded reference to Mary Morstan Watson. Holmes had learned of the bereavement, and recommended work as an antidote.

How much did Holmes know? Did Watson drag red herrings across *his* path, too?

Maybe it was on Holmes's advice but thenceforth in print Watson *deliberately sought to confuse the curious.* He was guardedly incoherent about his second marriage — a union which has puzzled students and which one can only hope was so uneventful as not to warrant concealment.

There is one curious incident which may be added to the story. It concerns the matter of the Greek e's. The letter Mary brought to Holmes at the beginning of THE SIGN OF FOUR problem in the late '80's, the letter that called her to a mysterious rendezvous and led to her marriage, was in a disguised hand which contained what Holmes called the "irrepressible Greek e."

On one other occasion Holmes mentioned a Greek e, and that was also in the days at "the end of the '80's," at the beginning of THE VALLEY OF FEAR problem when Watson was still sharing the Baker Street quarters.

The correspondent in the latter case was a "Fred Porlock" who received, by way of the Camberwell post office, payments from Holmes for occasional information on the Moriarty crowd's criminal plans.

Have we here a clue, left in the early days before Watson knew the story, that Mary was put into the Forrester household by people who knew THE SIGN OF FOUR mystery was forthcoming? Did Mrs. Forrester once try to play both sides? Was Mrs. Forrester in the pay of the Moriarty organization all the time, getting poisons for their purposes? (Poisons for a crowd led by at least one "James"?)

[10] *The Adventure of the Empty House.*

Such matters may be better left unknown, now that we have uncovered so much. It is said that in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a battered tin dispatch-box containing Watson's records of the Holmes cases. Watson admitted that some of these were "complete failures." [11]

Among the records we shall never find any notes on the Camberwell Poisoning Case, for they were destroyed around 1892. The case was the most tragic of all the complete failures.

[11] *The Problem of Thor Bridge.*

The anchor piece in our Holmesian triple-decker is the finest example of bloodhound buffoonery we have read since editing THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (*suppressed by the Doyle family*). *Our only regret is that "The Last Detective Story in the World" was not written in time to be included in* THE MISADVENTURES — *especially since Maurice Richardson's "last detective story" is without doubt the most misadventurous misadventure of all.*

The Richardson rib appeared in the English magazine, "Lilliput," and in the June 2, 1946 issue of "Crusader," the British Forces Weekly which was the counterpart of the Mediterranean edition of the U. S. "Stars and Stripes." A clipping of the story was mailed to us by Lt. Col. H. Hewitt, stationed at Caserta, Italy, and to that kind and thoughtful overseas aficionado we are now happy to express our gratitude in print.

In "The Last Detective Story in the World" we witness the Armageddon of the detective story — the final battle between the powers of good and evil. Needless to inform you, the Grand Field Marshals in charge of strategy and tactics are none other than Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty. The Master Criminal, with diabolic cunning, has enlisted all the arch-fiends of crime fiction and all the arch-villains of fact; his Rogues' Gallery include Colonel Sebastian Moran, Dr. Grimsby Roylott, their Excellencies Count Fosco and Dracula, Dr. Fu Manchu, Clubfoot, The Clutching Hand, Jack the Ripper, Charles Peace, Burke and Hare, and other monstrous and malevolent murderers. The Master Detective, with the safety of the entire world on his thin shoulders, has recruited such men of good will as Inspector French, Lord Peter Wimsey, Father Brown, Bulldog Drummond, the Old Man in the Corner, Philo Vance, Dr. Thorndyke, Dupin, Hercule Poirot, Reggie Fortune, Dr. Gideon Fell, Nero Wolfe, Ellery Queen, and Perry Mason — indeed, "the works"! How the colossal contest, the stupendous struggle, came out, we leave to

your suspenseful reading. We voice only one editorial hope: that Maurice Richardson, a well-known English author and critic, decides to write a sequel to "The Last Detective Story in the World" (last plus one, so to speak) and sends it to EQMM by jet-plane — we can't wait!

THE LAST DETECTIVE STORY IN THE WORLD

by MAURICE RICHARDSON

INFORMATION that Professor Moriarty, at the head of a gang of fiends recruited from villains of crime fiction throughout the past hundred years, was out to steal the Atomic Bomb was received in London late one foggy evening just in time for the nine o'clock news.

By a quarter past nine Holmes's old rooms at 221B were already thronged with detectives of all types and periods, come rallying with their amanuenses to offer their services in the Universal emergency. By nine-thirty Baker Street was one solid traffic block, jammed with every imaginable vehicle. The front door bell jangled incessantly and Mrs. Hudson threatened hysterics. Dr. Watson dispatched Billy the page-boy for a policeman.

The ex-Baker Street irregular scuttled up the area steps and dived into the mob to emerge with Inspector Lestrade and Superintendent French, who now made each other's acquaintance for the first time.

Lestrade sniffed disdainfully and muttered something under his breath about not having much use for these "new fangled eddicated rozzers."

"Don't you think we professionals ought to stick together with so many amateurs about?" said French softly.

The scrum was becoming unmanageable. With commendable presence of mind, Lord Peter Wimsey suggested an adjournment to the Wigmore Hall. Half an hour later the first meeting of a roughly organized association was under way with Sherlock Holmes in the chair.

The first item — procedure — was being discussed when two men entered the hall and strode towards the platform. The leader wore an MCC blazer and white flannels. He was smoking a Turkish cigarette. His companion staggered along under the weight of an enormous cricketing bag. Immediately there was a chorus of detectives' voices from all over the hall: "Arrest that man!" but before any action could be taken, Raffles, for it was none other, attended of course by the ever-faithful Bunny, bounded lightly on to the platform, doffed his cap to Holmes and with a winning smile exclaimed: "At your service, skipper! You can always count on me to play a straight bat for England!"

The debate which followed threatened to split the association from top to bottom. Professional detectives to a man were utterly opposed to the inclusion of A. J. Raffles in the team.

Amateurs, forgetting their jealousy of each other in their hostility to Scotland Yard, stressed the need for originality of method. The Amateur Cracksman himself, flicking his wrists in the motion of a late cut, strolled coolly over to where Wimsey was sitting and proffered his cigarette case. "A Sullivan, Peter?" he said laconically. Wimsey carefully selected one of the identical little paper cylinders, lit it, and blew a cloud of smoke up and down his delicately chiseled, aristocratic nostrils. A spasm of jealousy passed across Bunny's face. He dropped the cricketing bag with a sickening thump on the toe of Father Brown which was peeping out from under its owners' cassock.

The discussion had been raging for some minutes when a messenger from 10 Downing Street was admitted with a note for Holmes. After reading it the great detective turned a shade paler. Then he rang his bell for silence.

"Gentlemen," said Holmes, and never in all the desperate hazards they had experienced together had Watson known his old friend's voice to sound so grave, "gentlemen, I have here a confidential list, which has just been sent me by the Prime Minister, of the team Professor Moriarty is putting in the field. It is not a very long list but there are some names on it that make the blood run cold. The Professor, with characteristic malevolence, is including figures of fact as well as fiction. Nay, more, with cynical disregard of all the rules, he is sweeping into his net the dregs of the supernatural. Against a side which contains not only such monstrously unorthodox practitioners as Charles Peace and Jack the Ripper, but also that mythological pair of dentures known as Count Dracula, need we hesitate for one moment? I say: A. J. Raffles joins the team!"

This had a sobering effect. Holmes was able to outline a scheme for general coordination before the next interruption occurred.

With a bellow like a wounded water buffalo, Bulldog Drummond announced that Algy Longworth had just telephoned through from the Hog's Back — *Phyllis had been kidnaped. . . .*

The circumstances, it appeared, were not altogether unusual. The stable clock had just struck midnight and the golf course was enveloped in a thick black mist when a masked stranger, of whose features nothing could be distinguished save a pair of baleful, infra-red eyes, rang the bell and handed Phyllis a note.

Darling, she read, *I've just discovered a corking new putting grip. Come at once to 18th green. Bring balls and heavy water decanter — Hugh.*

"Do you think you ought to go, Phyl? I mean, it might just possibly be a trap," warned Peter Darrell. Too late. The impetuous girl was already tripping through the laurels. Next moment a scream rang out that could be heard all over the Home Counties.

"First victim to them," said the Old Man in the Corner, as he tied a

knot in that interminable piece of string. He had been appointed scorer.

And on this menacing note the meeting adjourned.

Next morning's *Daily Express* published an interview with Moriarty in which he divulged the names ("all except the fifth column") of his team: Professor Moriarty (Captain), Colonel Sebastian Moran, Dr. Grimsby Roylott, Mr. and Mrs. Carl Petersen, Dr. Henry Lakington, their Excellencies Counts Fosco and Dracula, Dr. Fu Manchu, Dr. Clubfoot Grundt, Sir Eustace Pedder, Sir Joseph Londe, The Clutching Hand, Jack the Ripper, Charles Peace, and Burke and Hare.

"As you see," said the Professor with a smile that made Consols drop five points, "the medical profession is well represented. The other side? We shall go through them like a stiletto through blubber. The mere thought of poor old Holmes makes me misquote Blake and say: 'Did he who made the lamb make *me?*' Yes, I think you may take it that the bomb is as good as in the bag. That is all I have to say except that Peace, Burke, and Hare will use the Player's Dressing Room."

In fact, this optimistic hand-out was intended to conceal the true state of affairs at Fiends' H.Q. where there had been more than one incident. Already, Fosco and Grimsby Roylott were not on speaking terms because the doctor's Russell's Viper had eaten the Count's pet white mice. Clubfoot was indisposed, having first stepped into Dr. Lakington's acid bath, then narrowly escaped being sold to the Royal College of Surgeon's Museum by Burke and Hare. Dracula, returning from a nocturnal foraging expedition, had flown too close to a blast furnace and only just managed to stagger home on one wing and a curse. Dr. Fu Manchu's sizeable retinue of venomous animals and oriental stranglers had attracted quite a lot of unwelcome attention when being exercised on Wimbledon Common. As for the activities of Jack the Ripper disguised as a G.I., they were rapidly leading to strained relations with Washington. Small wonder that Colonel Sebastian Moran, shaking his grizzled head and fingering the trigger of his sporting Lee-Metford, muttered to his chief, "Couldn't we turn King's Evidence, shop these flaming fiends, and go out on shikari by ourselves?"

"Patience, old friend," Moriarty soothed him. "Remember, if it's bad for us, it's fifty times worse for Holmes. He's got so many more on his side."

Seldom, if indeed ever, had Moriarty spoken a truer word. At the Albert Hall, which the British Council had placed at the disposal of the Detectives' Association, and whose floor was now six inches deep in tobacco ash, chaos threatened. Holmes had retired with a hundredweight of shag to the organ loft to think things out. His withdrawal was the signal for an outbreak of internecine feuds with which Watson, as chairman of the

Security Council, proved utterly unable to cope.

Unnerved by his bereavement, Drummond had launched a violent campaign against Philo Vance, abusing him as an effeminate highbrow. "The blighter's in hopeless condition," he roared. "One punch would split him like a rotten apple." Equally displeasing to the liberal mind was the scorn with which the more intellectual detectives regarded humbler practitioners like Sexton Blake and Val Fox. Even the scientific school, headed by Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Priestley, failed to exhibit their customary decorum and rudely challenged Father Brown to a science-versus-religion brains trust with demonstrations by Polton. Accusations of plagiarism were freely hurled about, as Poe's Dupin paraded gloomily past the boxes with a placard inscribed: "*The first and only genuine detective in fiction. All the rest are imitations.*"

But the most acute manifestations of professional jealousy were caused by encounters between first- and second-string detectives from the works of the same author. And more than once, as Hercule Poirot aimed a *coup de savate* at Col. Race, and Mr. Clunk served a writ on Reggie Fortune, amid the furious booming of Dr. Gideon Fell and Sir Henry Merrivale could be heard Watson's desperate threat: "If you don't stop it at once I'll send for your author!"

Nor were the American contingent behind-hand, contributing several untoward incidents such as when Nero Wolfe's man-eating orchid snapped at Ellery Queen, and Perry Mason, on a visit to the Old Bailey, collected a sharp sentence for contempt of court.

As for the super-toughs of the hard-boiled school, they began by beating up Lemmy Caution and Slim Callaghan* — just to keep their hands in — and went on to establish what Inspector French in his report to the Chief Commissioner described as "a régime of unbridled license and depravity indistinguishable from the goings-on of the professional underworld."

And now the President of the United States suddenly took it into his head to make another of those surprise decisions for which he was becoming famous. That evening it was announced that an emissary of the State Department had arrived at the Albert Hall and presented the Atomic Bomb to Bunny — on duty as chairman of the reception committee — for safe-keeping.

Later that same night, Watson, trembling in every limb, tiptoed up to the organ loft to break the news to Holmes: *Bunny had mislaid the bomb.*

"But really, Professor. . . ."

"Come on! Own up! One of you's got it. This story that Bunny's lost it is merely a fabrication of Holmes's P.R.O. to save face. Is it you, Dracula? Is it you, Fosco? Fu Manchu, you're looking unusually furtive. No? Petersen, what's that bulge in your

* But not, you notice, Sam Spade, The Continental Op, or Philip Marlowe. — *Editor's Note.*

pocket? An apple, indeed! Let's have a look at it. Bite it, please, Colonel. Thank you. Did you take it, Pedder? The trouble is there's not a single one of you I can trust. Very well. There's no time to waste. Scientific interrogation straight away! We'll begin with the lower orders. Colonel, take Peace, Burke and Hare up to Dr. Lakington's bathroom at once, please."

"Now look 'ere, Perfessor, yer know this ain't right. . . ."

"But, Holmes, what are we to do? We shall be the laughing-stock of the universe!"

"You must give me time to think, Watson."

"Bunny! You blithering little idiot!"

"I'm awfully sorry, A. J. I just can't for the life of me remember where I put it. My mind's a complete blank."

"Colonel! Suspend the interrogation! We must give Holmes some bluff to call. I have it! Challenge him to a cricket match."

"But, Professor, will he accept? . . . ."

"Bluff, you fool, bluff! Holmes never refuses a challenge. Can we still put an eleven in the field?"

"Hm . . . let me see. Peace, Burke, Hare, and Jack the Ripper all unfit to play. . . . Dracula and Fu Manchu don't know the rules. . . . Eight, nine, ten. . . . Yes, we can just do it if Clubfoot keeps wicket."

"Can he?"

"Of course. All German spies are taught cricket at school."

"But Holmes! You're not going to accept!"

"Bluff, my dear Watson, bluff! I always call bluff in whatever shape or form. Of course we accept. Tell Raffles to pick a side. But he's not to play Bunny."

Lord's was *en fête*. . . . The unusual nature of the teams had attracted interest far and wide. This suspension of hostilities to make room for a friendly game of cricket was something that made a direct appeal to the sporting spirit, and seemed to many to give promise of a new order of fairplay. It was also interpreted as a sign that the bomb was still in safe custody. Crowds lining the streets cheered themselves hoarse as the detectives' team in its old-fashioned barouche, driven by Mycroft Holmes, swept up to the ground. So essentially sporting, indeed, was the atmosphere that there was a sturdy cheer, intermingled with only a faint undercurrent of booing, when the fiends' eleven alighted from their jet-propelled hearse.

After a little friendly banter over some double-headed halfpennies, a coin was agreed on. Moriarty won the toss and elected to bat.

Raffles licked his thumb and felt the wind. "I'll take the pavilion end," he said. "And may God defend the right."

In the members' enclosure Holmes and Watson sat on either side of

Bunny. Holmes had just received a report from Inspector French that all members of the opposing team were being kept under observation.

A ripple of anticipation ran along the benches as the fiends' opening pair, Dr. Grimsby Roylott and Sir Joseph Londe strode out to the wicket.

"This," said the Old Man in the Corner, "is it." To his dismay there was not enough string for another knot.

Dr. Grimsby Roylott took middle and leg. Raffles measured his run and dug his heel into the ground. "Play," said the umpire.

Raffles had nearly reached the crease, and his wrist was coming up for the final flick that would send the leather spinning towards the stumps defended by one of the crookedest bats in the history of the game when there was a scream from Bunny: "Stop! Stop! Raffles! *You're bowling the bomb!* I remember now! I put it inside the special ball you use for your leg-breaks."

But it was too late . . .

No detective-story writer of international renown has created as many famous sleuths of fiction as has Agatha Christie — another proof of her remarkable versatility and her irrepressible literary experimenting. First and foremost among Miss Christie's investigators of crime is, of course, the man with the egg-shaped head and the indefatigable grey cells, the great Hercule Poirot. Next, in chronological order of Miss Christie's books of shorts, is that delightful duo, Tommy and Tuppence Beresford. This 'tec team was followed by another brace of bloodhounds, the mystical and mysterious Mr. Quin and his partner-in-crime-detection, the sedentary Mr. Satterthwaite. How familiar these names are to the dyed-in-the-bull fan! Then came one of Miss Christie's most successful adventures-in-print: the small-town, spinster-sleuth Miss Marple. And finally, that strictly British private eye, Parker Pyne.

All these gumshoe gentlemen (and ladies) have twirled their mustache, patted their hair-do, and come up with startling solutions to otherwise impossible crimes. But what of Miss Christie's other *detectives? Yes, there are others — amateur and professional criminologists who appeared in single stories and for reasons known only to Miss Christie, never achieved the fullness of a sustained series. We are on the trail of these one-shot snoopers, these fugitive ferrets, especially those who have never, to your Editor's knowledge, had American publication. For example, have you ever heard of Sir Edward Palliser, K.C.?*

At the time you meet Sir Edward he is a retired criminal lawyer, nearly seventy years old, whose waning years are spent in the peaceful and cloistered atmosphere of his very fine criminological library. His life had become, like his surroundings, a sort of cul-de-sac — and he liked it that way. But a decade before he had given, in elderly man-of-the-world fashion, a promise — a knightly promise to a beautiful young damsel. "If there is ever anything I can do . . ." And the day came when Magdalen Vaughan, as in the stories of old, found herself a damsel in distress. So, despite his three-score-and-ten which the oldest book of all so generously allots, Sir Edward Palliser went back to the wars, a knight in shining armor, to engage the Dragon of Murder . . .

SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

SIR EDWARD PALLISER, K.C., lived at No. 9 Queen Anne's Close. Queen Anne's Close is a cul-de-sac. In the very heart of Westminster it manages to have a peaceful old-world atmosphere far removed from the turmoil of the twentieth century. It suited Sir Edward Palliser admirably.

Sir Edward had been one of the most eminent criminal barristers of his day and now that he no longer practised at the Bar he had amused himself by amassing a very fine criminological library. He was also the author of a volume of Reminiscences of Eminent Criminals.

On this particular evening Sir Edward was sitting in front of his library fire sipping some very excellent black coffee, and shaking his head over a volume of Lombroso. Such ingenious theories and so completely out of date.

The door opened almost noiselessly and his well-trained manservant approached over the thick pile carpet, and murmured discreetly:

"A young lady wishes to see you, sir."

"A young lady?"

Sir Edward was surprised. Here was something quite out of the usual course of events. Then he reflected that it might be his niece, Ethel — but no, in that case Armour would have said so.

He inquired cautiously. "The lady did not give her name?"

"No, sir, but she said she was quite sure you would wish to see her."

"Show her in," said Sir Edward Palliser. He felt pleasurably intrigued.

A tall, dark girl of close on thirty, wearing a black coat and skirt, well cut, and a little black hat, came to Sir Edward with outstretched hand and a look of eager recognition on her face. Armour withdrew, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

"Sir Edward — you do know me, don't you? I'm Magdalen Vaughan."

"Why, of course." He pressed the outstretched hand warmly.

He remembered her perfectly now. That trip home from America on the *Siluric*! This charming child — for she had been little more than a child. He had made love to her, he remembered, in a discreet, elderly man-of-the-world fashion. She had been so adorably young — so eager — so full of admiration and hero-worship — just made to captivate the heart of a man near sixty. The remembrance brought additional warmth into the pressure of his hand.

"This is most delightful of you. Sit down, won't you." He arranged an armchair for her, talking easily and evenly, wondering all the time why she had come. When at last he brought the easy flow of small talk to an end, there was a silence.

Her hand closed and unclosed on the arm of the chair, she moistened her lips. Suddenly she spoke — abruptly.

"Sir Edward — I want you to help me."

He was surprised and murmured mechanically: "Yes?"

She went on, speaking more intensely: "You said that if ever I needed help — that if there was anything in the world you could do for me — you would do it."

Yes, he *had* said that. It was the sort of thing one did say — particularly at the moment of parting. He

could recall the break in his voice — the way he had raised her hand to his lips.

"*If there is ever anything I can do — remember, I mean it. . . .*"

Yes, one said that sort of thing. . . . But very, very rarely did one have to fulfil one's words! And certainly not after — how many? — nine or ten years. He flashed a quick glance at her — she was still a very good-looking girl, but she had lost what had been to him her charm — that look of dewy untouched youth. It was a more interesting face now, perhaps — a younger man might have thought so — but Sir Edward was far from feeling the tide of warmth and emotion that had been his at the end of that Atlantic voyage.

His face became legal and cautious. He said in a rather brisk way: "Certainly, my dear young lady, I shall be delighted to do anything in my power — though I doubt if I can be very helpful to anyone in these days."

If he was preparing his way of retreat she did not notice it. She was of the type that can only see one thing at a time and what she was seeing at this moment was her own need. She took Sir Edward's willingness to help for granted.

"We are in terrible trouble, Sir Edward."

"*We?* You are married?"

"No — I meant my brother and I. Oh! and William and Emily, too, for that matter. But I must explain. I have — I had an aunt — Miss Crabtree. You may have read about her in the papers? It was horrible. She was killed — murdered."

"Ah!" A flash of interest lit up Sir Edward's face. "About a month ago, wasn't it?"

The girl nodded. "Rather less than that — three weeks."

"Yes, I remember. She was hit on the head in her own house. They didn't get the fellow who did it."

Again Magdalen Vaughan nodded. "They didn't get the man — I don't believe they ever will get the man. You see — there mightn't be any man to get."

"What?"

"Yes — it's awful. Nothing's come out about it in the papers. But that's what the police think. They *know* nobody came to the house that night."

"You mean ——?"

"That it's one of us four. It *must* be. They don't know which — and *we* don't know which. . . . *We don't know.* And we sit there every day looking at each other surreptitiously and wondering. Oh! if only it could have been someone from outside — but I don't see how it can . . ."

Sir Edward stared at her, his interest rising.

"You mean that the members of the family are under suspicion?"

"Yes, that's what I mean. The police haven't said so, of course. They've been quite polite and nice. But they've ransacked the house, they've questioned us all, and Martha again and again. . . . And because they don't know which, they're holding their hand. I'm so frightened — so

horribly frightened. . . ."

"My dear child. Come now, surely you are exaggerating."

"I'm not. It's one of us four — it must be."

"Who are the four to whom you refer?"

Magdalen sat up straight and spoke more composedly.

"There's myself and Matthew. Aunt Lily was our great aunt. She was my grandmother's sister. We've lived with her ever since we were fourteen (we're twins, you know). Then there was William Crabtree. He was her nephew — her brother's child. He lived there, too, with his wife, Emily."

"She supported them?"

"More or less. He has a little money of his own, but he's not strong and has to live at home. He's a quiet, dreamy sort of man. I'm sure it would have been impossible for him to have — oh! it's awful of me to think of it even!"

"I am still very far from understanding the position. Perhaps you would not mind running over the facts — if it does not distress you too much."

"Oh! no — I want to tell you. And it's all quite clear in my mind still — horribly clear. We'd had tea, you understand, and we'd all gone off to do things of our own. I to do some dressmaking, Matthew to type an article — he does a little journalism; William to do his stamps. Emily hadn't been down to tea. She'd taken a headache powder and was lying down. So there we were, all of us, busy and occupied. And when Martha went in to lay supper at half-past seven, there Aunt Lily was — dead. Her head — oh! it's horrible — all crushed in."

"The weapon was found, I think?"

"Yes. It was a heavy paper-weight that always lay on the table by the door. The police tested it for finger-prints, but there were none. It had been wiped clean."

"And your first surmise?"

"We thought, of course, it was a burglar. There were two or three drawers of the bureau pulled out, as though a thief had been looking for something. Of course we thought it was a burglar! And then the police came — and they said she had been dead at least an hour, and asked Martha who had been to the house, and Martha said nobody. And all the windows were fastened on the inside, and there seemed no signs of anything having been tampered with. And then they began to ask us questions . . ."

She stopped. Her breast heaved. Her eyes, frightened and imploring, sought Sir Edward's in search of reassurance.

"For instance, who benefited by your aunt's death?"

"That's simple. We all benefit equally. She left her money to be divided in equal shares among the four of us."

"And what was the value of her estate?"

"The lawyer told us it will come

to about eighty thousand pounds after the death duties are paid."

Sir Edward opened his eyes in some slight surprise.

"That is quite a considerable sum. You knew, I suppose, the total of your aunt's fortune?"

Magdalen shook her head.

"No — it came quite as a surprise to us. Aunt Lily was always terribly careful about money. She kept just the one servant and always talked a lot about economy."

Sir Edward nodded thoughtfully. Magdalen leaned forward a little in her chair.

"You will help me — you will?"

Her words came to Sir Edward as an unpleasant shock just at the moment when he was becoming interested in her story for its own sake.

"My dear young lady — what can I possibly do? If you want good legal advice, I can give you the name ——"

She interrupted him. "Oh! I don't want that sort of thing! I want you to help me personally — as a friend."

"That's very charming of you, but ——"

"I want you to come to our house. I want you to ask questions. I want you to see and judge for yourself."

"But my dear young ——"

"Remember, *you promised*. Anywhere — any time — you said, if I wanted help . . ."

Her eyes, pleading yet confident, looked into his. He felt ashamed and strangely touched. That terrific sincerity of hers, that absolute belief in an idle promise, ten years old, as a sacred binding thing. How many men had not said those self-same words — a cliché almost! — and how few of them had ever been called upon to make good.

He said rather weakly: "I'm sure there are many people who could advise you better than I could."

"I've got lots of friends — naturally." (He was amused by the naïve self-assurance of that.) "But, you see, none of them are clever. Not like you. You're used to questioning people. And with all your experience you must *know*."

"Know what?"

"Whether they're innocent or guilty."

He smiled rather grimly to himself. He flattered himself that, on the whole, he usually *had* known! Though, on many occasions, his private opinion had not been that of the jury.

Magdalen pushed back her hat from her forehead with a nervous gesture, looked round the room, and said: "How quiet it is here. Don't you sometimes long for some noise?"

The cul-de-sac! All unwittingly her words, spoken at random, touched him on the raw. A cul-de-sac. Yes, but there was always a way out — the way you had come — the way back into the world. . . . Something impetuous and youthful stirred in him. Her simple trust appealed to the best side of his nature — and the condition of her problem appealed to something else — the innate criminologist in him. He wanted to see

these people of whom she spoke. He wanted to form his own judgment.

He said: "If you are really convinced I can be of any use. . . . Mind, I guarantee nothing."

He expected her to be overwhelmed with delight, but she took it very calmly.

"I knew you would do it. I've always thought of you as a real friend. Will you come back with me now?"

"No. I think if I pay you a visit tomorrow it will be more satisfactory. Will you give me the name and address of Miss Crabtree's lawyer? I may want to ask him a few questions."

She wrote it down and handed it to him. Then she got up and said rather shyly: "I — I'm really most awfully grateful. Goodbye."

"And your own address?"

"How stupid of me. 18 Palatine Walk, Chelsea."

It was three o'clock on the following afternoon when Sir Edward Palliser approached 18 Palatine Walk with a sober, measured tread. In the interval he had found out several things. He had paid a visit that morning to Scotland Yard, where the Assistant Commissioner was an old friend of his, and he had also had an interview with the late Miss Crabtree's lawyer. As a result he had a clearer vision of the circumstances. Miss Crabtree's arrangements in regard to money had been somewhat peculiar. She never made use of a check book. Instead she was in the habit of writing to her lawyer and asking him to have a certain sum in five-pound notes waiting for her. It was nearly always the same sum. Three hundred pounds four times a year. She came to fetch it herself in a four-wheeler, which she regarded as the only safe means of conveyance. At other times she never left the house.

At Scotland Yard Sir Edward learned that the question of finance had been gone into very carefully. Miss Crabtree had been almost due for her next instalment of money. Presumably the previous three hundred had been spent — or almost spent. But this was exactly the point that had not been easy to ascertain. By checking the household expenditure, it was soon evident that Miss Crabtree's expenditure per quarter fell a good deal short of the three hundred. On the other hand, she was in the habit of sending five-pound notes to needy friends or relatives. Whether there had been much or little money in the house at the time of her death was a debatable point. None had been found.

It was this particular point which Sir Edward was revolving in his mind as he approached Palatine Walk.

The door of the house (which was a non-basement one) was opened to him by a small elderly woman with an alert gaze. He was shown into a big double room on the left of the small hallway and there Magdalen came to him. More clearly than before, he saw the traces of nervous strain in her face.

"You told me to ask questions, and I have come to do so," said Sir Edward, smiling as he shook hands. "First of all, I want to know who last saw your aunt and exactly what time that was?"

"It was after tea — five o'clock. Martha was the last person with her. She had been paying the books that afternoon, and brought Aunt Lily the change and the accounts."

"You trust Martha?"

"Oh, absolutely. She was with Aunt Lily for — oh! thirty years, I suppose. She's honest as the day."

Sir Edward nodded.

"Another question. Why did your cousin, Mrs. Crabtree, take a headache powder?"

"Well, because she had a headache."

"Naturally, but was there any particular reason why she *should* have a headache?"

"Well, yes, in a way. There was rather a scene at lunch. Emily is very excitable and highly strung. She and Aunt Lily used to have rows sometimes."

"And they had one at lunch?"

"Yes. Aunt Lily was rather trying about little things. It all started out of nothing — and then they were at it hammer and tongs — with Emily saying all sorts of things she couldn't possibly have meant — that she'd leave the house and never come back — that she was grudged every mouthful she ate — oh! all sorts of silly things. And Aunt Lily said the sooner she and her husband packed their boxes and went the better. But it all meant nothing, really."

"Because Mr. and Mrs. Crabtree couldn't afford to pack up and go?"

"Oh, not only that. William was fond of Aunt Emily. He really was."

"It wasn't a day of quarrels, by any chance?"

Magdalen's color heightened.

"You mean me? The fuss about my wanting to be a manikin?"

"Your aunt wouldn't agree?"

"No."

"Why did you want to be a manikin, Miss Magdalen? Does the life strike you as a very attractive one?"

"No, but anything would be better than going on living here."

"Yes, then. But now you will have a comfortable income, won't you?"

"Oh! yes, it's quite different *now*."

She made the admission with the utmost simplicity.

He smiled but pursued the subject no further. Instead he said: "And your brother? Did he have a quarrel too?"

"Matthew? Oh, no."

"Then no one can say he had a motive for wishing his aunt out of the way?"

He was quick to seize on the momentary dismay that showed in her face.

"I forgot," he said casually. "He owed a good deal of money, didn't he?"

"Yes; poor old Matthew."

"Still, that will be all right now."

"Yes ——" She sighed. "It *is* a relief."

And still she saw nothing! He changed the subject hastily.

"Your cousins and your brother are at home?"

"Yes; I told them you were coming. They are all so anxious to help. Oh, Sir Edward — I feel, somehow, that you are going to find out that everything is all right — that none of us had anything to do with it — that, after all, it *was* an outsider."

"I can't do miracles. I may be able to find out the truth, but I can't make the truth be what you want it to be."

"Can't you? I feel that you could do anything — anything."

She left the room. He thought, disturbed, "What did she mean by that? Does she want me to suggest a line of defense? For whom?"

His meditations were interrupted by the entrance of a man about fifty years of age. He had a naturally powerful frame, but stooped slightly. His clothes were untidy and his hair carelessly brushed. He looked good-natured but vague.

"Sir Edward Palliser? Oh, how do you do? Magdalen sent me along. It's very good of you, I'm sure, to wish to help us. Though I don't think anything will ever be really discovered. I mean, they won't catch the fellow."

"You think it was a burglar, then — someone from outside?"

"Well, it must have been. It couldn't be one of the family. These fellows are very clever nowadays, they climb like cats and they get in and out as they like."

"Where were you, Mr. Crabtree, when the tragedy occurred?"

"I was busy with my stamps — in my little sitting-room upstairs."

"You didn't hear anything?"

"No — but then I never do hear anything when I'm absorbed. Very foolish of me, but there it is."

"Is the sitting-room you refer to over this room?"

"No, it's at the back."

Again the door opened. A small, fair woman entered. Her hands were twitching nervously. She looked fretful and excited.

"William, why didn't you wait for me? I said 'wait.' "

"Sorry, my dear, I forgot. Sir Edward Palliser — my wife."

"How do you do, Mrs. Crabtree? I hope you don't mind my coming here to ask a few questions. I know how anxious you must all be to have things cleared up."

"Naturally. But I can't tell you anything — can I, William? I was asleep — on my bed — I only woke up when Martha screamed."

Her hands continued to twitch.

"Where is your room, Mrs. Crabtree?"

"It's over this. But I didn't hear anything — how could I? I was asleep."

He could get nothing out of her but that. She knew nothing — she had heard nothing — she had been asleep. She reiterated it with the obstinacy of a frightened woman. Yet Sir Edward knew very well that it

might easily be — probably was — the bare truth.

He excused himself at last — said he would like to put a few questions to Martha. William Crabtree volunteered to take him to the kitchen. In the hall Sir Edward nearly collided with a tall, dark young man who was striding towards the front door.

"Mr. Matthew Vaughan?"

"Yes — but look here, I can't wait. I've got an appointment."

"Matthew!" It was his sister's voice from the stairs. "Oh! Matthew, you promised ——"

"I know, sis. But I can't. Got to meet a fellow. And, anyway, what's the good of talking about the damned thing over and over again. We have enough of that with the police. I'm fed up with the whole show."

The front door banged. Mr. Matthew Vaughan had made his exit.

Sir Edward was introduced into the kitchen. Martha was ironing. She paused, iron in hand. Sir Edward shut the door behind him.

"Miss Vaughan has asked me to help her," he said. "I hope you won't object to my asking you a few questions."

She looked at him, then shook her head.

"None of them did it, sir. I know what you're thinking, but it isn't so. As nice a set of ladies and gentlemen as you could wish to see."

"I've *no doubt of it.* But their niceness isn't what we call evidence, you know."

"Perhaps not, sir. The law's a funny thing. But there is evidence — as you call it, sir. None of them could have done it *without my* knowing."

"But surely ——"

"I know what I'm talking about, sir. There, listen to that ——"

"That" was a creaking sound above, their heads.

"The stairs, sir. Every time anyone goes up or down, the stairs creak something awful. It doesn't matter how quiet you go. Mrs. Crabtree, she was lying on her bed, and Mr. Crabtree was fiddling about with them wretched stamps of his, and Miss Magdalen she was up above, working her sewing machine, and if any one of those three had come down the stairs I should have known it. And they didn't!"

She spoke with a positive assurance which impressed the barrister. He thought: "A good witness. She'd carry weight."

"You mightn't have noticed."

"Yes, I would. I'd have noticed without noticing, so to speak. Like you notice when a door shuts and somebody goes out."

Sir Edward shifted his ground.

"That is three of them accounted for, but there is a fourth. Was Mr. Matthew Vaughan upstairs also?"

"No, but he was in the little room downstairs. Next door. And he was typewriting. You can hear it plain in here. His machine never stopped for a moment. Not for a moment, sir. I can swear to it. A nasty, irritating tap-tapping noise it is too."

Sir Edward paused a minute.

"It was you who found her, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir, it was. Lying there with blood on her poor hair. And no one hearing a sound on account of the tap-tapping of Mr. Matthew's typewriter."

"I understand you are positive that no one came to the house?"

"How could they, sir, without my knowing? The bell rings in here. And there's only the one door."

He looked at her straight in the face.

"You were attached to Miss Crabtree?"

A warm glow — genuine — unmistakable — came into her face.

"Yes, indeed, I was, sir. But for Miss Crabtree — well, I'm getting on and I don't mind speaking of it now. I got into trouble, sir, when I was a girl, and Miss Crabtree stood by me — took me back into her service, she did, when it was all over. I'd have died for her — I would indeed."

Sir Edward knew sincerity when he heard it. Martha was sincere.

"As far as you know, no one came to the door ——?"

"No one could have come."

"I said as far as *you* know. But if Miss Crabtree had been expecting someone — if she opened the door to that someone herself . . ."

"Oh!" Martha seemed taken back.

"That's possible, I suppose?" Sir Edward urged.

"It's possible — yes — but it isn't very likely. I mean . . ."

She was clearly taken aback. She couldn't deny and yet she wanted to do so. Why? Because she knew that the truth lay elsewhere. Was that it? The four people in the house — one of them guilty? Did Martha want to shield that guilty party? *Had* the stairs creaked? Had someone come stealthily down and did Martha know who that someone was?

She herself was honest — Sir Edward was convinced of that.

He pressed his point, watching her.

"Miss Crabtree might have done that, I suppose? The window of that room faces the street. She might have seen whoever it was she was waiting for from the window and gone out into the hall and let him — or her — in. She might even have wished that no one should see the person."

Martha looked troubled. She said at last reluctantly:

"Yes, you may be right, sir. I never thought of that. That she was expecting a gentleman — yes, it well might be."

It was as though she began to perceive advantages in the idea.

"You were the last person to see her, were you not?"

"Yes, sir. After I'd cleared away the tea. I took the receipted books to her and the change from the money she'd given me."

"Had she given the money to you in five-pound notes?"

"A five-pound note, sir," said Martha in a shocked voice. "The books never came up as high as five pounds. I'm very careful."

"Where did she keep her money?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. I should say that she carried it about with her — in her black velvet bag. But of course she may have kept it in one of the drawers in her bedroom that were locked. She was very fond of locking up things, though prone to lose her keys."

Sir Edward nodded. "You don't know how much money she had — in five-pound notes, I mean?"

"No, sir, I couldn't say what the exact amount was."

"And she said nothing to you that could lead you to believe that she was expecting anybody?"

"No, sir."

"You're quite sure? What exactly did she say?"

"Well," Martha considered, "she said the butcher was nothing more than a rogue and a cheat, and she said I'd had in a quarter of a pound of tea more than I ought, and she said Mrs. Crabtree was full of nonsense for not liking to eat margarine, and she didn't like one of the sixpences I'd brought her back — one of the new ones with oak leaves on it — she said it was bad, and I had a lot of trouble to convince her. And she said — oh, that the fishmonger had sent haddocks instead of whitings, and had I told him about it, and I said I had — and, really, I think that's all, sir."

Martha's speech had made the deceased lady loom clear to Sir Edward as a detailed description would never have done. He said casually: "Rather a difficult mistress to please, eh?"

"A bit fussy, but there, poor dear, she didn't often get out, and staying cooped up she had to have something to amuse herself like. She was pernicketty but kind-hearted — never a beggar sent away from the door without something. Fussy she may have been, but a real charitable lady."

"I am glad, Martha, that she leaves one person to regret her."

The old servant caught her breath.

"You mean — oh, but they were all fond of her — really — underneath. They all had words with her now and again, but it didn't mean anything."

Sir Edward lifted his head. There was a creak above.

"That's Miss Magdalen coming down."

"How do you know?" he shot at her.

The old woman flushed. "I know her step," she muttered.

Sir Edward left the kitchen rapidly. Martha had been right. Magdalen had just reached the bottom stair. She looked at him hopefully.

"Not very far on as yet," said Sir Edward, answering her look, and added, "You don't happen to know what letters your aunt received on the day of her death?"

"They are all together. The police have been through them, of course."

She led the way to the big double drawing-room, and unlocking a drawer, took out a large black velvet bag with an old-fashioned silver clasp.

"This is aunt's bag. Everything is in here just as it was on the day of her death. I've kept it like that."

Sir Edward thanked her and proceeded to turn out the contents of the bag on the table. It was, he fancied, a fair specimen of an eccentric elderly lady's handbag.

There was some odd silver change, two ginger nuts, three newspaper cuttings about Joanna Southcott's box, a trashy, printed poem about the unemployed, an *Old Moore's Almanack*, a large piece of camphor, some spectacles and three letters. A spidery one from someone called "Cousin Lucy," a bill for mending a watch, and an appeal from a charitable institution.

Sir Edward went through everything very carefully, then repacked the bag and handed it to Magdalen with a sigh.

"Thank you, Miss Magdalen. I'm afraid there isn't much there."

He rose, observed that the window commanded a good view of the front door steps, then took Magdalen's hand in his.

"You are going?"

"Yes."

"But it's — it's going to be all right?"

"Nobody connected with the law ever commits himself to a rash statement like that," said Sir Edward solemnly, and made his escape.

He walked along the street, lost in thought. The puzzle was there under his hand — and he had not solved it. It needed something — some little thing. Just to point the way.

A hand fell on his shoulder and he started. It was Matthew Vaughan, somewhat out of breath.

"I've been chasing you, Sir Edward. I want to apologize. For my rotten manners half an hour ago. But I've not got the best temper in the world, I'm afraid. It's awfully good of you to bother about this business. Please ask me whatever you like. If there's anything I can do to help ——"

Suddenly Sir Edward stiffened. His glance was fixed — not on Matthew — but across the street. Somewhat bewildered, Matthew repeated: "If there's anything I can do to help ——"

"You have already done it, my dear young man," said Sir Edward. "By stopping me at this particular spot and so fixing my attention on something I might otherwise have missed."

He pointed across the street to a small restaurant opposite.

"*The Four and Twenty Blackbirds?*" asked Matthew in a puzzled voice.

"Exactly."

"It's an odd name — but you get quite decent food there, I believe."

"I shall not take the risk of experimenting," said Sir Edward. "Being further from my nursery days than you are, my young friend, I probably remember my nursery rhymes better. There is a classic that runs thus, if I remember rightly: *Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye, Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie* — and so on. The rest of it does not concern us."

He wheeled round sharply.

"Where are you going?" asked

Matthew Vaughan.

"Back to your house, my friend."

They walked there in silence, Matthew Vaughan shooting puzzled glances at his companion. Sir Edward entered, strode to a drawer, lifted out a velvet bag and opened it. He looked at Matthew and the young man reluctantly left the room.

Sir Edward tumbled out the silver change on the table. Then he nodded. His memory had not been at fault.

He got up and rang the bell, slipping something into the palm of his hand as he did so.

Martha answered the bell.

"You told me, Martha, if I remember rightly, that you had a slight altercation with your late mistress over one of the new sixpences."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! but the curious thing is, Martha, that among this loose change, *there is no new sixpence.* There are two sixpences, but they are both old ones."

She stared at him in a puzzled fashion.

"You see what that means? *Someone did come to the house that evening — someone to whom your mistress gave sixpence.* . . . I think she gave it to him in exchange for this. . . ."

With a swift movement he shot his hand forward, holding out the doggerel verse about unemployment.

One glance at her face was enough.

"The game is up, Martha — you see, I know. You may as well tell me everything."

She sank down on a chair — the tears raced down her face.

"It's true — it's true — the bell didn't ring properly — I wasn't sure, and then I thought I'd better go and see. I got to the door just as he struck her down. The roll of five-pound notes was on the table in front of her — it was the sight of them as made him do it — that and thinking she was alone in the house as she'd let him in. I couldn't scream. I was too paralyzed and then he turned — and I saw it was my boy. . . .

"Oh, he's been a bad one always. I gave him all the money I could. He's been in jail twice. He must have come around to see me, and then Miss Crabtree, seeing as I didn't answer the door, went to answer it herself, and he was taken aback and pulled out one of those unemployment leaflets, and the mistress being kind of charitable, told him to come in, and got out a sixpence. And all the time that roll of notes was lying on the table where it had been when I was giving her the change. And the devil got into my Ben and he got behind her and struck her down."

"And then?" asked Sir Edward.

"Oh, sir, what could I do? My own flesh and blood. His father was a bad one, and Ben takes after him — but he was my own son. I hustled him out, and I went back to the kitchen, and I went to lay for supper at the usual time. Do you think it was very wicked of me, sir? I tried to tell you no lies when you was asking me questions."

Sir Edward rose.

"My poor woman," he said with

feeling in his voice. "I am very sorry for you. All the same, the law will have to take its course, you know."

"He's fled the country, sir. I don't know where he is."

"There's a chance, then, that he may escape the gallows, but don't build upon it. Will you send Miss Magdalen to me?"

"Oh, Sir Edward. How wonderful of you — how wonderful you are" said Magdalen when he had finished his brief recital. "You've saved us all. How can I ever thank you?"

Sir Edward smiled down at her and patted her hand gently. He was very much the great man. Little Magdalen had been very charming on the *Siluric*. That bloom of seventeen — wonderful! She had completely lost it now, of course.

"Next time you need a friend —" he said.

"I'll come straight to you."

"No, no," cried Sir Edward in alarm. "That's just what I don't want you to do. Go to a younger man."

He extricated himself with dexterity from the grateful household and hailing a taxi sank into it with a sigh of relief. Even the charm of a dewy seventeen seemed doubtful.

It could not really compare with a really well-stocked library on criminology.

The taxi turned into Queen Anne's Close.

His cul-de-sac.

QUOTH THE KING TO THE QUEEN

Manly Wade Wellman won first prize in EQMM's First Annual Short Story Contest with "A Star for a Warrior," about detective David Return, a full-blooded American Indian of the Tsichah tribe. We had intended to preface Mr. Wellman's second story about David Return with more facts about the author and what has happened to him in the last year. But Fate intervened.

This time Fate took the form, shape, and sound of a telephone call — from Christopher Morley. When your editor picked up the receiver, we heard the dove-dulcet voice of Mr. Morley saying: "Congratulations on your quinquennium!"

Your flabbergasted Editor replied: "Thanks, Chris — but what is a quinquennium?"

Mr. Morley said: "Suppose I put it this way: congratulations on your Ellery Quinquennium!"

And then it dawned. Today (as we write these words, within ten minutes of Mr. Morley's call) is September 25, 1946. On September 25, 1941 EQMM was "flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction." So today is the fifth anniversary — the quinquennial birthday — of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine." And only that kind friend and gentle man, Christopher Morley, remembered! — for it is a sad truth that your Editor awoke this morning with no awareness whatever of today's special significance.

Mr. Morley also said: "If I were you, Ellery, I'd celebrate the occasion by taking the day off."

Which is precisely what we are going to do. Methinks we'll amble over to Ebbets Field and take a gander at them glorious bums.

A KNIFE BETWEEN BROTHERS

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

STRIPPED to trousers and moccasins, young David Return needed only a feather jutting from his black hair to reincarnate the most picturesque of his warrior-chief ancestors of the Tsichah. Sweat and sunlight conferred to his brown back and shoulders a sheen like that of a well-used, well-kept saddle. His hands were as knowledgeable with spanner and screw driver as they might have been, two generations ago, with warclub or scalping knife. Rather incongruously for one who so well fitted the ideal picture of a savage, he was tinkering successfully with the ignition system of an old

Plymouth sedan behind the white-washed police shack of the Tsichah Agency.

Tightening a last connection, David Return slipped into the driver's seat, stepped on the starter, and listened intently to the response of the engine. Satisfied, he snapped off the ignition, wiped his hands and face on a morsel of ancient towelling, then caught up and put on his flannel shirt with its silver-plated star badge of the agency police. Tucking in his shirt tails, he entered the shack.

"*Ahi*, that car will run now," he announced to the Indian, much older and more picturesque than himself, who sat behind the desk with his hands full of papers. "The whole automotive industry ought to come and watch the things I did to it. And I'm dried out like jerked beef." From a hook by the window he lifted a canvas water bag and drank gratefully from it. "Are we running a police detail or a garage?"

Tough Feather, David's grandsire and senior agency policeman, reached for a pen and signed his name to a report. His profile was almost exactly similar to that of the noble old chief on the buffalo nickel. Had he not been so good a police officer, he might have been notable as an artists' model or a character actor. Tough Feather grinned, his teeth startlingly white in the seamed duskiness of his face.

"We run both those things, and ten or twenty more, David. Here," and he held up the paper, "is our monthly report to the agent. Here," and he turned his chin to indicate a high piled wire basket, "is unanswered correspondence — on almost every subject but law enforcement. By day after tomorrow, for instance, we must have something definite on the survey of how many dogs are kept by Indians living on this reservation —"

"How many dogs!" David almost whooped. "Who's going to count all the dogs of all the Tsichah?"

"Two policemen are going to count them," Tough Feather informed him. "They're at it now. And there's a request for a police escort to accompany the school children visiting the historical exhibit over at Smith City," continued Tough Feather, "and an advance man's coming to look this reservation over for a travel newsreel company. He needs a guide and interpreter."

"Don't give me either of those assignments," begged David. "Police college taught me to gather evidence and disarm violent lawbreakers, but not to be a governess or a public relations expert."

"Your education is incomplete," Tough Feather told him. "Indian police have to be everything — almost. You've started well, son of my son, but you still think the job begins and ends in trailing criminals and locking them up. If that's all you do, what will the Tsichah call you? A white man's Indian."

David winced at that.

"I'm an Indian's Indian," he said harshly, "and they'd better realize it. I believe in being a good citizen and a

good policeman, but I was born a chief of the Tsichah, and that's a priority. I don't want to do anything but help my tribe, which is what police are for."

"Because police must do other things than make arrests," amplified Tough Feather gravely. "We have to explain the law as well as enforce it. We must uphold the government with the Indians, and uphold the Indians with the government." He filled his ancient stone pipe and lighted it. "We Indians might still be masters of this hemisphere if we'd been able to stop fighting each other."

David's broad young brow creased, as if troubled by thoughts evoked by his grandfather's words. "I'm still a rookie policeman," he said. "What I need is experience. How about assigning me to gather some?"

"I was waiting for you to finish fixing the car," said Tough Feather, and held out a scribbled card. "Drive out the Squaw Hill trail to the cabin of Yellow Bird and Stone Wolf. They have a dispute. Judge between them."

David's brow-crease became a frown. He was young, and well-reared young Indians are shy about giving advice to old ones. "I've not been trained as a judge," he demurred.

"You were born a chief," his grandfather reminded him. "Now you're a grown warrior, and a qualified police officer of this agency. Yellow Bird and Stone Wolf sent me a message last night, asking for my help, but this paper work will keep me busy today and tomorrow." He thrust the card into David's hesitating hand. "Go and act in my place. Because of your blood, they'll accept your word as though it were mine."

David felt better for that assurance. He studied the names on the card. "Yellow Bird and Stone Wolf — I haven't seen those old brothers since I was a boy. They never come here to the agency. Aren't they old, old Tsichah, remembering nothing but wars and hunts? How do they stay alive?"

"They have lands on the reservation," replied Tough Feather. "Between their two head rights there are about eighty acres worth cultivating; but they never learned to farm, and they live among the hills and speak only to each other. Not even that now, since they quarreled. They rent their land to a step-kinsman."

"Step-kinsman?" echoed David.

"It was he who brought me their message last night. Both of them were married when they were young warriors, before their last fight with the white men." Tough Feather's face grew momentarily harder, for the bloody finish of that conflict was the most vivid and least pleasant memory of his own boyhood. "There was cannon-fire at the Tsichah camp, and it killed both their families, except for Stone Wolf's little daughter."

"She went to Chicago," remembered David.

"And married a white man. Now she's dead, too, without children of her own; but her husband had a son by a first marriage, and that son farms

for Stone Wolf and Yellow Bird. He began while you were away at the police college. His name's Avery Packer — a good farmer."

"He brought the message, you say. Can he help me?"

"He's a good farmer," repeated Tough Feather, "but no white man can decide the private quarrels of old Tsichah. They must have a chief's word."

Tough Feather's sinewy old hand shook the ashes from the stone pipe. "Any more questions?"

David brought his moccasined heels together and whipped his brown hand to his brown temple in salute.

"No questions. I'll get a bite of lunch at the trader's and go. My report will be on your desk before evening."

The afternoon was hotter than the morning had been. David drove up the trail with the car windows open, but the breeze he stirred was dry and heavy. Flat red-brown dryness stretched away to right and left, with occasional dimples where buffaloes had wallowed long ago, and more distant clumps and stragglings of brushy willow or cottonwood scrub to mark scanty watercourses. Now and then the hot air danced and blurred, as though a ghost had dared come out in broad daylight and shake his robe.

It was weary country, conquered country, mused David. His people, the Tsichah, had been almost the last Indian tribe to admit the mastery of the white men. This, their reservation, was the worst and driest portion of their vast ancient roaming-grounds. If Avery Packer, Stone Wolf's stepgrandson, actually paid rent on eighty acres of it, he must be a spendthrift fool. But as David decided that, his car topped a knoll and he saw the land of the disputing brothers.

It was all welcome, restful green, a smooth expanse of it to the very trailside and reaching ahead and beyond to a confining curve of knolls and bluffs. The only break in the pleasant expanse was a patch in the center, a patch as silver-bright in the sun as David's new star. It was quiet water, a whole pondful, as rare on Tsichah acres as the rich, sturdy grass itself. David's moccasin pushed down the brake and he leaned back in the driver's seat to gaze in admiration.

Toward him walked a figure, a burly white man in rough clothes, carefully parting the grass to avoid trampling too much of it.

"Looking for me?"

"If you're Avery Packer, I am," said David, his eyes still on the field. "Nice hay crop you've got here. Must have worked hard on it."

Packer nodded. "I did. That pond of mine's the secret." He glanced back toward the still surface of water, and his profile showed a short, straight nose and a jutting brow. "It catches rain and soaks it out through the loose earth. Otherwise whatever I planted would die out in the first hot spell."

"Lucky break having it," David congratulated him, and Packer grinned.

"Lucky back-break, you ought to say. When I first rented, it was just a mud-puddle. I dredged and scooped out for days to make it worth-while. This year I'll make a dollar or two on this hay, and next year I may go in for corn." Packer's eye caught the glint of the star on David's flannel shirt. "Agency policeman, aren't you?"

"Right. That's why I stopped. You rent from Yellow Bird and Stone Wolf, don't you? I'm going out to settle their squabble."

"They were kind of expecting old Tough Feather," said Packer.

"He can't come. I'm his grandson, handling the case for him. What can you tell me about it?"

Packer's grin came back. "Just that it's over money. A little bit of money I paid 'em a week ago."

He paused, as though awaiting a question, but David sat relaxed, watching him and listening. After a moment, Packer elaborated:

"I pay in silver. Paper they don't savvy. Rent's two dollars an acre a year, about fifteen bucks each month. They make out on that, buying a little flour and bacon and canned stuff, and sometimes a few cartridges to hunt rabbits and ducks. They keep it, as I hear, under a loose floor-board in their cabin. Well, old Stone Wolf was clawing for some of it yesterday, to buy supplies at the agency. There wasn't none."

"They told you this?" prompted David.

"In about eleven words between the both of 'em. I'm a sort of kinfolk — my dad married Stone Wolf's daughter — but they don't jaw a lot, not even to me. Anyhow, they wound up accusing each other of stealing. That's all I know, except I went to the agency for 'em, to ask Tough Feather would he come out and hear their argument."

"Thanks," said David, "that's a help. Where do they live?"

"Right yonder, past the bluff." Packer's big hand gestured ahead. "Mind if I come along?"

"Glad to have you." David opened the door for him.

Beyond the bluff they came in sight of the cabin, a sagging little structure on a rise above the trail. The open front door was full of darkness.

"Wait here," David told Packer, and trotted up the footpath to the flat rock that served as a front stoop.

"*Ahi*," grunted someone inside, and David stepped across the threshold.

In the hot still darkness inside the front room, squatting on the floor, was a spare old man as brown as leather. Despite the bitter heat, he was wrapped from skinny chin to skinny toes in a blanket that seemed as old and worn as himself. Two braids of gray-salted hair framed his wrinkled face. His licorice eyes looked sunken and sad.

David glanced quickly around the room. Its two windows were curtained with tattered blankets. In one corner lay a few poor possessions — rolled bedding, a battered coffee pot, a clay water-jar that surely dated back to

the days of savage freedom, some other small odds and ends. The only furniture was a rickety old chair with but three legs that leaned against the inner wall beside a closed door.

"*Ahi*, uncle," David greeted the oldster politely. "I am Tough Feather's grandson."

"I am Stone Wolf," replied the other.

"You asked for a chief to judge your quarrel," David reminded him. "Where is your brother Yellow Bird."

The gray-black head jerked toward the closed inner door. "In the kitchen. We have not spoken or sat together since —"

"I know something about it, but will speak to both at one time," announced David with chiefly dignity.

"Speak to Yellow Bird if you want to," said Stone Wolf slowly and deeply. "He will not hear you. He is out in the kitchen. Dead."

Yellow Bird, prone on the floor of the oven-hot kitchen, was a replica of Stone Wolf in all things — gray braids, wrinkled face, meager limbs, seedy old blanket — save the slack immobility of his body and the knife-handle that jutted from between his shoulders.

David stood over him, and pondered sagely that a policeman must do many right things at once, and must likewise refrain from doing many wrong things. In case of a homicide, first study the surroundings, he remembered from a lecture at police college. Carefully he looked to either side of him, up, down. At his left as he stood just inside the doorway was a single window, both its broken panes mended with flour sacking nailed on. To his right slouched a rusty stove. Straight ahead was the cabin's back door, with a broken lock and a heavy home-made bar of wood.

Stone Wolf rose and came to David's elbow, gazing at his quiet brother. "Who killed him?" asked David.

Out of the folded blanket crept Stone Wolf's skinny hand. A thumb like a stub of dark twig jabbed at Stone Wolf's chest.

"I," rumbled the old man. "I killed him."

David turned quickly to meet the gaze of the sunken eyes. "But you wanted your quarrel judged," he protested.

"I killed him," repeated Stone Wolf. "Who else could have struck my brother?"

Decrepitly he shuffled into the kitchen. The gaunt hand crept further into view, lifting to indicate with its spread palm, Indian-fashion, the back door.

"The bar is in place — inside. And the window —" Stone Wolf paused, turned and lifted his palm toward it, "could not open far enough to let an enemy in. See for yourself, young chief."

David stepped to the window and prodded both sashes. Warped by many hot seasons and by many soaking rains, they were stubbornly

wedged in position — the upper closed, the lower raised perhaps two inches. Not even a crowbar could dislodge them, judged David; they would splinter before they would budge. Nor had the sacking over the glass been disturbed; the nails that held it were rusted into their holes. David felt shame. Stone Wolf, in his self-accusation, weighed the evidence far better than he, David, for all that police college education.

"Is it your knife in Yellow Bird's back?" he demanded.

"*Yuh.* It is my knife." Stone Wolf bent creakily, his hand extending.

"Don't touch it!" commanded David sharply, and the old Indian stepped back obediently. David returned to the body — it lay two long strides from the window — and knelt.

"White men's police wisdom," he *lectured importantly, "can show* what hand held a knife, by things called fingerprints."

But not this time, he decided even as he spoke. The weapon, an old butcher knife such as traders have sold Indians for a century, had been driven to the very hilt, and blood had gushed from the wound over the worn brass-studded grip.

Stone Wolf was speaking again: "Such wisdom is not needed. I said that I killed him. Does a Tsichah lie?"

Rising, David faced the old man. "Was it self-defense, Stone Wolf?"

The exposed hand quivered its spread fingers, the universal plains sign for a question, a mystification, a lack of understanding. "I do not know. Maybe I slept squatting, and in my sleep crept upon my brother. Or a *djiba*, an enemy ghost, put a spell on me to make me do the thing. Or, because I am grown old, I forget at one time what I did another."

Stone Wolf's face was mournful, but calm and stubborn, even a bit disdainful.

"A man cannot kill and not know," David half-scolded him.

"You are the chief," Stone Wolf replied gravely, turning away. "Use your wisdom to find out."

He shuffled back into the front room and sat down on the floor again. Left alone in the stuffy kitchen, David again gazed thoughtfully at the body, at the stove, at the barred door, at the immovable window, and back at the body.

Yellow Bird had fallen on his left *side, head toward the back door,* feet drawn up, knees together. Plainly he had been squatting. Awake, then, or at most dozing lightly; and his right side, not his back, had been nearest to the communicating door. In any case the old floor boards creaked loudly, even under David's careful moccasins. How could Stone Wolf, asleep or in a trance or even awake and stealthy, have crept upon him?

Perhaps Stone Wolf had thrown his knife. Many Tsichah could do that — David himself was a fair knife-thrower. But another study of the dead man ruled that out. The knife had struck Yellow Bird's back — it had come, not from the direction

of the front room, but from the direction of the window.

David turned his attention to that jammed, sack-cloaked window with its crack of opening. Yellow Bird had been sitting some six feet away, no difficult target. Crossing the creaky floor to the back door, David lifted the wooden bar and walked out and around the cabin. Avery Packer was watching him curiously from the car's running board, below on the trail. David approached the window from outside.

Stacked against the wall below the sill was the cabin's supply of firewood — old broken boxes and planks, branches and roots, a few shingles blown from the ruinous roof, three broken pieces of an old bamboo fishing pole. David smiled thinly. The two old brothers must have ranged far to gather this fuel in an almost timberless country, but meditations on such chores were not part of an investigator's job. The stacked wood was enough to prevent a knife-thrower from pushing close to the window and inserting his hand. Even if a hand were inserted, it would be too cramped to whip strength behind the cast. David stepped several paces backward. Only the most skillful of thrown blades could sail through that narrow slit, and the dimness beyond would cloak any target.

A flutter of motion from the car registered in his eye-corner. Packer was beckoning. David hurried down to him.

"What's all this about?" demanded the white man. "You having trouble?"

David told him, briefly. Packer frowned, scratched his jaw, and stared at the cabin.

"You think Stone Wolf did it? After all, he's my step-granddad."

"I believe him when he says he doesn't know how it happened," replied David, "and it's plain that nobody else could have got to Yellow Bird. The set-up's like those sealed-room killings in the mystery stories. The police college instructors used to joke about them."

"It's no joke when the story's true," said Packer weightily. "Well, what next? If Stone Wolf goes to jail —" He stopped, with his mouth half open, and his face lighted up. "Look," he said, more animatedly, "if his memory lapsed, he can't be tried for murder. He's mentally incompetent."

"At Stone Wolf's age he'd probably beat a conviction on those grounds," agreed David.

"I certainly hope so," said Packer earnestly. "I'd do anything for that old duck. I'm the closest to a family he's got left. Maybe —"

"Tell me later." Again David was scrambling up the slope. He rounded the cabin again, entered the back door, and dropped the bar in place. Once more he paced around Yellow Bird's motionless body, thoughtful and silent.

He could see now that a knife-throw from outside was impossible. The position of the hilt showed that the blade had gone in, not flat down but edge down. Not even a circus star

could have counted on sailing it through the narrow space beneath the window in that fashion. David produced his bandana, knelt, and with his cloth-wrapped hand tugged at the bloody hilt. It was wedged hard, in spine or rib.

He got up quickly and went back into the front room. Stone Wolf sat motionless on the floor. David felt elation mingling with the gravity of his mood. He was being a policeman after all, finding out many small things that fitted together into a picture of growing clarity.

"Stone Wolf," he said, "when did you last see Yellow Bird alive?"

"This morning."

"Tell me how."

"Since our quarrel I kept to this room, he to the kitchen. Men who call each other thief and liar do not speak until the question is properly settled."

"*Yuh*," agreed David. "That is good Tsichah custom. And then?"

"We cooked at different times. I came this morning to fry bacon on the kitchen stove. When Yellow Bird saw me he unbarred the back door and went out. He looked at me without speaking." Stone Wolf's eyes fluttered briefly in their bracketing of pouchy wrinkles. "I think he was like me, anxious for a settlement. I cooked but I ate only a little, for my stomach was sad in me. When I came back in here, Yellow Bird came into the kitchen. He barred the door again and closed the door to this room. I heard him sit down and wait."

"When did you leave this room again?"

"When the sun was high. I felt hungry, for I had eaten so little in the morning. I opened the door to the kitchen and I saw that I had killed my brother."

Stone Wolf's hand, again emerging, rubbed its fingertips together as if casting away a pinch of sand — the sign of loss. David looked at him with eyes that brightened.

"You can kill with a knife? Show me."

Slowly Stone Wolf got to his feet and took the knife that David held out, hilt foremost. David picked up the ruined old chair. "Stab here," he directed. "I am a chief. Do not ask questions about what I want. Obey me."

Stone Wolf gripped the knife, his hand knowledgeable upon it. He struck with considerable suddenness for an old man. David lifted the chair by its shaky legs, catching the driving point on the wooden seat.

"That was a weak stab, uncle," he taunted. "Again."

Stone Wolf stepped closer and struck, with all his force. David caught the point as before, then tilted the chair to see. He curled his lip scornfully as he studied the splintery little nick.

"I have not your young arm," reminded Stone Wolf. "Once my blow would have split that chair, or even a heavier thing."

"Take the knife in both your hands," bade David. He set the chair

upright and steadied it by the back. "With all your strength this time. Strike down."

Stone Wolf's left hand cupped around and over his right, gripping the knife daggerwise. He poised himself, summoning and tensing every fiber of his stringy muscles, then drove downward from shoulder height, and stepped back. The blade stood upright and vibrating, its point lodged in the seat of the chair.

Stooping, David dislodged the knife with a little shake. He slid it back into the sheath at his hip. His white teeth flashed through the gloom of the curtained cabin in a happy smile.

"You did not kill your brother, Stone Wolf."

The gray head shook, its two braids quivered on Stone Wolf's shoulders. "But I have shown that I did."

"I say you did not," insisted David. "A stronger hand than yours struck Yellow Bird. The blow drove your knife through bone and flesh. You could never have done it."

Again Stone Wolf's hand made the quivering mystery-sign. "I see the truth of that. Your wisdom is big."

"You must help me." David seized the scrawny old shoulder in his earnestness. "Someone else killed Yellow Bird. Who?"

"A *djiba?* A devil?"

"No squaw's tales here! A man did it, somebody strong and bad. We will find him, you and I. First," and he used an English word, "we must search for a — motive."

Stone Wolf was as baffled as David. "I am a child in these things. I do not know your meaning."

"A motive means, why did the man kill him?"

"Why does any man kill another?" rejoined Stone Wolf. "He hates the other. He wants the other man's horse or wife or weapons. He is afraid the other means to kill him, and strikes first."

"But who hated Yellow Bird? Not even you, though you had quarrelled. Yellow Bird had no wife or horse or other things. Even the little money itself was already stolen. And who would fear him?"

"Those things are for a chief to find out." Stone Wolf doddered over to the corner where odds and ends were piled. He fumbled in a worn buckskin pouch, cradled something in his palm, and from the water jug carefully sluiced a few drops upon it.

"Nobody but you could have stabbed Yellow Bird inside this cabin," David amplified, as much for himself as for Stone Wolf. "It was someone else — at the window. But he did not throw. He struck." Breaking off, David watched his companion. "What are you doing there?"

"This is red paint for mourning." The old fellow dipped from the wet mass in his palm and smeared broad patches on his wrinkled cheeks, his parchment brow. Even in the dim room, the color was vivid.

Almost leaping at Stone Wolf, David thrust his own thumb into the palmful of watered powder. "Ver-

milion," said David at once, "Where did you get this?"

Stone Wolf jerked his chin doorward. "Out there, near where the grass is growing. My father and my father's father got red paint-powder in that place, long before white men ever came here."

"Red paint-powder," echoed David. He studied his stained thumb as though it were writing he had just learned to decipher.

"I mourn," continued Stone Wolf, "for my brother. He did not die by my hand. I may honestly show sorrow."

"And I," said David Return, "may honestly show the man who killed him."

He hastened outside.

For a moment only he paused, under the kitchen window, to snatch at the woodpile. As he headed downslope to the car, Avery Packer rose from the running board.

"Ready to bring Stone Wolf along?" asked the white man.

"I'm ready to bring you along," said David Return.

He held out the three broken lengths of the bamboo.

"When these were all in one piece," he said, "they made a pole. Here, in the hollow butt end, you put that knife you'd stolen from Stone Wolf. Through the crack of the window you jabbed at Yellow Bird's back — hard. The knife stuck in his bones, and you pulled the pole free and broke it up to lose in the kindling pile."

Packer stared. He fumbled out tobacco-bag and papers. "I don't get you," he said, and for the first time he sounded foolish.

"But I get you," David assured him. "Stone Wolf's innocent. That leaves you. You were the only one in contact with the brothers. You knew where they kept their money, how the cabin was arranged, you were able to steal Stone Wolf's knife. You took the money to make them suspicious of each other and start quarrelling — you even carried a message for them to my grandfather. Then you hurried back and killed Yellow Bird. For this."

Tucking the pieces of bamboo under one arm, David thrust his other hand under Packer's nose, waggling the red-smeared thumb.

"That's only Indian paint," said Packer, his goggling eyes as stupid as his voice.

"You recognize it. We both know what it is. Cinnabar — vermilion. For centuries the Tsichah and other Indians made their brightest red from it. But white men make something else — mercury. A deposit's worth a fortune to the right developer."

Packer had started to roll a cigarette. He threw the paper and the pinch of tobacco grains on the ground. Again he opened his mouth, but this time no words came out.

"You discovered the cinnabar deposit when you were dredging your pond," went on David. "Your rent for the farming rights was low; but mineral rights would come high. It would be cheaper, you decided, to

get them by killing."

"You're crazy!" Packer exploded. "Yellow Bird was killed. I can't claim anything of *his*. It's Stone Wolf who's my step-grandfather."

"And he's alive," David wound up for him. "You had that figured out, too. He'd stand trial, be called a crazy old man, and be put away in comfort — with a guardian named to handle his affairs. You'd be the logical one. You were all ready to offer yourself. You even started to explain all that to me, a moment ago when I was out here looking at the window and the woodpile. You sounded very kind and dutiful. Yellow Bird dead, Stone Wolf in a hospital or asylum — and you with a free hand to coin all that cinnabar into money."

David turned to the car, tossing in one piece of bamboo, then another. His right hip was within the white man's reach.

Packer shot out his own hand, whipping the knife from David's belt.

With the thickest piece of bamboo still in his hand, David struck Packer calculatingly across the knuckles. Packer swore in pain, and the knife, dropped among the crumbs of spilled tobacco.

"I gave you that chance on purpose, and you practically confessed," announced David in tones sweet with triumph. "You knew I had you, so you were going to knife me as you knifed Yellow Bird."

Stooping swiftly, he caught up the knife. It gleamed authoritatively, point toward Packer.

"Come to the agency with me," commanded David Return.

SPEAKING OF CRIME

A Department of Comment and Criticism

by HOWARD HAYCRAFT

IN KEEPING with the season's custom, this department herewith presents its choices for best-of-the-year just ended in the crime-mystery field. Listed below, in approximate order of their publication, and with attempted regard for variety and balance, are twelve novels and three collections of shorter material which seem to me the most rewarding in their several fashions of the 1946 crop.

THE FIFTH MAN by Manning Coles (Crime Club). Tommy Hambledon & Co. in the season's first, and still best, novel of espionage.

THE PAVILION by Hilda Lawrence (S. & S.). Not quite up to this satisfying writer's BLOOD UPON THE SNOW, but better than A TIME TO DIE. The accent is on character.

HE WHO WHISPERS by John Dickson Carr (Harper). Dr. Gideon Fell, in close to top form, copes handily with witchcraft and another "impossible" crime.

THE HORIZONTAL MAN by Helen Eustis (Harper). A brilliant first mystery and, for this department's money, the year's most enjoyable performance by any writer, new or old.

BUILD MY GALLOWS HIGH by Geoffrey Homes (Morrow). Sincerity and literary intelligence gives this novel top rating in the hardboiled bracket — which, as a whole, had a singularly uninspired year.

THE HOLLOW by Agatha Christie (Dodd). Mrs. Christie leans more heavily on characterization than has been her wont as Poirot romps to another deductive triumph.

MY LATE WIVES by Carter Dickson (Morrow). Sir Henry Merrivale, at his most delightful, in an absorbing variant of the Great Impersonation theme.

RIDE THE PINK HORSE by Dorothy B. Hughes (Duell). A brooding, occasionally theatrical, study of crime, suspense, and punishment against a vivid New Mexican backdrop.

SLUG IT SLAY by Edwin Lanham (Harcourt). This fast and professional yarn of murder in a metropolitan newsroom marks the mystery bow of a well known "straight" novelist. Slug it swell!

THE CASE OF THE BORROWED BRUNETTE by Erle Stanley Gardner (Morrow). Perry Mason ringing fresh changes on a seemingly inexhaustible formula.

STRANGER THAN TRUTH by Vera Caspary (Random). The author of LAURA dissects a magazine tycoon and lays bare the psychological key to two murders.

IT AIN'T HAY by David Dodge (S. & S.). There's not much mystery, but abundant excitement and sound documentation, in this purposeful tale of one man's fight against the marijuana ring.

In Shorter Form

TO THE QUEEN'S TASTE edited by Ellery Queen (Little). A quality companion-anthology to the editors' definitive 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT.

TWELVE AGAINST THE LAW by Edward D. Radin (Duell). Refreshingly unhackneyed real-life crimes, told in straightforward prose, with emphasis on actual police procedure.

DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR by Lillian de la Torre (Knopf). "Narrated as from the pen of James Boswell," this connoisseur's item is somewhat more successful as a literary *tour de force* than as detection, but distinguished writing withal.

I suspect that the list above will differ from similar compilations chiefly

in my considered omission of Kenneth Fearing's THE BIG CLOCK (Harcourt). Hailed by many reviewers as the year's "find," this novel struck me as a prime illustration of the too frequently ignored axiom that brilliance is not enough — that the novel of plot requires careful and conscientious carpentry as well. Mr. Fearing's power of invention and stimulating wit are more than welcome in the mystery field, and there is no denying the imaginative impact of THE BIG CLOCK's central situation. But it seemed to me that he blew the game and destroyed an otherwise brilliant effect when he tossed fact and plausibility out of the window in his concluding chapters.

Numerically, the season just ended saw a return to something approaching pre-war publication figures. Most of this pickup occurred in the last months of the year, and was more emphatic among American than British contributions.

In quality, too, the 1946 season may be credited with a moderate advance over 1945 and preceding wartime years, but less in terms of innovation than general improvement of "the mixture as before."

No signal generic trends appeared, save continued and increasing emphasis on the "suspense" novel. Here, it seemed to me, there was a good deal of mistaking the shadow for the substance, which will bear careful watching by editors in the coming months if this currently popular form is not to be run into the ground. Although I enjoyed several of the year's suspense entries when they first appeared, I find in retrospect little temptation to name them among the season's top entertainments: a possible commentary on their lack of body.

A currently disturbing tendency, restricted to no one type of the mystery, is the growing carelessness of many writers with respect to credibility. (See discussion of THE BIG CLOCK above.) Granting that the very nature of the modern whodunit implies a certain "suspension of belief," I am convinced that more and more readers are wearying of such abuses as mysteries which wouldn't be mysteries if any character behaved in a normal or rational manner, fantastic coincidences, proof that exists only in the detective's mind, nosy spinsters, moronic heroines, masochistic private eyes, and gay young couples who don't tell the nasty ole policemans about the body in the ice-box. By no means all of today's authors are guilty of these clichés-of-the-improbable, but enough of them have erred in the past year to call for the warning bell.

On the credit side of the season's ledger, the most encouraging sign is the emergence of an unusual number of promising new talents — almost certainly the delayed result of the war's ending. That the detective story is due for a renascence like that which followed the First World War is perhaps too much to hope; but the effect of this new blood over the next few years can scarcely be other than rejuvenating. The outlook for the future is at least healthy.

Random Notes: Having been so unfortunate as to lose Elizabeth Bullock as its crime critic, the *Chicago Sun* has staged a happy recovery in acquiring James Sandoe, the erudite 'tec sage of Boulder, Colo., as her successor. The Sandoe weekly columns, in the form of the correlated critical essay better known in England than here, strike a welcome and responsible note in American mystery reviewing. . . . Miss Bullock, incidentally, has recently changed mystery editorial desks as well, going from Rinehart, where she made an enviable record in the last two years, to Dial Press. At Dial she'll search for manuscripts "setting a high standard in suspense, mystery, and imagination". . . . The mystery world is extending felicitations on the recent marriage of Helen McCloy and Davis Dresser (Brett Halliday). . . . Operation Party-Line: Some years ago I wrote on the curious circumstance that detective stories have flourished only in the democracies. Discussing the incompatibility of the dictatorship mentality and a literary form so linked to the democratic concept of justice, I cited published Nazi and Italian Fascist fulminations against the *genre*. Just to make the picture complete, come now press dispatches from Russia quoting a charge by the *Moscow News* that the Sherlock Holmes tales "poison the minds" of Soviet readers and propagate "a criminal romanticism" alien to Communist youth. Comment unnecessary. . . . In his introduction to the omnibus MURDER WITH A DIFFERENCE (Random House), Christopher Morley writes of H. F. Heard's A TASTE FOR HONEY (one of the three novels making up the collection): "It is the only crime story I know where the Clue Begins in the very first sentence; even in the first two words." The puzzled publishers offer a free copy of MURDER WITH A DIFFERENCE to any reader who can elucidate this mystery-within-a-mystery. . . . For a long time I've been wondering how to pronounce a certain noun, indigenous to the hardboiled whodunit. In the stunning moving picture version of THE BIG SLEEP (which should be missed by no addict) three different actors render it thus: (a) *shah-mus;* (b) *sham-us;* (c) *shame-us.* Like *hom-icide* versus *home-icide*, I still wouldn't know. Who can help?

Year-End Crimes: Really new ideas in the detective story today are scarcer than dentures among our feathered friends, but unless I am mistaken, Pat McGerr has turned the trick in his first novel PICK YOUR VICTIM (Crime Club). If memory does not fail, this is the first full-length mystery in which the reader knows from the start that a murder has occurred, and who the murderer is, but does not learn the identity of the *victim* until the final chapter. To enliven matters, the "suspects" in this upside-down puzzle are as poisonous a crew of hucksters as you could wish not to meet. Although development falls a little short of original concept,

credit Pat McGerr with a technical triumph. . . . If you have found the recent mystery crop a little on the thin side, try Stewart Sterling's WHERE THERE'S SMOKE (Lippincott) for size. Solid detail about the Bureau of Fire Investigation, show business, and the radio game gives unusual substance to a fast paced yarn in which Chief Marshal Pedley runs an arson slayer to earth, and none too soon. . . . PURGATORY STREET by Roman McDougald (S. & S.) furnishes a pointed illustration of my remarks some paragraphs back about the bodiless quality of too many current suspense novels. The twin themes of plastic surgery and imposture, if not exactly original, offer virtually limitless possibilities. But this author works so hard at creating the confused breathlessness which passes for terror in the women's magazines that the reader never gets a chance to know the characters, and in consequence remains quite unterrified. There's a bit, too, about a dog failing to recognize the master whose face has been altered by surgery that I found hard to swallow. . . . Frank Gruber's BEAGLE SCENTED MURDER (Rinehart) will win no awards for realism, but its doublecrossing duo, Otis Beagle and Joe Peel, afford effortless entertainment of the brasher variety. Though Peel's deductions leave something to be desired, the plotting shows considerably more care than Gruber's previous book THE SILVER TOMBSTONE.

Among recent mysteries of English origin, Edmund Crispin's THE MOVING TOYSHOP (Lippincott) will appeal chiefly to readers who like their detection seasoned with the sauce of extravaganza. As so often happens in such experiments, the sauce tends to predominate in this Oxonian jape, reminiscent of both Michael Innes and Elliot Paul. The sleuthing is performed by Professor Gervase Fen, in a manner more suggestive of Groucho Marx than of Sherlock Holmes. . . . Less broad in its humor, but belonging to the same school of studied rudeness, is Margot Bennett's AWAY WENT THE LITTLE FISH (Crime Club), which brings back John Davies of TIME TO CHANGE HATS, published earlier this year. Principally interesting for its picture of post-war boredom in Britain, this novel marks a definite advance over its predecessor, but would have been better had it been a third shorter. . . . Christianna Brand's THE CROOKED WREATH (Dodd) offers solid plotting and an up-to-date version of the country house theme. Each of the March family is convincingly suspected of grandfather's murder in turn before Inspector Cockrill and a buzz bomb bring ultimate justice. . . . And in P. W. Wilson's THE OLD MILL (Rinehart), admirers of BRIDE'S CASTLE will find the leisurely Edwardian charm of the earlier novel coupled with the year's most intricate and ingenious mechanical device, as elucidated by Sir Julian Morthoe.

Who is Stanley Hopkins, Jr., author of MURDER BY INCHES *and* THE PARCHMENT KEY*? Is he, as his name would indicate, the son of the original Stanley Hopkins who was, as we all remember, an acquaintance of Sherlock Holmes'? Chronologically, it is possible. How, then, explain the singular statement which Stanley Hopkins, Jr. made in the beginning of his first book,* MURDER BY INCHES *— that "the only completely fictitious character in this novel is the author"? If Stanley Hopkins, Jr. is self-confessedly a fictitious character, then obviously we are confronted with a pseudonym, and that raises the question: Why did young "Hopkins" choose a Scotland-Yard-character-out-of-Doyle as the inspiration for a pen-name?*

Ah, dear reader, there are good and sufficient reasons, and now that we have teased you to the point of revelatory climax, we are forced to play you a dirty editorial trick. We know who Stanley Hopkins, Jr. is, but we are honor-bound to keep his identity a deep and dark secret. Perhaps some day . . . In the meantime we are privileged to say only this: that Stanley Hopkins, Jr.'s father is a very famous man of letters.

We first met Stanley Hopkins, Jr. at one of the annual dinners of the Baker Street Irregulars (we warn you: that is not *a clue). As the result of our first conversation with young Hopkins he promised to try his hand at a short story. That promise was fulfilled when a whole year later the manuscript of "The Lady Holding a Green Apple" reached our sanctum sanctorum. It was worth waiting for. Here is a story of New York's Greenwich Village, of The Happy Hour bar, of the curiously supernatural events that occurred one raw November night in the early career of Mr. Malorie the art dealer, and most important of all, here is the story of a new type of detective — a bartender.*

The idea of a bartender-detective is as exhilarating as a double-jigger of pre-war scotch. When you stop to think of it, isn't a bartender a brand-new wrinkle on the old conception of the "armchair detective?" True, a bartender can walk six paces this way or six paces that way, within the confines of his mahogany-and-glass world, but to all intents and purposes he remains a fixed object — stationary if not sedentary, in the sense that he is unable to visit the scene of a crime, examine evidence, or question the witnesses. And what kind of people lean over his mahogany-and-amber world? People with problems, with troubles, with worries; moreover, people who are itching to talk, to tell their troubles down to the very last (no matter how irrelevant) detail. Isn't that the perfect formula for consultant-and-

client? And who better than a bartender can put together the apparently unrelated pieces to complete the jigsaw puzzle? Yes, it is the bartender who is the modern Old Man in the Corner — as Stanley Hopkins, Jr. has so ingeniously contrived; and we are urging young Hopkins to make this, his first short story and first appearance in a magazine, merely the first in a long series about Joe the bartender and the crimes he solved while mixing 'em for the habitués and transients who patronized The Happy Hour bar.

THE LADY HOLDING A GREEN APPLE

by STANLEY HOPKINS, JR.

MR. MALORIE flicked a small bit of dust from his immaculate grey cuff and blew a smoke ring. His cat-like eyes lazily contemplated the ring as it traveled across the bar, bounced against the filmy mirror, and disintegrated. In a place like The Happy Hour bar in Greenwich Village, where every patron is a smoker and where the proprietor prides himself not only on the length of his ceiling's sooty cobwebs, but also on the poorness of his establishment's ventilation, a smoke ring does not have much chance. Nonetheless at least ten pairs of eyes besides Mr. Malorie's watched the progress of the smoke ring.

"Yes," Mr. Malorie exhaled gently, "it was a strange evening, an upsetting evening, but if you really want to hear about it — Well, another brandy first, Joe."

Joe, a small dark man with sharp humorous eyes and a crooked nose, poured the brandy neatly and leaned back against the wall with his arms folded. I had Joe to thank for the hint that had brought me to his bar that evening, and I wondered how many others in Mr. Malorie's audience had come for the same reason — to hear Mr. Malorie's prize story, recounted traditionally in that small room whenever a new and receptive audience had collected. Certainly tonight's audience was a study in abnormal psychology — a hawk-faced, slant-eyed dancer who made his living at a night club around the corner; a long-haired, drawl-eyed Smith graduate in blue jeans; a tubby besmocked painter with a cowlick; a straw-headed young radical — to name a few. I rather imagine that a predilection for psychology is the main reason why so fastidious a person as Mr. Malorie spends his evenings in a region like the Village. I had seen him before at The Happy Hour, and was always amazed at how he could manage to emerge, after precisely seven brandies, never more, never less, looking as immaculate as before his initial entrance, well-groomed and impeccably dressed, without even a hair of his

fading-blond crest disturbed. Yet manage it he invariably did, and manage it he would at the end of the evening in question, but not for a while yet. He was now on his fifth brandy, and the time looked most auspicious for us to lend him our attention.

"Of course," said Mr. Malorie, teasing his brandy slowly around the glass, "I am only an art dealer, not a raconteur. Nonetheless — if you persist in making light of the supernatural —"

He eyed the young radical sternly, and the young radical made a prompt exit into his beer-glass.

"— Ah, then, I have no choice. And there is a good moral in this story, too, for you younger sprouts who persist in inhabiting the Village. You cannot be too careful in closing an art deal: that is the moral. You will not want to believe that. Yes, I know how it is when you are young. It is a strong temptation, indeed, to close a deal quickly when you see a painting that appears like a vision, like a gift from the gods, for sale at a very low price. One even waits and hopes for such an opportunity, keeping cash money on hand, believing that many a dealer is made into a millionaire by such a transaction. On the evening which I am going to tell you about, I too was young, and still looking for the golden chance that would transform me overnight from a little to a big art dealer.

"It was a raw evening in late November, very like tonight in fact, with a cold numbing rain settling rawly over New York. I had scratched together a supper for myself, and was settling down in front of the fireplace with a book, in the little hole-in-the-wall on Charles Street which I then inhabited, when the telephone rang. Would I be interested in looking at a painting that was for sale?

"On a night like that? As you can imagine, my response was definitely lukewarm. At the time I had only two pairs of shoes, and one pair was already soaked through. But the voice was persuasive. It had to be tonight or not at all. I would not be sorry if I inspected the portrait in question. So I began to be tempted. And then the name of the caller, as well as his words, acted as a kind of inducement. Arthur Semple: wasn't he a well-established business man? He was, I remembered, and his name rang a bell because he had had some connection with a number of private art shows in the Village. Grumbling somewhat, I agreed to call at his house within an hour, and jotted down the address.

"The address did not contradict the name. You all know the prosperous, genteel, lovely old private houses that can be found on the east side of the Village? Well, the Semple residence was among them. After some difficulty I found the number, discreetly inconspicuous, and made my way up the dark well-bred doorsteps.

"The door opened quickly. I was surprised to notice that the butler appeared somewhat nervous; but he seemed to understand my business

without questioning me, and admitted me to a room that opened from the front hall.

"I could not help being impressed by the room in which I found myself. Long, low-ceilinged, with deep leather chairs, it apparently ran the length of the house. At the far end, spattered with rain, a pair of French windows opened out to what must have been a terrace. Directly in front of me in the fireplace a dying coal fire tinkled gently on its grate. Only one lamp near the fireplace was lit, its rays slanting against the shadows that steeped the walls and the ranks of expensively bound books.

"I looked first of all, naturally, for paintings. But there were only a couple of Cape Cod landscapes, pleasant and inoffensive enough but certainly dull — it was indeed a wasted evening if I had been summoned to give an estimate on one of those. Wait then: hadn't the man said 'portrait' over the phone? I was reassured, but grew the more restive as I waited for Semple. Hang it all, he might at least have left the painting where I could look at it while I stood around.

"When he came at last, he entered so quietly that he took me by surprise. We exchanged names formally; his hands were occupied with holding the painting, and I, indeed, was so occupied with trying to see the prospective buy that I hardly noticed more than that he was a medium-sized executive-type of man with a dark mustache. His eyes held one, to be sure, but then, when he stood the painting against the wall under the lamplight — then, ah, then, no one could have had eyes for anything save the portrait itself.

"It was a portrait of a woman, a frankly beautiful young woman with shoulder-length blonde hair, but there was nothing stilted, stylized or sentimental about her beauty. She was dressed in simple black against a green background and seated with her feet curled under her. In her hands she was holding a green apple.

"I can't say that it's easy to describe the quality of that picture. It wasn't particularly the beauty of the face that held one, or the strangely shadowed eyes, or the vibrance of the colors, or the grace of the lines of composition. It wasn't that the girl might have been Eve, or womanhood in general, as well as most especially herself. It was some essence that belonged to the painting as a whole — a feeling of happiness aware of itself against a background of tragedy. Well, to put it briefly, the painting had what a dealer is always looking for — the undefinable quality of a masterpiece, undefinable but unmistakable.

"Only Semple's voice roused me from my trance of study. 'I take it,' he said with faint irony, 'that you like the portrait.'

"'Well . . .' I responded cautiously, hastily trying to reerect my self-defenses. I'm afraid I made a bad show of it; I wanted that painting, at that moment, as I wanted nothing else on earth, and I had not yet learned

how to be a good actor in such matters. But Semple seemed quite ready to help me along. The name of the artist, Harlow Black, was unknown to me, and Semple declared without reservation that it was the artist's only good canvas. That was all the information that then passed between us, though he did inform me that it was a portrait of his wife. We settled very rapidly on a figure of four thousand dollars — a staggering blow to my limited finances, I knew, but only a small fraction of what the portrait was really worth.

" 'I hate to rush through this in such a fashion —' standing at the desk near the French windows, Semple scrawled out duplicate bills-of-sale in longhand, and we both signed them —'but I have my reasons. It is, so to speak, personal business. Unfinished business. And later tonight I am leaving on a long trip. I do not like to leave loose ends behind me.'

"For a moment he seemed to be listening to something I could not hear. Only the sound of the rain sliding and whispering on the panes came from the windows toward which he had halfway turned.

" 'But now —' he swung back, turning on me that peculiar enigmatic smile — 'your share of the transaction, Mr. Malorie?'

"I took out my billfold and counted out eight five-hundred dollar bills — congratulating myself silently on the fact that I believed in preparedness, and carried nearly all my fiscal resources in cash — and each of us pocketed a copy of the two bills-of-sale. Folding up the money, Semple placed it in his wallet.

" 'It is too bad you cannot meet the portrait's model, my wife,' he went on. 'Regrettably she is indisposed tonight; and moreover, I do not want her to know that I am selling the portrait. She would be most upset to part with it.'

"Taken by surprise, I did not answer him in words. But I was right in divining that he did not care whether I spoke or not.

" 'It's a twisted story,' he went on, 'but if you care to listen, I can spare a few minutes more to talk. It seems only fair to give you some idea of why I am selling the painting so suddenly and so privately.'

"I certainly did care to listen, and murmuring something appropriate, I perched on the arm of a chair.

" 'I married my wife ten years ago, Mr. Malorie, and I was ten years older than my bride. It seemed like a fair enough, practicable match; I wanted a good mistress for my home, a good hostess and a proper consort; and for five years I thought that I had found one. I never was foolish enough to believe that Anne was in love with me, but then, I thought that she was sufficiently contented.

" 'I was mistaken — that is, I found out not only that she had ceased to be contented, but also that she had fallen in love with someone else. It was this portrait that irrefutably drove home the truth. Yes, it's easy enough to fill in the blanks of the story. Anne had

met a young artist at some neighborhood party; they were both young, in their early twenties, and they liked each other; and their relationship, without my knowledge, throve happily. Until the artist began to paint this portrait.

" 'I was curious, naturally, about the portrait sittings, and went along with Anne one morning. One look at the painting ought to have been enough for me. But I was careful, and of course I made certain about matters before I took any definite steps.'

" 'Steps?' I said awkwardly. There was something cold, something terrifyingly formidable about the way this man leaned against the desk, patterning his words coolly and objectively. Yet even if I had wanted to stop listening or to move, only with great effort, at that moment, could I have done so. I had not really observed my host until that moment; now I realized that his eyes were a hard, metallic blue. A portrait of him as he stood there would have made a perfect antithesis for the portrait of the girl with the apple.

" 'Yes, of course, steps,' he continued quietly. 'He was a talented boy, that artist, but you can see that my position left no room for sentiment. I am not the kind of man who would accept the compromising situation of divorce. Accordingly I took steps; very neatly, I must say; the only trouble was that no one ever knew of my part in the affair. Regrettable, that. For when one executes a neat piece of business, one never feels that it is really finished until one gets proper credit for it."

"My throat somehow contracted, and my voice was hoarse as I spoke. 'And the artist —?' I asked. 'What happened to him?'

" 'The artist?' He smiled. 'It was always listed as a case of disappearance.'

"Riveted to the arm of my chair, I watched him step away from the desk. Some premonition of the truth must have invaded my mind at that moment, but my reason had not yet acknowledged it.

" 'However,' he continued, 'I won't detain you any longer. You have completed your business, and I have completed mine. Be sure to take the portrait with you when you leave. You know where the front door is.' For a moment he seemed again to be listening for something I could not hear; then he gathered himself. 'And now I really must be going. Good night, Mr. Malorie.'

"His face regarded me, sharply and suddenly, his eyes still hard and his lips still half-smiling. Then a gust of wind billowed out the drapes of the French windows, and as suddenly as he had first entered the room, he was gone.

"When I at last rose from my sitting position — and it was not for several minutes — my mind felt numb and confused. What did this story add up to? Should I do something about it? But I shook my head and dismissed the questions; the real thing that mattered was the portrait.

That was mine, my first big find. I lost myself once more in gazing at it. Then my mind returned to practical matters: I must obtain something to wrap it in, for safe transportation, and summon a cab. The butler seemed the logical person to help me. I crossed and rang the service bell by the doorway.

"The door opened almost immediately.

" 'I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, sir; I was just coming,' the butler said. 'You are the man from the law firm, are you not?'

" 'Why — no —' I said bewilderedly. 'I came to see Mr. Semple about this portrait.'

" 'The portrait?' Without doubt the butler looked confused and distressed. 'I'm terribly sorry, then, but there's been a mistake. Just three hours ago, sir —' he swallowed hard — 'Mr. Semple died of a heart attack.'

"For perhaps half a minute, uncomprehendingly, I stared at the butler. Then, with a wild notion of what had really happened, I felt in my pocket for the bill-of-sale. My hand trembled as I looked. For I was holding, after all, nothing but a blank piece of paper."

"My God," said the Smith alumna hoarsely, breaking the silence like a young Delphic priestess in a trance. "Pour me another rye, Joe. Is that story really *true*?"

"Every word," said Mr. Malorie. "Joe here — Joe will vouch for it. Right after it happened I came in here. I gave Joe the blank bill-of-sale, and he's been keeping it ever since."

"That's right," said Joe. "It's been here fifteen years. I'll swear to it."

Ceremoniously he unlocked a cash drawer and withdrew an old envelope. On the outside, with Joe's signature and a date that was fifteen years old, the words "given me for safekeeping — Mr. Malorie's bill of sale" were scrawled in Joe's handwriting.

Sure enough, the paper was blank, yellowing now at the edges. When it came my turn to look I gazed at it with a peculiar feeling in my spine. Pinned to the sheet was the final terse word: a ragged newspaper clipping from the *Times*, dated one day later than the envelope: the brief obituary of one Arthur Semple, business man and art connoisseur, who had died suddenly the previous day from a heart attack in his home in New York.

The long-haired girl again was the one to break the silence. "Whatever happened to the painting?" she asked.

"I wish I knew," answered Malorie unhappily. "That evening I was too stunned to do anything but leave the house. But I tried to get it, yes, I tried. I returned again and again to the house, but Mrs. Semple, I was informed, had gone away without leaving a forwarding address, and by no stratagem could I ever get past the front door. The portrait could not possibly belong to me, the butler said, unless I could produce a bill-of-sale. Of course I could not produce one.

"So that," he concluded, "was that.

But I may tell you that ever since then I have not been very ready to make light of the supernatural." He stood up, smiling ruefully at his empty brandy glass — the seventh — and slipped on his immaculate grey gabardine coat. "It grows late. Good night, my dears. Till we meet again."

I stayed on at the bar for an hour or so longer, slowly consuming Scotch and brooding silently to myself. The Happy Hour was almost empty of people before I suddenly snapped out of my waking dream. Joe was directly in front of me, leaning once more against the wall, watching me with an expression of ironical amusement on his face.

"Well, you have been outa this world," he said. "Whatsa matter?"

"Nothing," I said, "unless it's that story. I've got a nice prosaic legal mind, with a pleasant predilection for facts that can be fitted together and for happenings that can be explained. It wounds me somehow to think that ghosts exist in such a pleasant worldly place as Greenwich Village."

"It's a good story, you gotta admit that."

Something in his tone surprised me.

"What do you mean? Don't you believe it? I probably wouldn't have, if you hadn't produced that paper." I felt, somehow, grieved. Malorie might be capable of having invented that story, but Joe, in that case, shouldn't have backed him up.

Joe was grinning broadly. "Oh, sure, I believe it as far as he tells it."

"Then what *do* you mean?"

He leaned forward. "Listen, Jim," he said, "I like you. You're a nice young lawyer. But if I tell you something you've gotta promise never to pass it on."

"Why?"

He laughed. "There goes your legal mind again. Because it'd break Malorie's heart, that's why."

"All right. I promise. Why should it break Malorie's heart?"

"Because —" Joe leaned back and laughed — "because he'd lose the only good story he has to tell. Because he'd find out he was the victim of one of the neatest con game tricks that ever was passed off in this imaginative part of town.

"I gotta mind like yours, a nice legal mind, even if I never got through high school. I like puzzles, too. That's one reason why I went into this business of mine. Lots of room for a bartender to amuse himself with what they call psychological puzzles.

"I seen lots of Ph.D.'s swallow that story of Malorie's like water, but it never set easy on my stomach, like it don't on yours. On the other hand I was pretty sure that Malorie believed he was telling the truth. He ain't the kind of man to have hallucinations, either, and you can bet your bottom dollar I've had plenty of experience with that kind of customer. Well, if he wasn't seeing things, what was it then? And finally I says to myself, that piece of paper must be the key. Anything like writing, anything that disappears ought to be able to reap-

pear. You just have to know the right chemicals. So I dug out a friend of mine on the Force — you gotta have friends on the Force if you're in my business — and I persuaded him to take me through a police lab one day. They have some nice little ultra-violet-ray gadgets that'll show up things written with your so-called vanishing inks. And sure enough — Malorie's bill-of-sale came right back to life."

"Well," I said. "I'll be damned!"

"Damned's right." Joe chuckled. "But then, I says to myself, what kind of a ghost takes special pains to use a special kind of chemical ink?

"Then I seen what a beautiful trick it really was.

"It was the time element that gave the thing away. Remember, Malorie never saw both Semple and the butler at the same minute? There was always a spot of time between the exit of one and the entrance of the other.

"So here's how the pattern really goes. A slick crook with a flair for the unusual gets a job as Semple's butler — Semple is a sick man, and he owns lots of valuable paintings — and then this crook waits for a chance to get away with something, until suddenly Semple kicks the bucket. While the household is upset the butler has things pretty much under his control. He takes his chance. He gets hold of this romantic young art dealer; lets him in; leaves him waiting several minutes while he disguises himself as a business man with a tiny dark mustache; pumps the young art dealer full of a wild yarn, makes out bills-of-sale in disappearing ink, and collects the money; exits with lots of flourish into the rainy night; leaves Malorie waiting again for several minutes, knowing that the young dealer won't leave until he gets the painting wrapped up; changes his clothes back to the butler's and removes the mustache; re-enters, and states that Semple has been dead for three hours.

"What could be neater?"

"Joe," I said, "have a drink on me. What could be neater, indeed? But haven't you ever told Malorie all this?"

"I satisfied myself," Joe said. "Ain't that enough? I ain't no cop. I'm just an innocent bystander. Some things is more important than losing a few G's. And I like Malorie. He's much better off not knowing that the four thousand bucks didn't go to Semple's estate. He's had more than four G's worth of pleasure just out of telling that story." He grinned. "You wouldn't take candy away from a baby, would you? Well, I wouldn't either." With a chuckle he lifted his glass. "Here's to candy. Or, shall we say, here's to the lady holding a green apple?"

"O"

Willie Gordon was an opportunist — every good crook has to be. This time Opportunity knocked on Willie's door and Willie not only seized his big chance with both hands but made the most of what Opportunity offered him. It was a perfect set-up — until, figuratively speaking, Willie got his foot caught in the door . . . A crime short-short by a noted writer who has probably written more short-short stories than all his famous contemporaries put together.

ACCORDING TO CUSTOMS

By OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

MR. WILLIE GORDON understood ethics but did not indulge in them. He had innocent blue eyes, broad shoulders, youthful charm, and no conscience whatsoever. He went through life turning a willing hand to whatever offered — particularly if it belonged to someone else.

Yet tonight he stood at the rail of the majestic liner and imparted virtuous counsel to the slim and beautiful young girl beside him.

"Smuggling is dishonest," he observed.

"Oh, yeah? Well, what about it?"

"You'll be breaking the law, Mildred."

"Shocking! But no novelty, Willie. Every time I go out in my car I break the traffic laws. I'm a lawless person, Mr. Gordon, and the sooner you learn it — the wiser you'll be."

Willie shed his mantle of dignity and became a modern youth. "You're goofy. Suppose they grab you in New York tomorrow with that stuff. Do you think they'll go easy? Get this: Your old man is Park Avenue; you've already filed your customs declaration and said nothing about the twenty-thousand-dollar diamond necklace you bought in Amsterdam — that's *prima facie* evidence of intention to smuggle."

"You talk like a judge," she declared rapturously. "Go on. I love it!"

"They grab your trinket, slap a fine on you, and smother you with publicity. And all for what? A few measly dollars."

"Wrong, Willie, wrong! It's the sport of the thing, not the money. I'll be twice as proud of that necklace if I can know — every time I look at it — that I put something across on Uncle Sam. It's the great national spirit, my lad. Our motto has become, 'There's nothing wrong in what you can get away with.'"

"Never," advised Willie sententiously, "end a sentence with a preposition. Where have you got the stuff?"

"Under the false bottom of my make-up box. No custom inspector in the world would ever plow through that many cosmetics for the sake of a poor little necklace."

"All right," sighed Willie. "Be a

smuggler if you must . . . but be a good one. Don't keep probing to see if it's there, don't keep eyeing the box — and don't be too casual about it, either."

"Worry not, my mentor. I'm thoroughly case-hardened and blasé. My declaration is already in the purser's office, my necklace is hidden away, and I shall not think of it again until after I'm safely under the parental rooftree or what have you."

Willie took her hand. "Until you became a criminal, Mildred, I like you a heap." He sighed: "I still do."

"And you'll visit me in prison?"

"I'll get a job as matron," he declared. "Positively!"

Just before reaching the twelve-mile limit the younger crowd — which had converted the liner into a bedlam all the way across — raided the bar and laid in supplies for a final farewell party. When the ship reached quarantine at two in the morning and anchored for the night, the whoopee was in full swing.

At two-thirty Willie entrusted Miss Mildred Garrison to the arms of an enthusiastic young dancing man. Then Mr. Gordon strolled casually from the Palm Garden and away from the din of the jazz orchestra.

As he descended to B deck and approached the cabin of his shipboard romance, the expression of boyishness fled his countenance, and in its place came the rather hard, bitter, efficient look which Mr. Gordon reserved for his professional activities.

He entered the cabin and locked the door. Swiftly he opened Mildred's bags, and deftly he probed for the make-up box. He worked with the grace and delicacy of a surgeon performing a major operation: speed without haste; concentration without clumsiness.

Robbery was his business, and just now business was booming. He located the box, removed its dummy tray, and abstracted the gleaming diamond necklace. Then he replaced everything as it had been, dropped the diamonds into his pocket, and sauntered innocently from the cabin and back to the party.

Mr. Willie Gordon was well pleased with himself. In the first place, Miss Garrison would probably not miss her necklace; in the second place, she would hesitate to raise a disturbance if its loss should be discovered inasmuch as her customs declaration was already on file and she had neglected to mention the jewels. And in the third place, Willie knew that he could always toss the necklace overboard if worst came to worst. Chances were that everything would go smoothly; he would leave the pier a wealthier and more unscrupulous young man . . . and he was quite positive that he would never bother to renew his friendship with Mildred. Having courted and robbed her, he was content to call it quits.

Next morning at nine o'clock the ship was nuzzled into her berth by a half-dozen officious little tugs. Willie did not see Mildred until they met

under the letter G on the pier, each with a customs inspector in tow. Mildred was bright, cheerful, and unperturbed — and Willie breathed a vast sigh of relief. Unquestionably she had not discovered the loss of her jewels. Willie congratulated himself, and was still engaged in that pleasant task when he heard Mildred's cool, clear voice addressing her customs man:

"And one more thing, Mr. Inspector — I've made a terrible mistake."

"What is it, Miss?"

"I bought a twenty-thousand-dollar diamond necklace in Amsterdam and forgot to enter it on my declaration."

Willie felt suddenly ill. He listened for the worst — and heard it.

"That's quite all right, Miss," the inspector was saying, "so long as you're declaring it now. Where is it?"

The girl turned brightly to the bitterly disappointed Mr. Gordon.

"This gentleman has been taking care of it for me since last night. Please let the inspector have it, Willie."

The inspector glanced at the necklace which the perspiring Mr. Gordon reluctantly produced. Then, as the official trotted off in search of an appraiser, Mildred dimpled up at her shipboard friend:

"So sweet of you, Willie, to save me from myself. If you hadn't done this, I'd have been a smuggler. And you'd have been terribly shocked, wouldn't you, Willie, at the very thought of anyone's doing anything dishonest?"

'Q'

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PRESIDENT'S HALF DISME

by ELLERY QUEEN

THOSE FEW CURIOUS MEN who have chosen to turn off the humdrum highway to hunt for their pleasure along the black trails expect — indeed, they look confidently forward to — many strange encounters; and it is the dull stalk which does not turn up at least a hippograff. But it remained for Ellery Queen to experience the ultimate excitement. On one of his prowls he collided with a President of the United States.

This would have been joy enough if it had occurred as you might imagine: by chance, on a dark night, in some back street of Washington, D. C., with Secret Service men closing in on the delighted Mr. Queen to question his motives by way of his pockets while a large black bullet-proof limousine rushed up to spirit the President away. But mere imagination fails in this instance. What is required is the power of fancy, for the truth is fantastic. Ellery's encounter with the President of the United States took place, not on a dark night, but in the unromantic light of several days (although the night played its role, too). Nor was it by chance: the meeting was arranged by a farmer's daughter. And it was not in Washington, D. C., for this President presided over the affairs of the nation from a different city altogether. Not that the meeting took place in that city, either; it did not take place in a city at all, but on a farm some miles south of Philadelphia. Oddest of all, there was no limousine to spirit the Chief Executive away, for while the President was a man of great wealth, he was still too poor to possess an automobile and, what is more, not all the resources of his Government — indeed, not all the riches of the world — could have provided one for him.

There are even more curious facets to this jewel of paradox. This was an encounter in the purest sense, and yet, physically, it did not occur at all. The President in question was dead. And while there are those who would not blink at a rubbing of shoulders or a clasping of hands even though one of the parties was in his grave, and to such persons the thought might occur that the meeting took place on a psychic plane — alas, Ellery Queen is not of their company. He does not believe in ghosts, consequently he never encounters them. So he did not collide with the President's shade, either.

And yet their meeting was as palpable as, say, the meeting between two chess masters, one in Moscow and the other in New York, who never leave their respective armchairs and still play a game to a decision. It is even more wonderful than that, for while the chess players merely annihilate space, Ellery and the father of

his country annihilated time — a century and a half of it.

In fine, this is the story of how Ellery Queen matched wits with George Washington.

THOSE WHO ARE finicky about their fashions complain that the arms of coincidence are too long; but in this case the Designer might say that He cut to measure. Or, to put it another way, an event often brews its own mood. Whatever the cause — whether coincidental or incidental — the fact is The Adventure of the President's Half Disme, which was to concern itself with the events surrounding President Washington's fifty-ninth birthday, actually first engrossed Ellery on February the nineteenth and culminated three days later.

Ellery was in his study that morning of the nineteenth of February, wrestling with several reluctant victims of violence, none of them quite flesh and blood, since his novel was still in the planning stage. So he was annoyed when Nikki came in with a card.

"James Ezekiel Patch," growled the great man; he was never in his best humor during the planning stage. "I don't know any James Ezekiel Patch, Nikki. Toss the fellow out and get back to transcribing those notes on Possible Motives —"

"Why, Ellery," said Nikki. "This isn't like you at all."

"What isn't like me?"

"To renege on an appointment."

"Appointment? Does this Patch character claim — ?"

"He doesn't merely claim it. He proves it."

"Someone's balmy," snarled Mr. Queen; and he strode into the living room to contend with James Ezekiel Patch. This, he perceived as soon as James Ezekiel Patch rose from the Queen fireside chair, was likely to be a heroic project. Mr. Patch, notwithstanding his mild, even studious, eyes, seemed to rise indefinitely; he was a large, a very large, man.

"Now what's all this, what's all this?" demanded Ellery fiercely; for after all Nikki was there.

"That's what I'd like to know," said the large man amiably. "What did you want with me, Mr. Queen?"

"What did I want with you! What did you want with me?"

"I find this very strange, Mr. Queen."

"Now see here, Mr. Patch, I happen to be extremely busy this morning —"

"So am I." Mr. Patch's large thick neck was reddening and his tone was no longer amiable. Ellery took a cautious step backward as his visitor lumbered forward to thrust a slip of yellow paper under his nose. "Did you send me this wire, or didn't you?"

Ellery considered it tactically expedient to take the telegram, although for strategic reasons he did so with a bellicose scowl.

IMPERATIVE YOU CALL AT MY HOME TOMORROW FEBRUARY NINETEEN PROMPTLY TEN A.M. SIGNED ELLERY QUEEN

"Well, sir?" thundered Mr. Patch. "Do you have something on Washington for me, or don't you?"

"Washington?" said Ellery absently, studying the telegram.

"*George* Washington, Mr. Queen! I'm Patch the antiquarian. I *collect* Washington. I'm an *authority* on Washington. I have a large fortune and I spend it all on Washington! I'd never have wasted my time this morning if your name hadn't been signed to this wire! This is my busiest week of the year. I have engagements to speak on Washington —"

"Desist, Mr. Patch," said Ellery. "This is either a practical joke, or —"

"The Baroness Tchek," announced Nikki clearly. "With another telegram." And then she added: "And Professor John Cecil Shaw, ditto."

THE THREE TELEGRAMS were identical.

"Of course, I didn't send them," said Ellery thoughtfully, regarding his three visitors. Baroness Tchek was a short powerful woman, resembling a dumpling with gray hair; an angry dumpling. Professor Shaw was lank and long-jawed, wearing a sack suit which hung in some places and failed in its purpose by inches at the extremities. Along with Mr. Patch, they constituted as deliciously queer a trio as had ever congregated in the Queen apartment. Their host suddenly determined not to let go of them. "On the other hand, someone obviously did, using my name . . ."

"Then there's nothing more to be said," snapped the Baroness, snapping her bag for emphasis.

"I should think there's a great deal more to be said," began Professor Shaw in a troubled way. "Wasting people's time this way —"

"It's not going to waste any more of *my* time," growled the large Mr. Patch. "Washington's Birthday only three days off —!"

"Exactly," smiled Ellery. "Won't you all sit down? There's more in this than meets the eye . . . Baroness Tchek, if I'm not mistaken, you're the one who brought that fabulous collection of rare coins into the United States just before Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia? You're in the rare-coin business in New York now?"

"Unfortunately," said the Baroness coldly, "one must eat."

"And you, sir? I seem to know you."

"Rare books," said the Professor in the same troubled way.

"Of course. John Cecil Shaw, the rare-book collector. We've met at Mim's and other places. I abandon my first theory. There's a pattern here, distinctly unhumorous. An antiquarian, a coin dealer, and a collector of rare books — Nikki? Whom have you out there this time?"

"If this one collects anything," muttered Nikki into her employer's ear, "I'll bet it's things with two legs and hair on their chests. A darned pretty girl —"

"Named Martha Clarke," said a cool voice; and Ellery turned to find himself regarding one of the most satisfying sights in the world.

"Ah. I take it, Miss Clarke, you also received one of these wires signed with my name?"

"Oh, no," said the pretty girl. "I'm the one who sent them."

THERE WAS SOMETHING about the comely Miss Clarke which inspired, if not confidence, at least an openness of mind. Perhaps it was the self-possessed manner in which she sat all of them, including Ellery, down in Ellery's living room while she waited on the hearth-rug, like a conductor on the podium, for them to settle in their chairs. And it was the measure of Miss Clarke's assurance that none of them was indignant, only curious.

"I'll make it snappy," said Martha Clarke briskly. "I did what I did the way I did it because, first, I had to make sure I could see Mr. Patch, Baroness Tchek, and Professor Shaw today. Second, because I may need a detective before I'm through . . . Third," she added, almost absently, "because I'm pretty desperate.

"My name is Martha Clarke. My father Tobias is a farmer. Our farm lies just south of Philadelphia, it was built by a Clarke in 1761, and it's been in our family ever since. I won't go gooey on you. We're broke and there's a mortgage. Unless papa and I can raise six thousand dollars in the next couple of weeks we lose the old homestead."

Professor Shaw looked vague. But the Baroness said: "Deplorable, Miss Clarke. Now if I'm to run my auction this afternoon —"

And James Ezekiel Patch grumbled: "If it's money you want, young woman —"

"Certainly it's money I want. But I have something to sell."

"Ah!" said the Baroness.

"Oh?" said the Professor.

"Hm," said the antiquarian.

Mr. Queen said nothing, and Miss Porter jealously chewed the end of her pencil.

"The other day, while I was cleaning out the attic, I found an old book."

"Well, now," said Professor Shaw indulgently. "An old book, eh?"

"It's called *The Diary of Simeon Clarke*. Simeon Clarke was papa's great-great-great-something or other. His *Diary* was privately printed in 1792 in Philadelphia, Professor, by a second cousin of his, Jonathan, who was in the printing business there."

"Jonathan Clarke. *The Diary of Simeon Clarke*," mumbled the cadaverous book collector. "I don't believe I know either, Miss Clarke. Have you . . . ?"

Martha Clarke carefully unclasped a large manila envelope and drew forth a single yellowed sheet of badly printed paper. "The title page was loose, so I brought it along."

Professor Shaw silently examined Miss Clarke's exhibit, and Ellery got up to squint at it. "Of course," said the Professor after a long scrutiny, in which he held the sheet up to the light, peered apparently at individual characters, and performed other mysterious rites, "mere age doesn't con-

note rarity, nor does rarity of itself constitute value. And while this page looks genuine for the purported period and is rare enough to be unknown to me, still . . ."

"Suppose I told you," said Miss Martha Clarke, "that the chief purpose of the *Diary* — which I have at home — is to tell the story of how George Washington visited Simeon Clarke's farm in the winter of 1791 —"

"Clarke's farm? 1791?" exclaimed James Ezekiel Patch. "Preposterous. There's no record of —"

"And of what George Washington buried there," the farmer's daughter concluded.

BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, the Queen telephone was taken off its hook, the door was bolted, the shades were drawn, and the long interrogation began. By the middle of the afternoon, the unknown chapter in the life of the Father of His Country was fairly sketched.

Early on an icy gray February morning in 1791, Farmer Clarke had looked up from the fence he was mending to observe a splendid cortège galloping down on him from the direction of the City of Philadelphia. Outriders thundered in the van, followed by a considerable company of gentlemen on horseback and several great coaches-and-six driven by liveried Negroes. To Simeon Clarke's astonishment, the entire equipage stopped before his farmhouse. He began to run. He could hear the creak of springs and the snorting of sleek and sweating horses. Gentlemen and lackeys were leaping to the frozen ground and, by the time Simeon had reached the farmhouse, all were elbowing about the first coach, a magnificent affair bearing a coat of arms. Craning, the farmer saw within the coach a very large, great-nosed gentleman clad in a black velvet suit and a black cloak faced with gold; there was a cocked hat on his wigged head and a great sword in a white leather scabbard at his side. This personage was on one knee, leaning with an expression of considerable anxiety over a chubby lady of middle age, swathed in furs, who was half-sitting, half-lying on the upholstered seat, her eyes closed and her cheeks waxen under the rouge. Another gentleman, soberly attired, was stooping over the lady, his fingers on one pale wrist.

"I fear," he was saying with great gravity to the kneeling man, "that it would be imprudent to proceed another yard in this weather, Your Excellency. Lady Washington requires physicking and a warm bed immediately."

Lady Washington! Then the large, richly dressed gentleman was the President! Simeon Clarke pushed excitedly through the throng.

"Your Mightiness! Sir!" he cried. "I am Simeon Clarke. This is my farm. We have warm beds, Sarah and I!"

The President considered Simeon briefly. "I thank you, Farmer Clarke. No, no, Dr. Craik. I shall assist Lady Washington myself."

And George Washington carried

Martha Washington into the little Pennsylvania farmhouse of Simeon and Sarah Clarke. An aide informed the Clarkes that President Washington had been on his way to Virginia to celebrate his fifty-ninth birthday in the privacy of Mount Vernon.

Instead, he passed his birthday on the Clarke farm, for the physician insisted that the President's lady could not be moved, even back to the nearby Capital, without risking complications. On His Excellency's order, the entire incident was kept secret. "It would give needless alarm to the people," he said. But he did not leave Martha's bedside for three days and three nights.

Presumably during those seventy-two hours, while his lady recovered from her indisposition, the President devoted some thought to his hosts, for on the fourth morning he sent black Christopher, his body servant, to summon the Clarkes. They found George Washington by the kitchen fire, shaven and powdered and in immaculate dress, his stern features composed.

"I am told, Farmer Clarke, that you and your good wife refuse reimbursement for the live stock you have slaughtered in the accommodation of our large company."

"You're my President, Sir," said Simeon. "I wouldn't take money."

"We — we wouldn't take money, Your Worship," stammered Sarah.

"Nonetheless, Lady Washington and I would acknowledge your hospitality in some kind. If you give me leave, I shall plant with my own hands a grove of oak saplings behind your house. And beneath one of the saplings I propose to bury two of my personal possessions." Washington's eyes twinkled ever so slightly. "It is my birthday — I feel a venturesome spirit. Come, Farmer Clarke and Mistress Clarke, would you like that?"

"WHAT — WHAT WERE they?" choked James Ezekiel Patch, the Washington collector. He was pale.

Martha Clarke replied: "The sword at Washington's side, in its white leather scabbard, and a silver coin the President carried in a secret pocket."

"Silver *coin?*" breathed Baroness Tchek, the rare-coin dealer. "What kind of coin, Miss Clarke?"

"The *Diary* calls it 'a half disme,' with an *s*," replied Martha Clarke, frowning. "I guess that's the way they spelled dime in those days. The book's full of queer spellings."

"A United States of America half disme?" asked the Baroness in a very odd way.

"That's what it says, Baroness."

"And this was in February, 1791?"

"Yes."

The Baroness snorted, beginning to rise. "I thought your story was too impossibly romantic, young woman. The United States Mint didn't begin to strike off half dismes until 1792!"

"Half dismes or any other U. S. coinage, I believe," said Ellery. "How come, Miss Clarke?"

"It was an experimental coin," said

Miss Clarke coolly. "The *Diary* isn't clear as to whether it was the Mint which struck it off, or some private agency — maybe Washington himself didn't tell Simeon — but the President did say to Simeon that the half disme in his pocket had been coined from silver he himself had furnished and had been presented to him as a keepsake."

"There's a half disme with a story like that behind it in the possession of The American Numismatic Society," muttered the Baroness, "but it's definitely called one of the earliest coins struck off by the Mint. It's possible, I suppose, that in 1791, the preceding year, some specimen coins may have been struck off —"

"Possible my foot," said Miss Clarke. "It's so. The *Diary* says so. I imagine President Washington was pretty interested in the coins to be issued by the new country he was head of."

"Miss Clarke, I — I want that half disme. I mean — I'd like to buy it from you," said the Baroness.

"And I," said Mr. Patch carefully, "would like to ah . . . purchase Washington's sword."

"The *Diary*," moaned Professor Shaw. "I'll buy *The Diary of Simeon Clarke* from you, Miss Clarke!"

"I'll be happy to sell it to you, Professor Shaw — as I said, I found it in the attic and I have it locked up in a highboy in the parlor at home. But as for the other two things . . ." Martha Clarke paused, and Ellery looked delighted. He thought he knew what was coming. "I'll sell you the sword, Mr. Patch, and you the half disme, Baroness Tchek, providing —" and now Miss Clarke turned her clear eyes on Ellery "— providing you, Mr. Queen, will be kind enough to find them."

AND THERE WAS the farmhouse in the frosty Pennsylvania morning, set in the barren winter acres, and looking as bleak as only a little Revolutionary house with a mortgage on its head can look in the month of February.

"There's an apple orchard over there," said Nikki as they got out of Ellery's car. "But where's the grove of oaks? I don't see any!" And then she added, sweetly: "Do you, Ellery?"

Ellery's lips tightened. They tightened further when his solo on the front-door knocker brought no response.

"Let's go around," he said briefly; and Nikki preceded him with cheerful step.

Behind the house there was a barn; and beyond the barn there was comfort, at least for Ellery. For beyond the barn there were twelve ugly holes in the earth, and beside each hole lay either a freshly felled oak tree and its stump, or an ancient stump by itself, freshly uprooted. On one of the stumps sat an old man in earth-stained blue jeans, smoking a corncob pugnaciously.

"Tobias Clarke?" asked Ellery.

"Yump."

"I'm Ellery Queen. This is Miss Porter. Your daughter visited me in New York yesterday —"

"Know all about it."

"May I ask where Martha is?"

"Station. Meetin' them there other folks." Tobias Clarke spat and looked away — at the holes. "Don't know what ye're all comin' down here for. Wasn't nothin' under them oaks. Dug 'em all up t'other day. Trees that were standin' and the stumps of the ones that 'd fallen years back. Look at them holes. Hired hand and me dug down most to China. Washin'ton's Grove, always been called. Now look at it. Firewood — for someone else, I guess." There was an iron bitterness in his tone. "We're losin' this farm, Mister, unless . . ." And Tobias Clarke stopped. "Well, maybe we won't," he said. "There's always that there book Martha found."

"Professor Shaw, the rare-book collector, offered your daughter two thousand dollars for it if he's satisfied with it, Mr. Clarke," said Nikki.

"So she told me last night when she got back from New York," said Tobias Clarke. "Two thousand — and we need six." He grinned, and he spat again.

"Well," said Nikki sadly to Ellery, "that's that." She hoped Ellery would immediately get into the car and drive back to New York — immediately.

But Ellery showed no disposition to be sensible. "Perhaps, Mr. Clarke, some trees died in the course of time and just disappeared, stumps, roots, and all. Martha —" Martha! "— said the *Diary* doesn't mention the exact number Washington planted here."

"Look at them holes. Twelve of 'em, ain't there? In a triangle. Man plants trees in a triangle, he plants trees in a triangle. Ye don't see no place between holes big enough for another tree, do ye? Anyways, there was the same distance between all the trees. No, sir, Mister, twelve was all there was ever; and I looked under all twelve."

"What's the extra tree doing in the center of the triangle? You haven't uprooted that one, Mr. Clarke."

Tobias Clarke spat once more. "Don't know much about trees, do ye? That's a cherry saplin' I set in myself six years ago. Ain't got nothin' to do with George Washin'ton."

Nikki tittered.

"If you'd sift the earth in those holes —"

"I sifted it. Look, Mister, either somebody dug that stuff up a hundred years ago or the whole yarn's a Saturday night whopper. Which it most likely is. There's Martha now with them other folks." And Tobias Clarke added, spitting for the fourth time: "Don't let me be keepin' ye."

"It reveals Washington rather er . . . out of character," said James Ezekiel Patch that evening. They were sitting about a fire in the parlor, as heavy with gloom as with Miss Clarke's dinner; and that, at least in Miss Porter's view, was heavy indeed. Baroness Tchek wore the expression of one who is trapped in a cave; there was no further train until morning, and she had not yet resigned herself

to a night in a farmhouse bed. The better part of the day had been spent poring over *The Diary of Simeon Clarke*, searching for a clue to the buried Washingtonia. But there was no clue; the pertinent passage referred merely to "a Triangle of Oake Trees behinde the red Barn, distant fifteen yards one from the other, which His Excellency the President did plant with his own Hands, as he had promised me, and then did burie his Sworde and the Half Disme for his Pleasure in a Case of copper beneathe one of the Oakes, the which, he said, (the Case) had been fashioned by Mr. Revere of Boston who is experimenting with this Mettle in his Furnasses."

"How out of character, Mr. Patch?" asked Ellery. He had been staring into the fire for a long time, scarcely listening.

"Washington wasn't given to romanticism," said the large man dryly. "No folderol about him. I don't know of anything in his life which prepares us for such a yarn as this. I'm beginning to think —"

"But Professor Shaw himself says the *Diary* is no forgery!" cried Martha Clarke.

"Oh, the book's authentic enough." Professor Shaw seemed unhappy. "But it may simply be a literary hoax, Miss Clarke. The woods are full of them. I'm afraid that unless the story is confirmed by the discovery of that copper case with its contents . . ."

"Oh, dear," said Nikki impulsively; and for a moment she was sorry for Martha Clarke, she really was.

But Ellery said: "I believe it. Pennsylvania farmers in 1791 weren't given to literary hoaxes, Professor Shaw. As for Washington, Mr. Patch — no man can be so rigidly consistent. And with his wife just recovering from an illness — on his own birthday . . ." And Ellery fell silent again.

Almost immediately he leaped from his chair. "Mr. Clarke!"

Tobias stirred from his dark corner. "What?"

"Did you ever hear your father, or grandfather — anyone in your family — talk of *another barn behind the house?*"

Martha stared at him. Then she cried: "Papa, that's it! It was a different barn, in a different place, and the original Washington's Grove was cut down, or died —"

"Nope," said Tobias Clarke. "Never was but this one barn. Still got some of its original timbers. Ye can see the date burned into the crosstree 1761."

NIKKI WAS UP early. A steady *hack-hack-hack* borne on frosty air woke her. She peered out of her back window, the coverlet up to her nose, to see Mr. Ellery Queen against the dawn, like a pioneer, wielding an ax powerfully.

Nikki dressed quickly, shivering, flung her mink-dyed muskrat over her shoulders, and ran downstairs, out of the house, and around it past the barn.

"Ellery! What do you think you're doing? It's practically the middle of the night!"

"Chopping," said Ellery, chopping.

"There's *mountains* of firewood stacked against the barn," said Nikki. "Really, Ellery, I think this is carrying a flirtation too far." Ellery did not reply. "And anyway, there's something — something gruesome and indecent about chopping up trees George Washington planted. It's vandalism."

"Just a thought," panted Ellery, pausing for a moment. "A hundred and fifty-odd years is a long time, Nikki. Lots of queer things could happen, even to a tree, in that time. For instance —"

"The copper case," breathed Nikki, visibly. "The roots grew *around* it. It's *in* one of these stumps!"

"Now you're functioning," said Ellery, and he raised the ax again.

He was still at it two hours later, when Martha Clarke announced breakfast.

AT 11:30 A.M. Nikki returned from driving the Professor, the Baroness, and James Ezekiel Patch to the railroad station. She found Mr. Queen seated before the fire in the kitchen in his undershirt, while Martha Clarke caressed his naked right arm.

"Oh!" said Nikki faintly. "I *beg* your pardon."

"Where you going, Nikki?" said Ellery irritably. "Come in. Martha's rubbing liniment into my biceps."

"He's not very accustomed to chopping wood, is he?" asked Martha Clarke in a cheerful voice.

"Reduced those foul 'oakes' to splinters," groaned Ellery. "Martha, ouch!"

"I should think you'd be satisfied *now*," said Nikki coldly. "I suggest we imitate Patch, Shaw, and the Baroness, Ellery — there's a 3:05. We can't impose on Miss Clarke's hospitality forever."

To Nikki's horror, Martha Clarke chose this moment to burst into tears.

"Martha!"

Nikki felt like leaping upon her and shaking the cool look back into her perfidious eyes.

"Here — here, now, Martha." That's right, thought Nikki contemptuously. Embrace her in front of me! "It's those three rats. Running out that way! Don't worry — I'll find that sword and half disme for you yet."

"You'll never find them," sobbed Martha, wetting Ellery's undershirt. "Because they're not here. They *never* were here. When you s-stop to think of it . . . *burying* that coin, his sword . . . if the story were true, he'd have given them to Simeon and Sarah . . ."

"Not necessarily, not necessarily," said Ellery with hateful haste. "The old boy had a sense of history, Martha. They all did in those days. They knew they were men of destiny and that the eyes of posterity were upon them. Burying 'em is *just* what Washington would have done!"

"Do you really th-think so?"

Oh . . . *pfui.*

"But even if he did bury them," Martha sniffled, "it doesn't stand to reason Simeon and Sarah would have let them *stay* buried. They'd have dug

that copper box up like rabbits the minute G-George turned his back."

"Two simple countryfolk?" cried Ellery. "Salt of the earth? The new American earth? Disregard the wishes of His Mightiness, George Washington, First President of the United States? Are you out of your mind? And anyway, what would Simeon do with a dress-sword?"

Beat it into a ploughshare, thought Nikki spitefully — *that's* what he'd do.

"And that half disme. How much could it have been worth in 1791? Martha, they're here under your farm somewhere. You wait and see —"

"I wish I could b-believe it . . . Ellery."

"Shucks, child. Now stop crying —"

From the door Miss Porter said stiffly: "You might put your shirt back on, Superman, before you catch pneumonia."

MR. QUEEN PROWLED about the Clarke acres for the remainder of that day, his nose at a low altitude. He spent some time in the barn. He devoted at least twenty minutes to each of the twelve holes in the earth. He reinspected the oaken wreckage of his axwork, like a paleontologist examining an ancient petrefaction for the impression of a dinosaur foot. He measured off the distance between the holes; and, for a moment, a faint tremor of emotion shook him. George Washington had been a surveyor in his youth; here was evidence that his passion for exactitude had not wearied with the years. As far as Ellery could make out, the oaks had been set into the earth at exactly equal distances, in an equilateral triangle.

It was at this point that Ellery had seated himself upon the seat of a cultivator behind the barn, wondering at his suddenly accelerated circulation. Little memories were knocking at the door. And as he opened to admit them, it was as if he were admitting a personality. It was, of course, at this time that the sense of personal conflict first obtruded. He had merely to shut his eyes in order to materialize a tall, large-featured man carefully pacing off the distances between twelve points — pacing them off in a sort of objective challenge to the unborn future. George Washington . . .

The man Washington had from the beginning possessed an affinity for numbers. It had remained with him all his life. To count things, not so much for the sake of the things, perhaps, as for the counting, had been of the utmost importance to him. As a boy in Mr. Williams' school in Westmoreland, he excelled in arithmetic. Long division, subtraction, weights and measures — to calculate cords of wood and pecks of peas, pints and gallons and avoirdupois — young George delighted in these as other boys delighted in horseplay. As a man, he merely directed his passion into the channel of his possessions. Through his possessions he apparently satisfied his curious need for enumeration. He was not content simply to keep accounts of the acreage

he owned, its yield, his slaves, his pounds and pence. Ellery recalled the extraordinary case of Washington and the seed. He once calculated the number of seeds in a pound Troy weight of red clover. Not appeased by the statistics on red clover, Washington then went to work on a pound of timothy seed. His conclusions were: 71,000 and 298,000. His appetite unsatisfied, he thereupon fell upon the problem of New River grass. Here he tackled a calculation worthy of his prowess: his mathematical labors produced the great, pacifying figure of 844,800.

This man was so obsessed with numbers, Ellery thought, staring at the ruins of Washington's Grove, that he counted the windows in each house of his Mount Vernon estate and the number of "Paynes" in each window of each house, and then triumphantly recorded the exact number of each in his own handwriting.

It was like a hunger, requiring periodic satiation. In 1747, as a boy of fifteen, George Washington drew "A Plan of Major Law: Washingtons Turnip Field as Survey'd by me." In 1786, at the age of fifty-four, General Washington, the most famous man in the world, occupied himself with determining the exact elevation of his piazza above the Potomac's high-water mark. No doubt he experienced a warmer satisfaction thereafter for knowing that when he sat upon his piazza looking down upon the river he was sitting exactly 124 feet 10½ inches above it.

And in 1791, as President of the United States, Ellery mused, he was striding about right here, setting saplings into the ground, "distant fifteen yards one from the other," twelve of them in an equilateral triangle, and beneath one of them he buried a copper case containing his sword and the half disme coined from his own silver. Beneath one of them . . . But it was not beneath one of them. Or had it been? And had long ago been dug up by a Clarke? But the story had apparently died with Simeon and Sarah. On the other hand . . .

Ellery found himself irrationally reluctant to conclude the obvious. George Washington's lifelong absorption with figures kept intruding. Twelve trees, equidistant, in an equilateral triangle.

"What is it?" he kept asking himself, almost angrily. "Why isn't it satisfying me?"

And then, in the gathering dusk, a very odd explanation insinuated itself. *Because it wouldn't have satisfied him!*

That's silly, Ellery said to himself abruptly. It has all the earmarks of a satisfying experience. There is no more satisfying figure in all geometry than an equilateral triangle. It is closed, symmetrical, definite, a whole and balanced and finished thing.

But it wouldn't have satisfied George Washington . . . for all its symmetry and perfection.

Then perhaps there is a symmetry and perfection beyond the cold beauty of figures?

At this point, Ellery began to question his own postulates . . . lost in the dark and to his time . . .

They found him at ten-thirty, crouched on the cultivator seat, numb and staring.

HE PERMITTED HIMSELF to be led into the house, he suffered Nikki to subject him to the indignity of having his shoes and socks stripped off and his frozen feet rubbed to life, he ate Martha Clarke's dinner — all with a detachment and indifference which alarmed the girls and even made old Tobias look uneasy.

"If it's going to have this effect on him," began Martha, and then she said: "Ellery, give it up. Forget it." But she had to shake him before he heard her.

He shook his head. "They're there."

"*Where?*" cried the girls simultaneously.

"In Washington's Grove."

"Ye found 'em?" croaked Tobias Clarke, half-rising.

"No."

The Clarkes and Nikki exchanged glances.

"Then how can you be so certain they're buried there, Ellery?" asked Nikki gently.

Ellery looked bewildered. "Darned if I know *how* I know," he said, and he even laughed a little. "Maybe George Washington told me." Then he stopped laughing and went into the firelit parlor and — pointedly — slid the doors shut.

AT TEN MINUTES past midnight Martha Clarke gave up the contest.

"Isn't he *ever* going to come out of there?" she said, yawning.

"You never can tell what Ellery will do," replied Nikki.

"Well, I can't keep my eyes open another minute."

"Funny," said Nikki. "I'm not the least bit sleepy."

"You city girls."

"You country girls."

They laughed. Then they stopped laughing, and for a moment there was no sound in the kitchen but the patient sentry walk of the grandfather clock and the snores of Tobias assaulting the ceiling from above.

"Well," said Martha. Then she said: "I just *can't*. Are you staying up, Nikki?"

"For a little while. You go to bed, Martha."

"Yes. Well. Good night."

"Good night, Martha."

At the door Martha turned suddenly: "Did he say *George Washington* told him?"

"Yes."

Martha went rather quickly up the stairs.

Nikki waited fifteen minutes. Then she tiptoed to the foot of the stairs and listened. She heard Tobias snuffling and snorting as he turned over in his bed, and an uneasy moan from the direction of Martha's bedroom, as if she were dreaming an unwholesome dream. Nikki set her jaw grimly and went to the parlor doors and slid them open.

Ellery was on his knees before the fire. His elbows were resting on the floor. His face was propped in his hands. In this attitude his posterior was considerably higher than his head.

"Ellery!"

"Huh?"

"Ellery, what on earth —?"

"Nikki. I thought you'd gone to bed long ago." In the firelight his face was haggard.

"But what have you been *doing?* You look exhausted!"

"I am. I've been wrestling with a man who could bend a horseshoe with his naked hands. A very strong man. In more ways than one."

"What are you talking about? Who?"

"George Washington. Go to bed, Nikki."

"George . . . Washington?"

"Go to bed."

". . . *Wrestling* with him?"

"Trying to break through his defenses. Get into his mind. It's not an easy mind to get into. He's been dead such a long time — that makes the difference. The dead are stubborn, Nikki. Aren't you going to bed?"

Nikki backed out, shivering.

The house *was* icy.

IT WAS EVEN icier when an inhuman bellow accompanied by a thunder that shook the Revolutionary walls of her bedroom brought Nikki out of bed with a yelping leap.

But it was only Ellery.

He was somewhere up the hall, in the first glacial light of dawn, hammering on Martha Clarke's door.

"Martha. *Martha!* Wake up, damn you, and tell me where I can find a book in this damned house! A biography of Washington — a history of the United States — an almanac . . . *anything!*"

THE PARLOR FIRE had long since given up the ghost. Nikki and Martha in wrappers, and Tobias Clarke in an ancient bathrobe over his marbled long underwear, stood around shivering and bewildered as a disheveled, daemonic Ellery leafed eagerly through a 1921 edition of *The Farmer's Fact Book and Complete Compendium.*

"Here it is!" The words shot out of his mouth like bullets, leaving puffs of smoke.

"What is it, Ellery?"

"What on earth are you looking for?"

"He's loony, I tell ye!"

Ellery turned with a look of ineffable peace, closing the book.

"That's it," he said. "That's it."

"What's it?"

"Vermont. The State of Vermont."

"Vermont . . .?"

"Ver*mont?*"

"Vermont. What in the crawlin' creepers 's Vermont got to do with —?"

"Vermont," said Ellery with a tired smile, "did not enter the Union until March fourth, 1791. So that proves it, don't you see?"

"Proves *what?*" shrieked Nikki.

"Where George Washington buried his sword and half disme."

"BECAUSE," SAID ELLERY in the rapidly lightening dawn behind the barn, "Vermont was the fourteenth State to do so. The *fourteenth*. Tobias, would you get me an ax, please?"

"An ax," mumbled Tobias. He shuffled away, shaking his head.

"Come on, Ellery, I'm d-dying of c-cold!" chattered Nikki, dancing up and down before the cultivator.

"Ellery," said Martha Clarke piteously, "I don't understand *any* of this."

"It's very simple, Martha — oh, thank you, Tobias — as simple," said Ellery, "as simple arithmetic. Numbers, my dears — numbers tell this remarkable story. Numbers and their influence on our first President who was, above all things, a number-man. That was my key. I merely had to discover the lock to fit it into. Vermont was the lock. And the door's open."

Nikki seated herself on the cultivator. You had to give Ellery his head in a situation like this; you couldn't drive him for beans. Well, she thought grudgingly, seeing how pale and how tired-looking he was after a night's wrestling with George Washington, he's earned it.

"The number was wrong," said Ellery solemnly, leaning on Tobias's ax. "Twelve trees. Washington apparently planted twelve trees — Simeon Clarke's *Diary* never did mention the number twelve, but the evidence seemed unquestionable — there were twelve oaks in an equilateral triangle, each one fifteen yards from its neighbor.

"And yet . . . I felt that *twelve* oaks couldn't be, perfect as the triangle was. Not if they were planted by George Washington. Not on February the twenty-second, New Style, in the year of our Lord 1791.

"Because on February the twenty-second, 1791 — in fact, until March the fourth, when Vermont entered the Union to swell its original number by one — there was *another* number in the United States so important, so revered, so much a part of the common speech and the common living — and dying — that it was more than a number; it was a solemn and sacred thing; almost not a number at all. It overshadowed other numbers like the still-unborn Paul Bunyan. It was memorialized on the new American flag in the number of its stars and the number of its stripes. It was a number of which George Washington was the standard-bearer! — the head and only recently the strong right arm of the new Republic which had been born out of the blood and muscle of its integers. It was a number which was in the hearts and minds and mouths of all Americans.

"No. If George Washington, who was not merely the living symbol of all this but carried with him that extraordinary compulsion toward numbers which characterized his whole temperament besides, had wished to plant a number of oak trees to commemorate a birthday visit in the year 1791 . . . he would have, he could have, selected only one number out of

all the mathematical trillions at his command — *the number thirteen.*"

The sun was looking over the edge of Pennsylvania at Washington's Grove.

"George Washington planted thirteen trees here that day, and under one of them he buried Paul Revere's copper case. Twelve of the trees he arranged in an equilateral triangle, and we know that the historic treasure was not under any of the twelve. Therefore he must have buried the case under the thirteenth — a thirteenth oak sapling which grew to oakhood and, some time during the past century and a half, withered and died and vanished, vanished so utterly that it left no trace, not even its roots.

"Where would Washington have planted that thirteenth oak? Because beneath the spot where it once stood — there lies the copper case containing his sword and the first coin to be struck off in the new United States."

And Ellery glanced tenderly at the cherry sapling which Tobias Clarke had set into the earth in the middle of Washington's Grove six years before.

"Washington the surveyor, the geometer, the man whose mind cried out for integral symmetries? Obviously, in only one place: *In the center of the triangle.* Any other place would be unthinkable."

And Ellery hefted Tobias's ax and strode toward the six-year-old tree. He raised the ax.

But suddenly he lowered it, and turned, and said in a rather startled way: "See here! isn't today . . .?"

"Washington's Birthday," said Nikki.

Ellery grinned and began to chop down the cherry tree.

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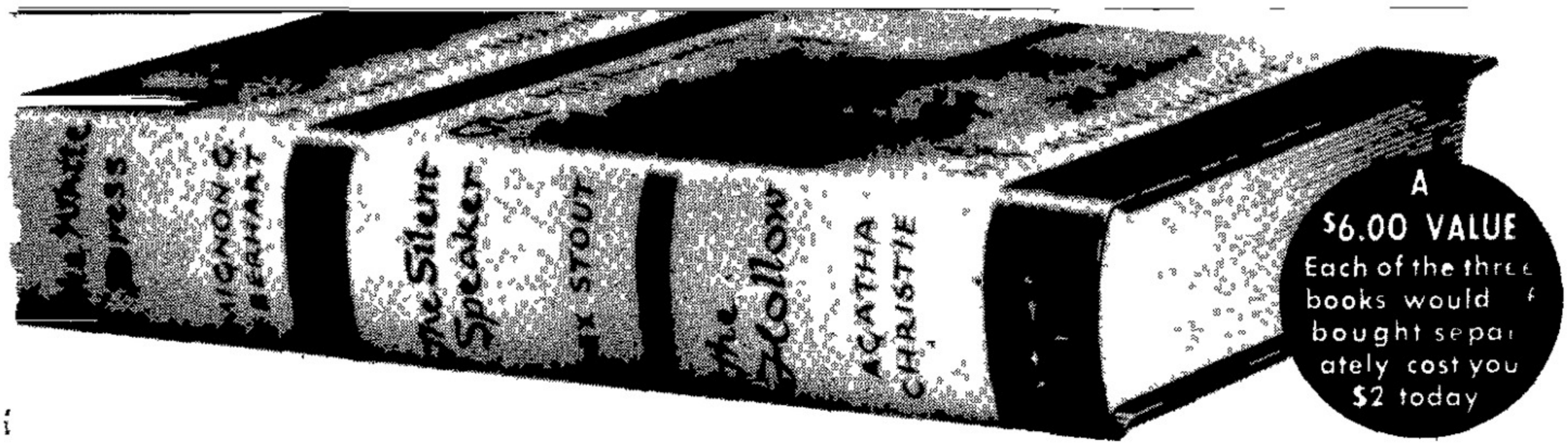

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