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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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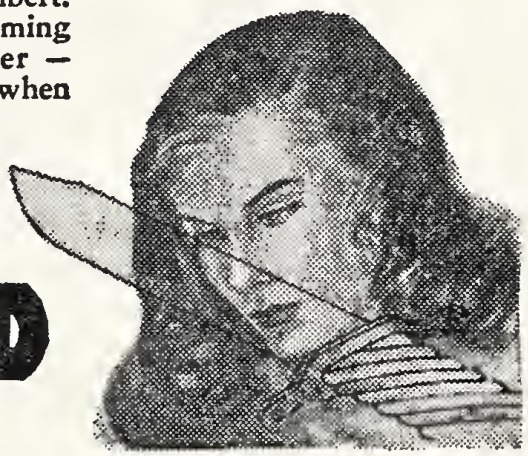

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THE GUN AND MR. SMITH

by John Godey

Listen to CRIME CLUB every week over WOR-Mutual. See your local paper for time and station.

At your bookseller's

THE CRIME CLUB

Dashiell Hammett is branching out. True, he has not written a novel since THE THIN MAN *which was published thirteen years ago (it's hard to believe, isn't it, that* THE THIN MAN *first appeared so long ago?), but the author of such fabulous detective novels as* THE MALTESE FALCON *and* THE GLASS KEY *can rest on his laurels for a long, long time — especially if his success in so-called "supplementary fields" keeps increasing with the years. For surely Mr. Hammett has performed the literary hat trick with a vengeance: his books continue to sell in reprint editions of all prices; his movie credits are still associated with Class A productions; and his radio record is reaching an all-time high — at the time of this writing there are no less than three Hammett shows on the air (The Thin Man, The Fat Man, and Sam Spade) and rumors are flying that The Continental Op will join his brothers-of-the-blood on the ether any week now. And still Dashiell Hammett is branching out. From the grapevine comes the report that Mr. Hammett is writing his first play for Broadway. That is good news indeed! Hammett has it in him to write a smash hit — remember his powerful screenplay of Lillian Hellman's* WATCH ON THE RHINE? *Will Mr. Hammett write a serious play? He can do it. Or will he stick to his first love — detection-and-melodrama? Selfishly, we hope Mr. Hammett makes his début as a dramatist in the genre to which he has already made so important a contribution . . .*

It is many years since Mr. Hammett has written a new short story. He once told your Editor he might never go back to the short-story form. We think he will, and until that happy day we shall continue to unearth Mr. Hammett's buried treasures of the past and bring you such "unknown" stories as the Continental Op's early adventure titled "Dead Yellow Women."

DEAD YELLOW WOMEN

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

SHE was sitting straight and stiff in one of the Old Man's chairs when he called me into his office — a tall girl of perhaps twenty-four, broad-shouldered, deep-bosomed, in mannish grey clothes. That she was Oriental showed only in the black shine of her bobbed hair, in the pale yellow of her unpowdered skin, and in the fold of her upper lids at the outer eye-corners, half hidden by the dark rims of her spectacles. But there was no slant to her eyes, her nose was almost aquiline, and she had more chin than Mongolians usually have. She was modern Chinese-American from the flat heels of her tan shoes to the crown of her untrimmed felt hat.

I knew her before the Old Man introduced me. The San Francisco papers had been full of her affairs for a couple of days. They had printed photographs and diagrams, interviews, editorials, and more or less expert opinions from various sources. They had gone back to 1912 to remember the stubborn fight of the local Chinese — mostly from Fokien and Kwangtung, where democratic ideas and hatred of Manchus go together — to have her father kept out of the United States, to which he had scooted when the Manchu rule flopped. The papers had recalled the excitement in Chinatown when Shan Fang was allowed to land — insulting placards had been hung in the streets, an unpleasant reception planned. But Shan Fang had fooled the Cantonese. Chinatown had never seen him. He had taken his daughter and his gold — presumably the accumulated profits of a life-time of provincial misrule — down to San Mateo County, where he had built what the papers described as a palace on the edge of the Pacific. There he had lived and died in a manner suitable to a *Ta Jen* and a millionaire.

So much for the father. For the daughter — this young woman who was coolly studying me as I sat down across the table from her: she had been ten-year-old Ai Ho, a very Chinese little girl, when her father had brought her to California. All that was Oriental of her now were the features I have mentioned and the money her father had left her. Her name, translated into English, had become Water Lily, and then, by another step, Lillian. It was as Lillian Shan that she had attended an eastern university, acquired several degrees, and published a book on the nature and significance of fetishes, whatever all that is or are.

Since her father's death, in 1921, she had lived with her four Chinese servants in the house on the shore, where she had written her first book and was now at work on another. A couple of weeks ago, she had found herself stumped, so she said — had run into a blind alley. There was, she said, a certain old cabalistic manuscript in the Arsenal Library in Paris that she believed would solve her troubles for her. So she had packed some clothes and, accompanied by her maid, a Chinese woman named Wang Ma, had taken a train for New York, leaving the three other servants to take care of the house during her absence.

On the train between Chicago and New York, the key to the problem that had puzzled her suddenly popped into her head. Without pausing even for a night's rest in New York, she had turned around and headed back for San Francisco. At the ferry here she had tried to telephone her chauffeur to bring a car for her. No answer. A taxicab had carried her and her maid to her house. She rang the door-bell to no effect.

When her key was in the lock the door had been suddenly opened by a young Chinese man — a stranger to

her. He had refused her admittance until she told him who she was. He mumbled an unintelligible explanation as she and the maid went into the hall.

Both of them were neatly bundled up in some curtains.

Two hours later Lillian Shan got herself loose — in a linen closet on the second floor. Switching on the light, she started to untie the maid. She stopped. Wang Ma was dead. The rope around her neck had been drawn too tight.

Lillian Shan went out into the empty house and telephoned the sheriff's office in Redwood City.

Two deputy sheriffs had come to the house, had listened to her story, had poked around, and had found another Chinese body — another strangled woman — buried in the cellar. Apparently she had been dead a week or a week and a half; the dampness of the ground made more positive dating impossible. Lillian Shan identified her as another of her servants — Wan Lan, the cook.

The other servants — Hoo Lun and Yin Hung — had vanished. Of the several hundred thousand dollars' worth of furnishings old Shan Fang had put into the house during his life, not a nickel's worth had been removed. There were no signs of a struggle. Everything was in order. The closest neighboring house was nearly half a mile away. The neighbors had seen nothing, knew nothing.

That's the story the newspapers had hung headlines over, and that's the story this girl, sitting very erect in her chair, speaking with business-like briskness, told the Old Man and me.

"I am not at all satisfied with the effort the San Mateo County authorities have made to apprehend the murderer or murderers," she wound up. "I wish to engage your agency."

"Have you any idea of your own on the murders, Miss Shan?" I asked.

"I have not."

"What do you know about the servants — the missing ones as well as the dead?"

"I really know little or nothing about them." She didn't seem very interested. "Wang Ma was the most recent of them to come to the house, and she has been with me for nearly seven years."

"Don't you know where they came from? Whether they have relatives? Whether they have friends?"

"No," she said. "I did not pry into their lives."

"The two who disappeared — what do they look like?"

"Hoo Lun is an old man, quite white-haired and thin and stooped. He did the housework. Yin Hung, who was my chauffeur and gardener, is younger, about thirty years old, I think. He is quite short, even for a Cantonese, but sturdy. His nose has been broken at some time and not set properly. It is very flat, with a pronounced bend in the bridge."

"Do you think this pair could have killed the women?"

"I do not think they did."

"The young Chinese — the stranger who let you in the house — what did he look like?"

"He was quite slender, and not more than twenty or twenty-one years old, with large gold fillings in his front teeth."

"Will you tell me exactly why you are dissatisfied with what the sheriff is doing, Miss Shan?"

"In the first place, I am not sure they are competent. The ones I saw certainly did not impress me."

"And in the second place?"

For a moment she hung fire. Then: "I don't think they are looking in very likely places. They seem to spend the greater part of their time in the vicinity of the house. It is absurd to think the murderers are going to return."

I turned that over in my mind.

"Miss Shan," I asked, "don't you think they suspect you?"

"Preposterous!"

"That isn't the point," I insisted. "Do they?"

"I am not able to penetrate the police mind," she came back. "Do *you?*"

"I don't know anything about this job but what I've read and what you've just told me. I need more foundation than that to suspect anybody. But I can understand why the sheriff's office would be a little doubtful. You left in a hurry. They've got your word for why you went and why you came back, and your word is all. The woman found in the cellar could have been killed just before you left as well as just after. Wang Ma, who could have told things, is dead. The other servants are missing. Nothing was stolen. That's plenty to make the sheriff think about you!"

"Do you suspect me?" she asked again.

"No," I said truthfully. "But that proves nothing."

She spoke to the Old Man, with a chin-tilting motion, as if she were talking over my head.

"Do you wish to undertake this work for me?"

"We shall be very glad to do what we can," he said, and then to me, after they had talked terms and while she was writing a check, "you handle it. Use what men you need."

"I want to go out to the house first and look the place over," I said.

Lillian Shan was putting away her check-book.

"Very well. I am returning home now. I will drive you down."

It was a restful ride. Neither the girl nor I wasted energy on conversation. My client and I didn't seem to like each other very much.

The Shan house was a big brownstone affair, set among sodded lawns. The place was hedged shoulder-high on three sides. The fourth boundary was the ocean, where it came in to make a notch in the shore-line between two small rocky points.

The house was full of hangings, rugs, pictures, and so on — a mixture of things American, European and Asiatic. I didn't spend much time inside. After a look at the linen-

closet, at the still open cellar grave, and at the pale, thick-featured Danish woman who was taking care of the house until Lillian Shan could get a new corps of servants, I went outdoors again. I poked around the lawns for a few minutes, stuck my head in the garage, where two cars, besides the one in which we had come from town, stood, and then went off to waste the rest of the afternoon talking to the girl's neighbors. None of them knew anything.

By twilight I was back in the city, going into the apartment building in which I lived during my first year in San Francisco. I found the lad I wanted in his cubby-hole room, getting his small body into a cerise silk shirt that was something to look at. Cipriano was the bright-faced Filipino boy who looked after the building's front door in the daytime. At night, like all the Filipinos in San Francisco, he could be found down on Kearny Street, just below Chinatown, except when he was in a Chinese gambling-house passing his money over to the yellow brothers.

I had once, half-joking, promised to give the lad a fling at gum-shoeing if the opportunity ever came. I thought I could use him now.

"Come in, sir!"

He was dragging a chair out of a corner for me, bowing and smiling.

"What's doing in Chinatown these days?" I asked.

He gave me a white-toothed smile.

"I take eleven bucks out of bean-game last night."

"And you're getting ready to take it back tonight?"

"Not all of 'em, sir! Five bucks I spend for this shirt."

"That's the stuff," I applauded his wisdom in investing part of his fan-tan profits. "What else is doing down there?"

"Nothing unusual, sir. You want to find something?"

"Yeah. Hear any talk about the killings down the country last week? The two Chinese women?"

"No, sir. Chinaboy don't talk much about things like that. Not like us Americans. I read about those things in newspapers, but I have not heard."

"Many strangers in Chinatown nowadays?"

"All the time there's strangers, sir. But I guess maybe some new Chinaboys are there. Maybe not, though."

"How would you like to do a little work for me?"

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" He said it oftener than that, but that will give you the idea.

"Here's what I want. Two of the servants ducked out of the house down there." I described Yin Hung and Hoo Lun. "I want to find them. I want to find what anybody in Chinatown knows about the killings. I want to find who the dead women's friends and relatives are, where they came from, and the same thing for the two men. I want to know about those strange Chinese — where they hang out, where they sleep, what they're up to.

"Now, don't try to get all this in a

night. You'll be doing fine if you get any of it in a week. Here's twenty dollars. Five of it is your night's pay. You can use the other to carry you around. Don't be foolish and poke your nose into a lot of grief. Take it easy and see what you can turn up for me. I'll drop in tomorrow."

From the Filipino's room I went to the office. Everybody except Fiske, the night man, was gone, but Fiske thought the Old Man would drop in for a few minutes later in the night.

I smoked, pretended to listen to Fiske's report on all the jokes that were at the Orpheum that week, and grouched over my job. I was too well known to get anything on the quiet in Chinatown. I wasn't sure Cipriano was going to be much help. I needed somebody who was in right down there.

This line of thinking brought me around to "Dummy" Uhl. Uhl was a dummerer who had lost his store. Five years before, he had been sitting on the world. Any day on which his sad face, his package of pins, and his *I am deaf and dumb* sign didn't take twenty dollars out of the office buildings along his route was a rotten day. His big card was his ability to play the statue when skeptical people yelled or made sudden noises behind him. When the Dummy was right, a gun off beside his ear wouldn't make him twitch an eye-lid. But too much heroin broke his nerves until a whisper was enough to make him jump. He put away his pins and his sign — another man whose social life had ruined him.

Since then Dummy had become an errand boy for whoever would stake him to the price of his necessary nose-candy. He slept somewhere in Chinatown, and he didn't care especially how he played the game. I had used him to get me some information on a window-smashing six months before. I decided to try him again.

I called "Loop" Pigatti's place — a dive down on Pacific Street, where Chinatown fringes into the Latin Quarter. Loop is a tough citizen, who runs a tough hole, and who minds his own business, which is making his dive show a profit. Everybody looks alike to Loop. Whether you're a yegg, stool-pigeon, detective, or settlement worker, you get an even break out of Loop and nothing else.

He answered the phone himself.

"Can you get hold of Dummy Uhl for me?" I asked after I had told him who I was. "I'd like to see him tonight."

"You got nothin' on him?"

"No, Loop, and I don't expect to. I want him to get something for me."

"All right. Where d'you want him?"

"Send him up to my joint. I'll wait."

"If he'll come," Loop promised and hung up.

I left word with Fiske to have the Old Man call me up when he came in, and then I went up to my rooms to wait for my informant.

He came in a little after ten — a short, stocky, pasty-faced man of forty or so, with mouse-colored hair streaked with yellow-white.

"Loop says y'got sumpin' f'r me."

"Yes," I said, waving him to a chair, and closing the door. "I'm buying news."

"What kind o' news? I don't know nothin'."

I was puzzled. The Dummy's yellowish eyes should have showed the pin-point pupils of the heroin addict. They didn't. The pupils were normal. That didn't mean he was off the stuff — he had put cocaine into them to distend them to normal. The puzzle was — why? He wasn't usually particular enough about his appearance to go to that trouble.

"Did you hear about the Chinese killings down the shore last week?" I asked him.

"No."

"Well," I said, paying no attention to the denial, "I'm hunting for the pair of yellow men who ducked out — Hoo Lun and Yin Hung. It's worth a couple of hundred dollars to you to find either of them for me. It's worth another couple hundred to find out about the killings for me. It's worth another to find the slim Chinese youngster with gold teeth who opened the door for the Shan girl and her maid."

"I don't know nothin' about them things," he said.

But he said it automatically while his mind was busy counting up the hundreds I had dangled before him. I suppose his dope-addled brains made the total somewhere in the thousands. He jumped up.

"I'll see what I c'n do. S'pose you slip me a hundred now, on account."

I didn't see that.

"You get it when you deliver."

We had to argue that point, but finally he went off grumbling and growling to get me my news.

I went back to the office. The Old Man hadn't come in yet. It was nearly midnight when he arrived.

"I'm using Dummy Uhl again," I told him, "and I've put a Filipino boy down there too. I've got another scheme, but I don't know anybody to handle it. I think if we offered the missing chauffeur and house-man jobs in some out-of-the-way place up in the country, perhaps they'd fall for it. Do you know anybody who could pull it for us?"

"Exactly what have you in mind?"

"It must be somebody who has a house out in the country, the farther the better, the more secluded the better. They would phone one of the Chinese employment offices that they needed three servants — cook, house-man, and chauffeur. We throw in the cook for good measure, to cover the game. It's got to be air-tight on the other end, and, if we're going to catch our fish, we have to give 'em time to investigate. So whoever does it must have some servants, and must put up a bluff — I mean in his own neighborhood — that they are leaving, and the servants must be in on it. And we've got to wait a couple of days, so our friends here will have time to investigate. I think we'd better use Fong Yick's employment agency, on Washington Street.

"Whoever does it could phone Fong Yick tomorrow morning, and say he'd be in Thursday morning to look the applicants over. This is Monday — that'll be long enough. Our helper gets at the employment office at ten Thursday morning. Miss Shan and I arrive in a taxicab ten minutes later, when he'll be in the middle of questioning the applicants. I'll slide out of the taxi into Fong Yick's, grab anybody that looks like one of our missing servants. Miss Shan will come in a minute or two behind me and check me up — so there won't be any false-arrest mixups."

The Old Man nodded approval.

"Very well," he said. "I think I can arrange it."

I went home to bed. Thus ended the first day.

At nine the next morning, Tuesday, I was talking to Cipriano in the lobby of the apartment building that employs him. His eyes were black drops of ink in white saucers. He thought he had got something.

"Yes, sir! Strange Chinaboys are in town, some of them. They sleep in a house on Waverly Place — on the western side, four houses from the house of Jair Quon, where I sometimes play dice. And there is more — I talk to a white man who knows they are hatchet-men from Portland and Eureka and Sacramento. They are Hip Sing men — a tong war starts — pretty soon, maybe."

"Do these birds look like gunmen?"

Cipriano scratched his head.

"No, sir, maybe not. But a fellow can shoot sometimes if he don't look like it. This man tells me they are Hip Sing men."

"Who was this white man?"

"I don't know the name, but he lives there. A short man — snowbird."

"Grey hair, yellowish eyes?"

"Yes, sir."

That, as likely as not, would be Dummy Uhl. One of my men was stringing the other. The tong stuff hadn't sounded right to me anyhow. Once in a while they mix things, but usually they are blamed for somebody else's crimes. Most wholesale killings in Chinatown are the result of family or clan feuds — such as the ones the "Four Brothers" used to stage.

"This house where you think the strangers are living — know anything about it?"

"No, sir. But maybe you could go through there to the house of Chang Li Ching on other street — Spofford Alley."

"So? And who is this Chang Li Ching?"

"I don't know, sir. But he is there. Nobody sees him, but all Chinaboys say he is great man."

"So? And his house is in Spofford Alley?"

"Yes, sir, a house with red door and red steps. You find it easy, but better not fool with Chang Li Ching."

"A big gun, huh?" I probed.

But my Filipino didn't really know anything about this Chang Li Ching. He was basing his opinion of the Chinese's greatness on the attitude of his

fellow countrymen when they mentioned him.

"Learn anything about the two Chinese men?" I asked.

"No, sir, but I will — you bet!"

I praised him for what he had done, told him to try it again that night, and went back to my rooms to wait for Dummy Uhl, who had promised to come there at ten-thirty. It was not quite ten when I got there, so I used some of my spare time to call up the office. The Old Man said Dick Foley — our shadow ace — was idle, so I borrowed him. Then I fixed my gun and sat down to wait for my stool-pigeon.

He rang the bell at eleven o'clock. He came in frowning tremendously.

"I don't know what t'hell to make of it, kid," he spoke importantly over the cigarette he was rolling. "There's sumpin' makin' down there, an' that's a fact. Things ain't been anyways quiet since the Japs began buyin' stores in the Chink streets, an' maybe that's got sumpin' to do with it. But there ain't no strange Chinks in town — not a damn one! I got a hunch your men have gone down to L. A., but I expec' t' know f'r certain tonight. I got a Chink ribbed up t' get the dope; 'f I was you, I'd put a watch on the boats at San Pedro. Maybe those fellas'll swap papers wit' a coupla Chink sailors that'd like t' stay here."

"And there are no strangers in town?"

"Not any."

"Dummy," I said bitterly, "you're a liar, and you're a boob, and I've been playing you for a sucker. You were in on that killing, and so were your friends, and I'm going to throw you in the can, and your friends on top of you!"

I put my gun in sight, close to his scared-grey face.

"Keep yourself still while I do my phoning!"

Reaching for the telephone with my free hand, I kept one eye on the Dummy.

It wasn't enough. My gun was too close to him.

He yanked it out of my hand. I jumped for him.

The gun turned in his fingers. I grabbed it — too late. It went off, its muzzle less than a foot from where I'm thickest. Fire stung my body.

Clutching the gun with both hands I folded down to the floor. Dummy went away from there, leaving the door open behind him.

One hand on my burning belly, I crossed to the window and waved an arm at Dick Foley, stalling on a corner down the street. Then I went to the bathroom and looked to my wound. A blank cartridge does hurt if you catch it close up!

My vest and shirt and union suit were ruined, and I had a nasty scorch on my body. I greased it, taped a cushion over it, changed my clothes, loaded the gun again, and went down to the office to wait for word from Dick. The first trick in the game looked like mine. Heroin or no heroin, Dummy Uhl would not have jumped

me if my guess — based on the trouble he was taking to make his eyes look right and the lie he had sprung on me about there being no strangers in Chinatown — hadn't hit close to the mark.

Dick wasn't long in joining me.

"Good pickings!" he said when he came in. The little Canadian talks like a thrifty man's telegram. "Beat it for phone. Called Hotel Irvington. Booth — couldn't get anything but number. Ought to be enough. Then Chinatown. Dived in cellar west side Waverly Place. Couldn't stick close enough to spot place. Afraid to take chance hanging around. How do you like it?"

"I like it all right. Let's look up 'The Whistler's' record."

A file clerk got it for us — a bulky envelope the size of a brief case, crammed with memoranda, clippings and letters. The gentleman's biography, as we had it, ran like this:

Neil Conyers, alias The Whistler, was born in Philadelphia — out on Whiskey Hill — in 1883. In '94, at the age of eleven, he was picked up by the Washington police. He had gone there to join Coxey's Army. They sent him home. In '98 he was arrested in his home town for stabbing another lad in a row over an election-night bonfire. This time he was released in his parents' custody. In 1901 the Philadelphia police grabbed him again, charging him with being the head of the first organized automobile-stealing ring. He was released without trial, for lack of evidence. But the district attorney lost his job in the resultant scandal. In 1908 Conyers appeared on the Pacific Coast — at Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles — in company with a con-man known as "Duster" Hughes. Hughes was shot and killed the following year by a man whom he'd swindled in a fake airplane manufacturing deal. Conyers was arrested on the same deal. Two juries disagreed and he was turned loose. In 1910 the Post Office Department's famous raid on get-rich-quick promoters caught him. Again there wasn't enough evidence against him to put him away. In 1915 the law scored on him for the first time. He went to San Quentin for buncoing some visitors to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition. He stayed there for three years. In 1919 he and a Jap named Hasegawa nicked the Japanese colony of Seattle for $20,000, Conyers posing as an American who had held a commission in the Japanese army during that late war. He had a counterfeit medal of the Order of the Rising Sun which the emperor was supposed to have pinned on him. When the game fell through, Hasegawa's family made good the $20,000 — Conyers got out of it with a good profit and not even any disagreeable publicity. The thing had been hushed. He returned to San Francisco after that, bought the Hotel Irvington, and had been living there now for five years without anybody being able to add another word to his criminal record. He was up to something, but nobody could

learn what. There wasn't a chance in the world of getting a detective into his hotel as a guest. Apparently the joint was always without vacant rooms. It was as exclusive as the Pacific-Union Club.

This, then, was the proprietor of the hotel Dummy Uhl had got on the phone before diving into his hole in Chinatown.

I had never seen Conyers. Neither had Dick. There were a couple of photographs in his envelope. One was the profile and full-face photograph of the local police, taken when he had been picked up on the charge that led him to San Quentin. The other was a group picture: all rung up in evening clothes, with the phoney Japanese medal on his chest, he stood among half a dozen of the Seattle Japs he had trimmed — a flashlight picture taken while he was leading them to the slaughter.

These pictures showed him to be a big bird, fleshy, pompous-looking, with a heavy, square chin and shrewd eyes.

"Think you could pick him up?" I asked Dick.

"Sure."

"Suppose you go up there and see if you can get a room or apartment somewhere in the neighborhood — one you can watch the hotel from. Maybe you'll get a chance to tail him around now and then."

I put the pictures in my pocket, in case they'd come in handy, dumped the rest of the stuff back in its envelope, and went into the Old Man's office.

"I arranged that employment office stratagem," he said. "A Frank Paul, who has a ranch out beyond Martinez, will be in Fong Yick's establishment at ten Thursday morning, carrying out his part."

"That's fine! I'm going calling in Chinatown now. If you don't hear from me for a couple of days, will you ask the street-cleaners to watch what they're sweeping up?"

He said he would.

San Francisco's Chinatown jumps out of the shopping district at California Street and runs north to the Latin Quarter — a strip two blocks wide by six long. Before the fire nearly twenty-five thousand Chinese lived in those dozen blocks. I don't suppose the population is a third of that now.

Grant Avenue, the main street and spine of this strip, is for most of its length a street of gaudy shops catering to the tourist trade and flashy chop-suey houses, where the racket of American jazz orchestras drowns the occasional squeak of a Chinese flute. Farther out, there isn't so much paint and gilt, and you can catch the proper Chinese smell of spices and vinegar and dried things. If you leave the main thoroughfares and show places and start poking around in alleys and dark corners, and nothing happens to you, the chances are you'll find some interesting things — though you won't like some of them.

However, I wasn't poking around as I turned off Grant Avenue at Clay Street, and went up to Spofford Alley,

hunting for the house with red steps and red door, which Cipriano had said was Chang Li Ching's. I did pause for a few seconds to look up Waverly Place when I passed it. The Filipino had told me the strange Chinese were living there, and that he thought their house might lead through to Chang Li Ching's; and Dick Foley had shadowed Dummy Uhl there.

But I couldn't guess which was the important house. Four doors from Jair Quon's gambling house, Cipriano had said, but I didn't know where Jair Quon's was. Waverly Place was a picture of peace and quiet just now. A fat Chinese was stacking crates of green vegetables in front of a grocery. Half a dozen small yellow boys were playing at marbles in the middle of the street. On the other side, a blond young man in tweeds was climbing the six steps from a cellar to the street, a painted Chinese woman's face showing for an instant before she closed the door behind him.

I went on up to Spofford Alley and found my house with no difficulty at all. It was a shabby building with steps and door the color of dried blood, its windows solidly shuttered with thick, tight-nailed planking. What made it stand out from its neighbors was that its ground floor wasn't a shop or place of business. Purely residential buildings are rare in Chinatown.

I went up the three steps and tapped the red door with my knuckles.

Nothing happened.

I hit it again, harder. Still nothing. I tried it again, and this time was rewarded by the sounds of scraping and clicking inside.

At least two minutes of this scraping and clicking, and the door swung open — a bare four inches.

One slanting eye and a slice of wrinkled brown face looked out of the crack at me, above the heavy chain that held the door.

"Whata wan'?"

"I want to see Chang Li Ching."

"No savvy. Maybe closs stleet."

"Bunk! You fix your little door and run back and tell Chang Li Ching I want to see him."

"No can do! No savvy Chang."

"You tell him I'm here," I said, turning my back on the door. I sat down on the top step, and added, without looking around, "I'll wait."

While I got my cigarettes out there was silence behind me. Then the door closed softly and the scraping and clicking broke out behind it. I smoked a cigarette and another and let time go by, trying to look like I had all the patience there was.

An hour went to waste, and a few minutes, and then the familiar scraping and clicking disturbed the door.

The chain rattled as the door swung open. I wouldn't turn my head.

"Go 'way! No catch 'em Chang!"

I said nothing. If he wasn't going to let me in he would have let me sit there without further attention.

A pause.

"Whata wan'?"

"I want to see Chang Li Ching," I

said without looking around.

Another pause, ended by the banging of the chain against the door-frame.

"All light."

I chucked my cigarette into the street, got up and stepped into the house. In the dimness I could make out a few pieces of cheap and battered furniture. I had to wait while the Chinese put four arm-thick bars across the door and padlocked them there. Then he nodded at me and scuffled across the floor, a small, bent man with hairless yellow head and a neck like a piece of rope.

Out of this room, he led me into another, darker still, into a hallway, and down a flight of rickety steps. We walked through the dark across a dirt floor for a while, turned to the left, and cement was under my feet. We turned twice more in the dark, and then climbed a flight of unplaned wooden steps into a hall that was fairly light with the glow from shaded electric lights.

In this hall my guide unlocked a door, and we crossed a room where cones of incense burned, and where, in the light of an oil lamp, little red tables with cups of tea stood in front of wooden panels, marked with Chinese characters in gold paint, which hung on the walls. A door on the opposite side of this room let us into pitch blackness, where I had to hold the tail of my guide's loose made-to-order blue coat.

So far he hadn't once looked back at me since our tour began, and neither of us had said anything. This running upstairs and downstairs, turning to the right and turning to the left, seemed harmless enough. If he got any fun out of confusing me, he was welcome. I was confused enough now, so far as the directions were concerned. I hadn't the least idea where I might be. But that didn't disturb me so much. If I was going to be cut down, a knowledge of my geographical position wouldn't make it any more pleasant. If I was going to come out all right, one place was still as good as another.

We did a lot more of the winding around, we did some stair-climbing and some stair-descending, and the rest of the foolishness. I figured I'd been indoors nearly half an hour by now, and I had seen nobody but my guide.

Then I saw something else.

We were going down a long, narrow hall that had brown-painted doors close together on either side. All these doors were closed — secretive-looking in the dim light. Abreast of one of of them, a glint of dull metal caught my eye — a dark ring in the door's center.

I went to the floor.

Going down as if I'd been knocked, I missed the flash. But I heard the roar, smelled the powder.

My guide spun around, twisting out of one slipper. In each of his hands was an automatic as big as a coal scuttle. Even while trying to get my own gun out I wondered how so puny a man could have concealed so much

machinery on him.

The big guns in the little man's hands flamed at me. Chinese-fashion, he was emptying them — crash! crash! crash!

I thought he was missing me until I had my finger tight on my trigger. Then I woke up in time to hold my fire.

He wasn't shooting at me. He was pouring metal into the door behind me — the door from which I had been shot at.

I rolled away from it, across the hall.

The scrawny little man stepped closer and finished his bombardment. His slugs shredded the wood as if it had been paper. His guns clicked empty.

The door swung open, pushed by the wreck of a man who was trying to hold himself up by clinging to the sliding panel in the door's center.

Dummy Uhl — all the middle of him gone — slid down to the floor and made more of a puddle than a pile there.

The hall filled with yellow men, black guns sticking out like briars in a blackberry patch.

I got up. My guide dropped his guns to his side and sang out a guttural solo. Chinese began to disappear through various doors, except four who began gathering up what twenty bullets had left of Dummy Uhl.

The stringy old boy tucked his empty guns away and came down the hall to me, one hand held out toward my gun.

"You give 'em," he said politely.

I gave 'em. He could have had my pants.

My gun stowed away in his shirt-bosom, he looked casually at what the four Chinese were carrying away, and then at me.

"No like 'em fella, huh?" he asked.

"Not so much," I admitted.

"All light. I take you."

Our two-man parade got under way again. The ring-around-the-rosy game went on for another flight of stairs and some right and left turns, and then my guide stopped before a door and scratched it with his fingernails.

The door was opened by another Chinese. But this one was none of your Cantonese runts. He was a big meat-eating wrestler — bull-throated, mountain-shouldered, gorilla-armed, leather-skinned. The god that made him had plenty of material, and gave it time to harden.

Holding back the curtain that covered the door, he stepped to one side. I went in, and found his twin standing on the other side of the door.

The room was large and cubical, its doors and windows — if any — hidden behind velvet hangings of green and blue and silver. In a big black chair, elaborately carved, behind an inlaid black table, sat an old Chinese man. His face was round and plump and shrewd, with a straggle of thin white whiskers on his chin. A dark, close-fitting cap was on his head; a purple robe, tight around his neck, showed its sable lining at the bottom.

where it had fallen back in a fold over his blue satin trousers.

He did not get up from his chair, but smiled mildly over his whiskers and bent his head almost to the tea things on the table.

"It was only the inability to believe that one of your excellency's heaven-born splendor would waste his costly time on so mean a clod that kept the least of your slaves from running down to prostrate himself at your noble feet as soon as he heard the Father of Detectives was at his unworthy door."

That came out smoothly in English that was a lot clearer than my own. I kept my face straight, waiting.

"If the Terror of Evildoers will honor one of my deplorable chairs by resting his divine body on it, I can assure him the chair shall be burned afterward, so no lesser being may use it. Or will the Prince of Thief-catchers permit me to send a servant to his palace for a chair worthy of him?"

I went slowly to a chair, trying to arrange words in my mind. This old joker was spoofing me with an exaggeration — a burlesque — of the well-known Chinese politeness. I'm not hard to get along with: I'll play anybody's game up to a certain point.

"It's only because I'm weak-kneed with awe of the mighty Chang Li Ching that I dare to sit down," I explained, letting myself down on the chair, and turning my head to notice that the giants who had stood beside the door were gone.

I had a hunch they had gone no farther than the other side of the velvet hangings that hid the door.

"If it were not that the King of Finders-out" — he was at it again — "knows everything, I should marvel that he had heard my lowly name."

"Heard it? Who hasn't?" I kidded back. "Isn't the word *change*, in English, derived from Chang? Change, meaning alter, is what happens to the wisest man's opinions after he has heard the wisdom of Chang Li Ching!" I tried to get away from this vaudeville stuff, which was a strain on my head. "Thanks for having your man save my life back there in the passage."

He spreads his hands out over the table.

"It was only because I feared the Emperor of Hawkshaws would find the odor of such low blood distasteful to his elegant nostrils that the foul one who disturbed your excellency was struck down quickly. If I have erred, and you would have chosen that he be cut to pieces inches by inch, I can only offer to torture one of my sons in his place."

"Let the boy live," I said carelessly, and turned to business. "I wouldn't have bothered you except that I am so ignorant that only the help of your great wisdom could ever bring me up to normal."

"Does one ask the way of a blind man?" the old duffer asked, cocking his head to one side. "Can a star, however willing, help the moon? If it pleases the Grandfather of Bloodhounds to flatter Chang Li Ching into thinking he can add to the great one's

knowledge, who is Chang to thwart his master by refusing to make himself ridiculous?"

I took that to mean he was willing to listen to my questions.

"What I'd like to know is, who killed Lillian Shan's servants, Wang Ma and Wan Lan?"

"Does the stag-hunter look at the hare?" he wanted to know. "And when so mighty a hunter pretends to concern himself with the death of servants, can Chang think anything except that it pleases the great one to conceal his real object? Yet it may be, because the dead were servants and not girdle-wearers, that the Lord of Snares thought the lowly Chang Li Ching, insignificant one of the Hundred Names, might have knowledge of them. Do not rats know the way of rats?"

He kept this stuff up for some minutes, while I sat and listened and studied his round, shrewd yellow mask of a face, and hoped that something clear would come of it all. Nothing did.

"My ignorance is even greater than I had arrogantly supposed," he brought his speech to an end. "This simple question you put is beyond the power of my muddled mind. I do not know who killed Wang Ma and Wan Lan."

I grinned at him, and put another question:

"Where can I find Hoo Lun and Yin Hung?"

"Again I must grovel in my ignorance," he murmured, "only consoling myself with the thought that the Master of Mysteries knows the answers to his questions, and is pleased to conceal his infallibly accomplished purpose from Chang."

And that was as far as I got.

There were more crazy compliments, more bowing and scraping, more assurances of eternal reverence and love, and then I was following my rope-necked guide through winding, dark halls, across dim rooms, and up and down rickety stairs again.

At the street door — after he had taken down the bars — he slid my gun out of his shirt and handed it to me. I stuck it in my pocket and stepped through the door.

"Thanks for the killing upstairs," I said.

The Chinese grunted, bowed, and closed the door.

I went up to Stockton Street, and turned toward the office, walking along slowly, punishing my brains.

First, there was Dummy Uhl's death to think over. Had it been arranged before-hand: to punish him for bungling that morning and, at the same time, to impress me? And how? And why? Or was it supposed to put me under obligations to the Chinese? And, if so, why? Or was it just one of those complicated tricks the Chinese like? I put the subject away and pointed my thoughts at the little plump yellow man in the purple robe.

I liked him. He had humor, brains, nerve, everything. To jam him in a cell would be a trick you'd want to write home about. He was my idea

of a man worth working against.

But I didn't kid myself into thinking I had anything on him. Dummy Uhl had given me a connection between The Whistler's Hotel Irvington and Chang Li Ching. Dummy Uhl had gone into action when I accused him of being mixed up in the Shan killings. That much I had — and that was all, except that Chang had said nothing to show he wasn't interested in the Shan troubles.

In this light, the chances were that Dummy's death had not been a planned performance. It was more likely that he had seen me coming, had tried to wipe me out, and had been knocked off by my guide because he was interfering with the audience Chang had granted me.

In the office, a message from Dick Foley was waiting for me. He had rented a front apartment up the street from the Irvington and had put in a couple of hours trailing The Whistler.

The Whistler had spent half an hour in "Big Fat" Thomson's place on Market Street, talking to the proprietor and some of the sure-thing gamblers who congregate there. Then he had taxicabbed out to an apartment house on O'Farrell Street — the Glenway — where he had rung one of the bells. Getting no answer, he had let himself into the building with a key. An hour later he had come out and returned to his hotel. Dick hadn't been able to determine which bell he had rung, or which apartment he had visited.

I got Lillian Shan on the telephone.

"Will you be in this evening?" I asked. "I've something I want to go into with you, and I can't give it to you over the wire."

"I will be at home until seven-thirty."

"All right, I'll be down."

It was seven-fifteen when the car I had hired put me down at her front door. She opened the door for me. The Danish woman who was filling in until new servants were employed stayed there only in the daytime, returning to her own home at night.

The evening gown Lillian Shan wore was severe enough, but it suggested that if she would throw away her glasses and do something for herself, she might not be so unfeminine looking after all. She took me upstairs, to the library, where a clean-cut lad of twenty-something in evening clothes got up from a chair as we came in — a well-set-up boy with fair hair and skin.

His name, I learned when we were introduced, was Garthorne. The girl seemed willing enough to hold our conference in his presence. I wasn't. After I had done everything but insist point-blank on seeing her alone, she excused herself — calling him Jack — and took me out into another room.

By then I was a bit impatient.

"Who's that?" I demanded.

She put her eyebrows up for me.

"Mr. John Garthorne," she said.

"How well do you know him?"

"May I ask why you are so interested?"

"You may. Mr. John Garthorne is

all wrong, I think."

"Wrong?"

I had another idea.

"Where does he live?"

She gave me an O'Farrell Street number.

"The Glenway Apartments?"

"I think so." She was looking at me without any affectation at all. "Will you please explain?"

"One more question and I will. Do you know a Chinese named Chang Li Ching?"

"No."

"All right. I'll tell you about Garthorne. So far I've run into two angles on this trouble of yours. One of them has to do with this Chang Li Ching in Chinatown, and one with an ex-convict named Conyers. This John Garthorne was in Chinatown today. I saw him coming out of a cellar that probably connects with Chang Li Ching's house. The ex-convict Conyers visited the building where Garthorne lives, early this afternoon."

Her mouth popped open and then shut.

"That is absurd!" she snapped. "I have known Mr. Garthorne for some time, and ——"

"Exactly how long?"

"A long — several months."

"Where'd you meet him?"

"Through a girl I knew at college."

"What does he do for a living?"

She stood stiff and silent.

"Listen, Miss Shan," I said. "Garthorne may be all right, but I've got to look him up. If he's in the clear there'll be no harm done. I want to know what you know about him."

I got it, little by little. He was, or she thought he was, the youngest son of a prominent Richmond, Virginia, family, in disgrace just now because of some sort of boyish prank. He had come to San Francisco four months ago, to wait until his father's anger cooled. Meanwhile his mother kept him in money, leaving him without the necessity of toiling during his exile. He had brought a letter of introduction from one of Lillian Shan's schoolmates. Lillian Shan had, I gathered, a lot of liking for him.

"You're going out with him tonight?" I asked when I had got this.

"Yes."

"In his car or yours?"

"In his. We are going to drive down to Half Moon for dinner."

"I'll need a key, then, because I am coming back here after you have gone."

"You're what?"

"I'm coming back here. I'll ask you not to say anything about my more or less unworthy suspicions to him, but my honest opinion is that he's drawing you away for the evening. So if the engine breaks down on the way back, just pretend you see nothing unusual in it."

That worried her, but she wouldn't admit I might be right. I got the key, though, and then I told her of my employment agency scheme that needed her assistance, and she promised to be at the office at half past nine Thursday.

I didn't see Garthorne again before I left the house.

In my hired car again, I had the driver take me to the nearest village, where I bought a plug of chewing tobacco, a flashlight, and a box of cartridges at the general store. My gun is a .38 Special, but I had to take the shorter, weaker cartridges, because the storekeeper didn't keep the specials in stock.

My purchases in my pocket, we started back toward the Shan house again. Two bends in the road this side of it, I stopped the car, paid the chauffeur, and sent him on his way, finishing the trip afoot.

The house was dark all around.

Letting myself in as quietly as possible, and going easy with the flashlight, I gave the interior a combing from cellar to roof. I was the only occupant. In the kitchen, I looted the icebox for a bite or two, which I washed down with milk.

The luncheon done, I made myself comfortable on a chair in the passageway between the kitchen and the rest of the house. On one side of the passageway, steps led down to the basement. On the other, steps led upstairs. With every door in the house except the outer ones open, the passageway was the center of things so far as hearing noises was concerned.

An hour went by — quietly except for the passing of cars on the road a hundred yards away and the washing of the Pacific down in the little cove. I chewed on my plug of tobacco — a substitute for cigarettes — and tried to count up the hours of my life I'd spent like this, sitting or standing around waiting for something to happen.

Another half hour went by with a breeze springing up from the ocean, rustling trees outside.

A noise came that was neither wind nor surf nor passing car.

Something clicked somewhere.

It was at a window, but I didn't know which. I got rid of my chew, got gun and flashlight out.

It sounded again, harshly.

Somebody was giving a window a strong play — too strong. The catch rattled, and something clicked against the pane. It was a stall. Whoever he was, he could have smashed the glass with less noise than he was making.

I stood up, but I didn't leave the passageway. The window noise was a fake to draw the attention of anyone who might be in the house. I turned my back on it, trying to see into the kitchen.

The kitchen was too black to see anything.

I saw nothing there. I heard nothing there.

Damp air blew on me from the kitchen.

That was something to worry about. I had company, and he was slicker than I. He could open doors or windows under my nose. That wasn't so good.

Weight on rubber heels, I backed away from my chair until the frame of the cellar door touched my shoulder. So when a thin line of light danced out of the kitchen to hit the chair in the passageway, I was three steps

cellar-ward, my back flat against the stair-wall.

The light fixed itself on the chair for a couple of seconds, and then began to dart around the passageway, through it into the room beyond. I could see nothing but the light.

Fresh sounds came to me — the purr of automobile engines close to the house on the road side, the soft padding of feet on the back porch, on the kitchen linoleum, quite a few feet. An odor came to me — an unmistakable odor — the smell of unwashed Chinese.

Then I lost track of these things. I had plenty to occupy me close up.

The proprietor of the flashlight was at the head of the cellar steps.

The first thin ray he sent downstairs missed me by an inch — which gave me time to make a map there in the dark. If he was of medium size, holding the light in his left hand, a gun in his right, and exposing as little of himself as possible — his noodle should have been a foot and a half above the beginning of the light-beam, the same distance behind it, six inches to the left — my left.

The light swung sideways and hit one of my legs.

I swung the barrel of my gun at the point I had marked X in the night.

His gun-fire cooked my cheek. One of his arms tried to take me with him. I twisted away and let him dive alone into the cellar, showing me a flash of gold teeth as he went past.

The house was full of "Ah yahs" and pattering feet.

I had to move — or I'd be pushed.

Downstairs might be a trap. I went up to the passageway again.

The passageway was solid and alive with stinking bodies. Hands and teeth began to take my clothes away from me. I knew damned well I had declared myself in on something!

I was one of a struggling, tearing, grunting and groaning mob of invisibles. An eddy of them swept me toward the kitchen. Hitting, kicking, butting, I went along.

A high-pitched voice was screaming Chinese orders.

My shoulder scraped the door-frame as I was carried into the kitchen, fighting as best I could against enemies I couldn't see, afraid to use the gun I still gripped.

I was only one part of the mad scramble. The flash of my gun might have made me the center of it. These lunatics were fighting panic now: I didn't want to show them something tangible to tear apart.

I went along with them, cracking everything that got in my way, and being cracked back. A bucket got between my feet.

I crashed down, upsetting my neighbors, rolled over a body, felt a foot on my face, squirmed from under it, and came to rest in a corner; still tangled up with the galvanized bucket.

Thank God for that bucket!

I wanted these people to go away. I didn't care who or what they were. If they'd depart in peace I'd forgive their sins.

I put my gun inside the bucket and squeezed the trigger. I got the worst of the racket, but there was enough to go around. It sounded like a crump going off.

I cut loose in the bucket again, and had another idea. Two fingers of my left hand in my mouth, I whistled as shrill as I could while I emptied the gun.

It was a sweet racket!

When my gun had run out of bullets and my lungs out of air, I was alone. I was glad to be alone. I knew why men go off and live in caves by themselves. And I didn't blame them!

Sitting there alone in the dark, I reloaded my gun.

On hands and knees I found my way to the open kitchen door, and peeped out into the blackness that told me nothing. The surf made guzzling sounds in the cove. From the other side of the house came the noise of cars. I hoped it was my friends going away.

I shut the door, locked it, and turned on the kitchen light.

The place wasn't as badly upset as I had expected. Some pans and dishes were down and a chair had been broken, and the place smelled of unwashed bodies. But that was all — except a blue cotton sleeve in the middle of the floor, a straw sandal near the passageway door, and a handful of short black hairs, a bit blood-smeared, beside the sandal.

In the cellar I did not find the man I had sent down there. An open door showed how he had left me. His flashlight was there, and my own, and some of his blood.

Upstairs again, I went through the front of the house. The front door was open. Rugs had been rumpled. A blue vase was broken on the floor. A table was pushed out of place, and a couple of chairs had been upset. I found an old and greasy brown felt hat that had neither sweat-band nor hat-band and a grimy photograph of President Coolidge — apparently cut from a Chinese newspaper.

I found nothing upstairs to show that any of my guests had gone up there.

It was half past two in the morning when I heard a car drive up to the front door. I peeped out of Lillian Shan's bedroom window, on the second floor. She was saying good-night to Jack Garthorne.

I went back to the library to wait for her.

"Nothing happened?" were her first words, and they sounded more like a prayer than anything else.

"It did," I told her, "and I suppose you had your breakdown."

For a moment I thought she was going to lie to me, but she nodded, and dropped into a chair.

"I had a lot of company," I said, "but I can't say I found out much. The fact is, I bit off more than I could chew, and had to be satisfied with chasing them out."

"You didn't call the sheriff's office?" There was something strange about the tone in which she put the question.

"No — I don't want Garthorne arrested yet."

That shook the dejection out of her. She was up, tall and straight in front of me, and cold.

"I'd rather not go into that again," she said.

That was all right with me, but:

"You didn't say anything to him, I hope."

"Say anything to him?" She seemed amazed. "Do you think I would insult him by repeating your guesses — your absurd guesses?"

"That's fine," I applauded her silence if not her opinion of my theories. "Now, I'm going to stay here tonight. There isn't a chance in a hundred of anything happening, but I'll play it safe."

She didn't seem very enthusiastic about that, but she finally went off to bed.

Nothing happened between then and sun-up, of course. I left the house as soon as daylight came and gave the grounds the once over. Footprints were all over the place, from water's edge to driveway. Along the driveway some of the sod was cut where machines had been turned carelessly.

Borrowing one of the cars from the garage, I was back in San Francisco before the morning was far gone.

In the office, I asked the Old Man to put an operative behind Jack Garthorne; to have the old hat, flashlight, sandal and the rest of my souvenirs put under the microscope and searched for fingerprints, footprints, toothprints or what have you; and to have our Richmond branch look up the Garthornes. Then I went up to see my Filipino assistant.

He was gloomy.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Somebody knock you over?"

"Oh, no, sir!" he protested. "But maybe I am not so good a detective. I try to follow one fella, and he turns a corner and he is gone."

"Who was he, and what was he up to?"

"I do not know, sir. There is four automobiles with men getting out of them into that cellar of which I tell you the strange Chinese live. After they are gone in, one man comes out. He wears his hat down over bandage on his upper face, and he walks away rapidly. I try to follow him, but he turns that corner, and where is he?"

My visitors, no doubt, and the man Cipriano had tried to shadow could have been the one I swatted. The Filipino hadn't thought to get the license numbers of the automobiles. He didn't know whether they had been driven by white men or Chinese, or even what make cars they were.

"You've done fine," I assured him. "Try it again tonight."

From him I went to a telephone and called the Hall of Justice. Dummy Uhl's death had not been reported, I learned.

Twenty minutes later I was skinning my knuckles on Chang Li Ching's front door.

The little old Chinese with the rope neck didn't open for me this time. Instead, a young Chinese with a

smallpox-pitted face and a wide grin.

"You wanna see Chang Li Ching," he said before I could speak, and stepped back for me to enter.

I went in and waited while he replaced all the bars and locks. We went to Chang by a shorter route than before, but it was still far from direct.

The velvet-hung room was empty when my guide showed me in, bowed, grinned, and left me. I sat down in a chair near the table and waited.

Chang Li Ching didn't put on the theatricals for me by materializing silently, or anything of the sort. I heard his soft slippers on the floor before he parted the hangings and came in. He was alone, his white whiskers ruffled in a smile that was grandfatherly.

"The Scatterer of Hordes honors my poor residence again," he greeted me, and went on at great length with the same sort of nonsense that I'd had to listen to on my first visit.

The Scatterer of Hordes part was cool enough — if it was a reference to last night's doings.

"Not knowing who he was until too late, I beaned one of your servants last night," I said when he had run out of flowers for the time. "I know there's nothing I can do to square myself for such a terrible act, but I hope you'll let me cut my throat and bleed to death in one of your garbage cans as a sort of apology."

A little sighing noise that could have been a smothered chuckle disturbed the old man's lips.

"The Disperser of Marauders knows all things," he murmured blandly, "even to the value of noise in driving away demons. If he says the man he struck was Chang Li Ching's servant, who is Chang to deny it?"

I tried him with my other barrel.

"I don't know much — not even why the police haven't yet heard of the death of the man who was killed here yesterday."

One of his hands made little curls in his white beard.

"I had not heard of the death," he said.

"You might ask the man who brought me here yesterday," I suggested.

Chang Li Ching picked up a little padded stick from the table and struck a tasseled gong that hung at his shoulder. Across the room the hangings parted to admit the pock-marked Chinese who had brought me in.

"Did death honor our hovel yesterday?" Chang asked in English.

"No, *Ta Jen.*"

"It was the nobleman who guided me here yesterday," I explained, "not this son of an emperor."

Chang imitated surprise.

"Who welcomed the King of Spies yesterday?" he asked the man at the door.

"I bring 'em, *Ta Jen.*"

I grinned at the pock-marked man, he grinned back, and Chang smiled benevolently.

"An excellent jest," he said.

It was.

The pock-marked man bowed and started to duck back through the

hangings. Loose shoes rattled on the boards behind him. He spun around. One of the big wrestlers I had seen the previous day loomed above him. The wrestler's eyes were bright with excitement, and grunted Chinese syllables poured out of his mouth. The pock-marked one talked back. Chang Li Ching silenced them with a sharp command. All this was in Chinese — out of my reach.

"Will the Grand Duke of Manhunters permit his servant to depart for a moment to attend to his distressing domestic affairs?"

"Sure."

Chang bowed with his hands together, and spoke to the wrestler.

"You will remain here to see that the great one is not disturbed and that any wishes he expresses are gratified."

The wrestler bowed and stood aside for Chang to pass through the door with the pock-marked man. The hangings swung over the door behind them.

I didn't waste any language on the man at the door, but got a cigarette going and waited for Chang to come back. The cigarette was half gone when a shot sounded in the building, not far away.

The giant at the door scowled.

Another shot sounded, and running feet thumped in the hall. The pock-marked man's face came through the hangings. He poured grunts at the wrestler. The wrestler scowled at me and protested. The other insisted.

The wrestler scowled at me again, rumbled, "You wait," and was gone.

I finished my cigarette to the tune of muffled struggle-sounds that seemed to come from the floor below. There were two more shots, far apart. Feet ran past the door of the room I was in. Perhaps ten minutes had gone since I had been left alone.

I found I wasn't alone.

Across the room from the door, the hangings that covered the wall were disturbed. The blue, green and silver velvet bulged out an inch and settled back in place.

The disturbance happened the second time perhaps ten feet farther along the wall. No movement for a while, and then a tremor in the far corner.

Somebody was creeping along between hangings and wall.

I let them creep, still slumping in my chair with idle hands. If the bulge meant trouble, action on my part would only bring it that much quicker.

I traced the disturbance down the length of that wall and halfway across the other, to where I knew the door was. Then I lost it for some time. I had just decided that the creeper had gone through the door when the curtains opened and the creeper stepped out.

She wasn't four and a half feet high — a living ornament from somebody's shelf. Her face was a tiny oval of painted beauty, its perfection emphasized by the lacquer-black hair that was flat and glossy around her temples. Gold earrings swung beside her smooth cheeks, a jade butterfly was in her hair. A lavender jacket,

glittering with white stones, covered her from under her chin to her knees. Lavender stockings showed under her short lavender trousers, and her bound-small feet were in slippers of the same color, shaped like kittens, with yellow stones for eyes and aigrettes for whiskers.

The point of all this our-young-ladies'-fashion stuff is that she was impossibly dainty. But there she was — neither a carving nor a painting, but a living small woman with fear in her black eyes and nervous, tiny fingers worrying the silk at her bosom.

Twice as she came toward me — hurrying with the awkward, quick step of the foot-bound Chinese woman — her head twisted around for a look at the hangings over the door.

I was on my feet by now, going to meet her.

Her English wasn't much. Most of what she babbled at me I missed, though I thought "yung hel-lup" might have been meant for "You help?"

I nodded, catching her under the elbows as she stumbled against me.

She gave me some more language that didn't make the situation any clearer — unless "sul-lay-vee gull" meant slave-girl and "tak-ka wah" meant take away.

"You want me to to get you out of here?" I asked.

Her head, close under my chin, went up and down, and her red flower of a mouth shaped a smile that made all the other smiles I could remember look like leers.

She did some more talking. I got nothing out of it. Taking one of her elbows out of my hand, she pushed up her sleeve, baring a forearm that an artist had spent a life-time carving out of ivory. On it were five finger-shaped bruises ending in cuts where the nails had punctured the flesh.

She let the sleeve fall over it again, and gave me more words. They didn't mean anything to me, but they tinkled prettily.

"All right," I said, sliding my gun out. "If you want to go, we'll go."

Both her hands went to the gun, pushing it down, and she talked excitedly into my face, winding up with a flicking of one hand across her collar — a pantomime of a throat being cut.

I shook my head from side to side and urged her toward the door.

She balked, fright large in her eyes.

One of her hands went to my watch-pocket. I let her take the watch out.

She put the tiny tip of one pointed finger over the twelve and then circled the dial three times. I thought I got that. Thirty-six hours from noon would be midnight of the following night — Thursday.

"Yes," I said.

She shot a look at the door and led me to the table where the tea things were. With a finger dipped in cold tea she began to draw on the table's inlaid top. Two parallel lines I took for a street. Another pair crossed them. The third pair crossed the second and paralleled the first.

"Waverly Place?" I guessed.

Her face bobbed up and down, delightedly.

On what I took for the east side of Waverly Place she drew a square — perhaps a house. In the square she set what could have been a rose. I frowned at that. She erased the rose and in its place put a crooked circle, adding dots. I thought I had it. The rose had been a cabbage. This thing was a potato. The square represented the grocery store I had noticed on Waverly Place. I nodded.

Her finger crossed the street and put a square on the other side, and her face turned up to mine, begging me to understand her.

"The house across the street from the grocer's," I said slowly, and then, as she tapped my watch-pocket, I added, "at midnight tomorrow."

I don't know how much of it she caught, but she nodded until her earrings were swinging like pendulums.

With a quick diving motion, she caught my right hand, kissed it, and with a tottering, hoppy run vanished behind the velvet curtains.

I used my handkerchief to wipe the map off the table and was smoking in my chair when Chang Li Ching returned some twenty minutes later.

I left shortly after that, as soon as we had traded a few dizzy compliments. The pock-marked man ushered me out.

At the office there was nothing new for me. Foley hadn't been able to shadow The Whistler the night before.

I went home for the sleep I had not got last night.

At ten minutes after ten the next morning Lillian Shan and I arrived at the front door of Fong Yick's employment agency.

"Give me just two minutes," I told her as I climbed out. "Then come in."

In Fong Yick's, a lanky, grey-haired man whom I thought was the Old Man's Frank Paul was talking around a chewed cigar to half a dozen Chinese. Across the battered counter a fat Chinese was watching through steel-rimmed spectacles.

I looked at the half-dozen. The third from me had a crooked nose — a short, squat man.

I pushed aside the others and reached for him.

I don't know what the stuff he tried on me was — jiu jitsu, maybe, or its Chinese equivalent. Anyhow, he crouched and moved his stiffly open hands trickily.

I took hold of him here and there, and presently had him by the nape of his neck, with one of his arms bent up behind him.

Another Chinese piled on my back. The lean, grey-haired man did something to his face, and the Chinese went over in a corner and stayed there.

That was the situation when Lillian Shan came in.

I shook the flat-nosed boy at her.

"Yin Hung!" she exclaimed.

"Hoo Lun isn't one of the others?" I asked, pointing to the spectators.

She shook her head emphatically, and began jabbering Chinese at my

prisoner. He jabbered back, meeting her gaze.

"What are you going to do with him?" she asked me in a voice that wasn't quite right.

"Turn him over to the police to hold for the San Mateo sheriff. Can you get anything out of him?"

"No."

I began to push him toward the door.

There was no excitement in the street. We climbed into the taxicab and drove the block and a half to the Hall of Justice, where I yanked my prisoner out. The rancher Paul said he wouldn't go in, that he had enjoyed the party, but now had some of his own business to look after. He went on up Kearney Street afoot.

Half-out of the taxicab, Lillian Shan changed her mind.

"Unless it's necessary," she said, "I'd rather not go in either. I'll wait here for you."

"Righto," and I pushed my captive across the sidewalk and up the steps.

Inside, an interesting situation developed.

The San Francisco police weren't especially interested in Yin Hung, though willing enough, of course, to hold him for the sheriff of San Mateo County.

Yin Hung pretended he didn't know any English, and I was curious to know what sort of story he had to tell, so I hunted around in the detectives' assembly room until I found Bill Thode of the Chinatown detail, who talks the language some.

He and Yin Hung jabbered at each other for some time.

Then Bill looked at me, laughed, bit off the end of a cigar, and leaned back in his chair.

"According to the way he tells it," Bill said, "that Wan Lan woman and Lillian Shan had a row. The next day Wan Lan's not anywheres around. The Shan girl and Wang Ma, her maid, say Wan Lan has left, but Hoo Lun tells this fellow he saw Wang Ma burning some of Wan Lan's clothes.

"So Hoo Lun and this fellow think something's wrong, and the next day they're damned sure of it, because this fellow misses a spade from his garden tools. He finds it again that night, and it's still wet with damp dirt, and he says no dirt was dug up anywheres around the place — not outside of the house anyways. So him and Hoo Lun put their heads together, didn't like the result, and decided they'd better dust out before they went wherever Wan Lan had gone."

"Where is Hoo Lun now?"

"He says he don't know."

"So Lillian Shan and Wang Ma were still in the house when this pair left?" I asked. "They hadn't started for the East yet?"

"So he says."

"Has he got any idea why Wan Lan was killed?"

"Not that I've been able to get out of him."

"Thanks, Bill! You'll notify the sheriff that you're holding him?"

"Sure."

Of course Lillian Shan and the

taxicab were gone when I came out of the Hall of Justice door.

I went back into the lobby and used one of the booths to phone the office. A wire had come from the Richmond branch. It was to the effect that the Garthornes were a wealthy and well-known local family, that young Jack was usually in trouble, that he had slugged a Prohibition agent during a cafe raid a few months ago, that his father had taken him out of his will and chased him from the house, but that his mother was believed to be sending him money.

That fit in with what the girl had told me.

A street car carried me to the garage where I had stuck the roadster I had borrowed from the girl's garage the previous morning.

I was a little inclined toward grouchiness as I turned the roadster west, driving out through Golden Gate Park to the Ocean Boulevard. The job wasn't getting along as snappily as I wanted it to.

A bony-faced man with pinkish mustache opened the door when I rang Lillian Shan's bell. I knew him — Tucker, a deputy sheriff.

"Hullo," he said. "What d'you want?"

"I'm hunting for her too."

"Keep on hunting," he grinned. "Don't let me stop you."

"Not here, huh?"

"Nope. The Swede woman that works for her says she was in and out half an hour before I got here, and I've been here about ten minutes now."

"Got a warrant for her?" I asked.

"You bet. Her chauffeur squawked."

"Yes, I heard him," I said. "I'm the bright boy who gathered him in."

I spent five or ten minutes more talking to Tucker and then pointed the roadster at San Francisco again.

Just outside of Daly City a taxicab passed me, going south. Jack Garthorne's face looked through the window.

I snapped on the brakes and waved my arm. The taxicab turned and came back to me.

I got down into the road and went over to him.

"There's a deputy sheriff waiting in Miss Shan's house, if that's where you're headed."

His blue eyes narrowed as he looked suspiciously at me.

"Let's go over to the side of the road and have a little talk," I invited.

He got out of the taxicab and we crossed to a couple of comfortable-looking boulders on the other side.

"Where is Lil — Miss Shan?" he asked.

"Ask The Whistler," I suggested.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

I hadn't meant anything. I had just wanted to see how the remark would hit him. I kept quiet.

"Has The Whistler got her?"

"I don't think so," I admitted, though I hated to do it. "But the point is that she has had to go in hiding to keep from being hanged for the murders The Whistler framed."

"Hanged?"

"Uh-huh. The deputy waiting in her house has a warrant for her — for murder."

He made gurgling noises in his throat.

"I'll go there! I'll tell everything I know!"

He started for his taxicab.

"Wait!" I called. "Maybe you'd better tell me what you know first. I'm working for her, you know."

He spun around and came back.

"Yes, that's right. You'll know what to do."

"Now what do you really know, if anything?" I asked when he was standing in front of me.

"I know the whole thing!" he cried. "About the deaths and the booze and ——"

"Easy! There's no use wasting all that knowledge on the chauffeur."

He quieted down, and I began to pump him. I spent nearly an hour getting all of it.

The history of his young life, as he told it to me, began with his departure from home after falling into disgrace through slugging the Prohi. He had come to San Francisco to wait until his father cooled off. Meanwhile his mother kept him in funds, but she didn't send him all the money a young fellow in a wild city could use.

That was the situation when he ran into The Whistler, who suggested that a chap with Garthorne's front could pick up some easy money in the rum-running game if he did what he was told to do.

The Whistler, it seemed, had boats and booze and waiting customers, but his landing arrangements were out of whack. He had his eye on a little cove down the shore line that was an ideal spot to land hooch. It was neither too close nor too far from San Francisco. It was sheltered on either side by rocky points, and screened from the road by a large house and high hedges. Given the use of that house, his troubles would be over. He could land his hooch in the cove, run it into the house, repack it innocently there, put it through the front door into his automobiles, and shoot it to the thirsty city.

The house, he told Garthorne, belonged to a Chinese girl named Lillian Shan, who would neither sell nor rent it. Garthorne was to make her acquaintance — The Whistler was already supplied with a letter of introduction written by a former classmate of the girl's, a classmate who had fallen a lot since university days — and try to work himself in with her to a degree of intimacy that would permit him to make her an offer for the use of the house. That is, he was to find out if she was the sort of person who could be approached with a more or less frank offer of a share in the profits of The Whistler's game.

Garthorne had gone through with his part, or the first of it, and had become fairly intimate with the girl, when she suddenly left for the East, sending him a note saying she would be gone several months. That was fine for the rum-runners. Garthorne, calling at the house, the next day,

had learned that Wang Ma had gone with her mistress, and that the three other servants had been left in charge of the house.

That was all Garthorne knew firsthand. He had not taken part in the landing of the booze, though he would have liked to. But The Whistler had ordered him to stay away, so that he could continue his original part when the girl returned.

The Whistler told Garthorne he had bought the help of the three Chinese servants, but that the woman, Wan Lan, had been killed by the two men in a fight over their shares of the money. Booze had been run through the house once during Lillian Shan's absence. Her unexpected return gummed things. The house still held some of the booze. They had to grab her and Wang Ma and stick them in a closet until they got the stuff away. The strangling of Wang Ma had been accidental — a rope tied too tight.

The worst complication, however, was that another cargo was scheduled to land in the cove the following Tuesday night, and there was no way of getting word out to the boat that the place was closed. The Whistler sent for our hero and ordered him to get the girl out of the way and keep her out of the way until at least two o'clock Wednesday morning.

Garthorne had invited her to drive down to Half Moon with him for dinner that night. She had accepted. He had faked engine trouble, and had kept her away from the house until two-thirty, and The Whistler had told him later that everything had gone through without a hitch.

After this I had to guess at what Garthorne was driving at — he stuttered and stammered and let his ideas rattle looser than ever. I think it added up to this: he hadn't thought much about the ethics of his play with the girl. She had no attraction for him — too severe and serious to seem really feminine. And he had not pretended — hadn't carried on what could possibly be called a flirtation with her. Then he suddenly woke up to the fact that she wasn't as indifferent as he. That had been a shock to him — one he couldn't stand. He had seen things straight for the first time. He had thought of it before as simply a wit-matching game. Affection made it different — even though the affection was all on one side.

"I told The Whistler I was through this afternoon," he finished.

"How did he like it?"

"Not a lot. In fact, I had to hit him."

"So? And what were you planning to do next?"

"I was going to see Miss Shan, tell her the truth, and then — then I thought I'd better lay low."

"I think you'd better. The Whistler might not like being hit."

"I won't hide now! I'll go give myself up and tell the truth."

"Forget it!" I advised him. "That's no good. You don't know enough to help her."

That wasn't exactly the truth, because he did know that the chauffeur

and Hoo Lun had still been in the house the day after her departure for the East. But I didn't want him to get out of the game yet.

"If I were you," I went on, "I'd pick out a quiet hiding place and stay there until I can get word to you. Know a good place?"

"Yes," slowly. "I have a — a friend who will hide me — down near — near the Latin Quarter."

"Near the Latin Quarter?" That could be Chinatown. I did some sharpshooting. "Waverly Place?"

He jumped.

"How did you know?"

"I'm a detective. I know everything. Ever hear of Chang Li Ching?"

"No."

I tried to keep from laughing into his puzzled face.

The first time I had seen this cut-up he was leaving a house in Waverly Place, with a Chinese woman's face showing dimly in the doorway behind him. The house had been across the street from a grocery. The Chinese girl with whom I had talked at Chang's had given me a slave-girl yarn and an invitation to that same house. Big-hearted Jack here had fallen for the same game, but he didn't know that the girl had anything to do with Chang Li Ching, didn't know that Chang existed, didn't know Chang and The Whistler were playmates. Now Jack is in trouble, and he's going to the girl to hide!

I didn't dislike this angle of the game. He was walking into a trap, but that was nothing to me — or, rather, I hoped it was going to help me.

"What's your friend's name?" I asked.

He hesitated.

"What is the name of the tiny woman whose door is across the street from the grocery?" I made myself plain.

"Hsiu Hsiu."

"All right," I encouraged him in his foolishness. "You go there. That's an excellent hiding place. Now if I want to get a Chinese boy to you with a message, how will he find you?"

"There's a flight of steps to the left as you go in. He'll have to skip the second and third steps, because they are fitted with some sort of alarm. So is the handrail. On the second floor you turn to the left again. The hall is dark. The second door to the right — on the right-hand side of the hall — lets you into a room. On the other side of the room is a closet, with a door hidden behind old clothes. There are usually people in the room the door opens into, so he'll have to wait for a chance to get through it. This room has a little balcony outside, that you can get to from either of the windows. The balcony's sides are solid, so if you crouch low you can't be seen from the street or from other houses. At the other end of the balcony there are two loose floor boards. You slide down under them into a little room between walls. The trap-door there will let you down into another just like it where I'll probably be. There's another way out of the bot-

tom room, down a flight of steps, but I've never been that way."

A fine mess! It sounded like a child's game. But even with all this frosting on the cake your young chump hadn't tumbled. He took it seriously.

"So that's how it's done!" I said. "You'd better get there as soon as you can, and stay there until my messenger gets to you. The street door — is it locked?"

"No. I've never found it locked. There are forty or fifty Chinamen — or perhaps a hundred — living in that building, so I don't suppose the door is ever locked."

"Good. Beat it now."

At 10:15 that night I was pushing open the door opposite the grocery in Waverly Place — an hour and three-quarters early for my date with Hsiu Hsiu. At 9:55 Dick Foley had phoned that The Whistler had gone into the red-painted door on Spofford Alley.

I found the interior dark, and closed the door softly, concentrating on the childish directions Garthorne had given me.

The stairs gave me some trouble, but I got over the second and third without touching the handrail, and went on up. I found the second door in the hall, the closet in the room behind it, and the door in the closet. Light came through the cracks around it. Listening, I heard nothing.

I pushed the door open — the room was empty. A smoking oil lamp stunk there. The nearest window made no sound as I raised it. That was inartistic — a squeak would have impressed Garthorne with his danger.

I crouched low on the balcony, in accordance with instructions, and found the loose floorboards that opened up a black hole. Feet first, I went down in, slanting at an angle that made descent easy. It seemed to be a sort of slot cut diagonally through the wall. I went down swiftly, coming into a small room, long and narrow, as if placed inside a thick wall.

No light was there. My flashlight showed a room perhaps eighteen feet long by four wide, furnished with table, couch and two chairs. I looked under the one rug on the floor. The trapdoor was there.

Flat on my belly, I put an ear to the trapdoor. No sound. I raised it a couple of inches. Darkness and a faint murmuring of voices. I pushed the trapdoor wide, let it down easily on the floor and stuck head and shoulders into the opening, discovering then that it was a double arrangement. Another door was below, fitting no doubt in the ceiling of the room below.

Cautiously I let myself down on it. It gave under my foot. I could have pulled myself up again, but since I had disturbed it I chose to keep going.

I put both feet on it. It swung down. I dropped into light. The door snapped up over my head. I grabbed Hsiu Hsiu and clapped a hand over her tiny mouth in time to keep her quiet.

"Hello," I said to the startled Garthorne; "this is my boy's evening off, so I came myself."

"Hello," he gasped.

This room, I saw, was a duplicate of the one from which I had dropped, another cupboard between walls, though this one had an unpainted wooden door at one end.

I handed Hsiu Hsiu to Garthorne.

"Keep her quiet," I ordered, "while ——"

The clicking of the door's latch silenced me. I jumped to the wall on the hinged side of the door just as it swung open — the opener hidden from me by the door.

The door opened wide, but not much wider than Jack Garthorne's blue eyes, nor than this mouth. I let the door go back against the wall and stepped out behind my balanced gun.

The queen of something stood there!

She was a tall woman, straight-bodied and proud. A butterfly-shaped headdress decked with the loot of a dozen jewelry stores exaggerated her height. Her gown was amethyst filigreed with gold above, a living rainbow below. The clothes were nothing!

She was — maybe I can make it clear this way. Hsiu Hsiu was as perfect a bit of feminine beauty as could be imagined. She was perfect! Then comes this queen of something — and Hsiu Hsiu's beauty went away. She was a candle in the sun. She was still pretty — prettier than the woman in the doorway, if it came to that — but you didn't pay any attention to her. Hsiu Hsiu was a pretty girl: this royal woman in the doorway was — I don't know the words.

"My God!" Garthorne was whispering harshly. "I never knew it!"

"What are you doing here?" I challenged the woman.

She didn't hear me. She was looking at Hsiu Hsiu as a tigress might look at an alley cat. Hsiu Hsiu was looking at her as an alley cat might look at a tigress. Sweat was on Garthorne's face and his mouth was the mouth of a sick man.

"What are you doing here?" I repeated, stepping closer to Lillian Shan.

"I am here where I belong," she said slowly. "I have come back to my people."

That was a lot of bunk. I turned to the goggling Garthorne.

"Take Hsiu Hsiu to the upper room, and keep her quiet. I want to talk to Miss Shan."

Still dazed, he pushed the table under the trapdoor, climbed up on it, hoisted himself through the ceiling, and reached down. Hsiu Hsiu kicked and scratched, but I heaved her up to him. Then I closed the door through which Lillian Shan had come, and faced her.

"How did you get here?" I demanded.

"I went home after I left you, knowing what Yin Hung would say, because he had told me in the employment office, and when I got home — When I got home I decided to come here where I belong."

"Nonsense!" I corrected her. "When you got home you found a message there from Chang Li Ching,

ordering you to come here."

She looked at me, saying nothing.

"What did Chang want?"

"He thought perhaps he could help me," she said, "and so I stayed here."

More nonsense.

"Chang told you Garthorne was in danger — had split with The Whistler."

"The Whistler?"

"You made a bargain with Chang," I accused her, paying no attention to her question. The chances were she didn't know The Whistler by that name.

"There was no bargain," she said.

I didn't believe her. I said so.

"You gave Chang your house — or the use of it — in exchange for his promise that Garthorne would be saved from The Whistler, and that you would be saved from the law."

She drew herself up.

"I did," she said calmly.

"You ought to be spanked!" I growled at her. "Haven't you had enough trouble without mixing yourself now with a flock of highbinders? Did you see The Whistler?"

"There was a man up there," she said. "I don't know his name."

I hunted through my pocket and found the picture of him taken when he was sent to San Quentin.

"That is he," she told me when I showed it to her.

"A fine partner you picked," I raged. "What do you think his word on anything is worth?"

"I did not take his word for anything. I took Chang Li Ching's word."

"That's just as bad. They're mates. What was your bargain?"

She balked again, straight, stiff-necked and level-eyed. I tried another angle of attack.

"Here, you don't mind who you make bargains with. Make one with me. I'm still one prison sentence ahead of The Whistler, so if his word is any good at all, mine ought to be highly valuable. You tell me what the deal was. If it's half-way decent, I'll promise you to crawl out of here and forget it. If you don't tell me, I'm going to empty a gun out of the first window I can find. And you'd be surprised how many cops a shot will draw in this part of town."

The threat took some of the color out of her face. She bit her lips and let her fingers twist together, and then it came.

"Chang Li Ching is one of the leaders of the anti-Japanese movement in China. Since the death of Sun Wen — or Sun Yat-Sen, as he is called in the south of China and here — the Japanese have increased their hold on the Chinese government until it is greater than it ever was. It is Sun Wen's work that Chang Li Ching and his friends are carrying on.

"With their own government against them, their immediate necessity is to arm enough patriots to resist Japanese aggression when the time comes. That is what my house is used for. Rifles and ammunition are loaded into boats there and sent out to ships lying far offshore. This man you call The Whistler is the owner of

the ships that carry arms to China."

"And the death of the servants?" I asked.

"Wan Lan was a spy for the Chinese government — for the Japanese. Wang Ma's death was an accident, I think, though she, too, was suspected of being a spy. To a patriot, the death of traitors is a necessary thing, you can understand that? Your people are like that too when your country is in danger."

"Garthorne told me a rum-running story," I said. "How about it?"

"He believed it," she said, smiling softly at the trapdoor through which he had gone. "They told him that, because they did not know him well enough to trust him."

One of her hands came out to rest on my arm.

"You will go away and keep silent?" she pleaded. "These things are against the law of your country, but would you not break another country's laws to save your own country's life? Have not four hundred million people the right to fight an alien race that would exploit them? Since the day of Taou-kwang my country has been the plaything of more aggressive nations. Is any price too great for patriotic Chinese to pay to end that period of dishonor? You will not put yourself in the way of my people's liberty?"

"I hope they win," I said, "but you've been tricked. The only guns that have gone through your house have gone through in pockets! It would take a year to get a shipload through there. Maybe Chang is running guns to China. It's likely. But they don't go through your place.

"The night I was there coolies went through — coming in, not going out. They came from the beach, and they left in machines. Maybe The Whistler is running the guns over for Chang and bringing coolies back. He can get anything from a thousand dollars up for each one he lands. That's about the how of it. He runs the guns over for Chang, and brings his own stuff — coolies and no doubt some opium — back, getting his big profit on the return trip. There wouldn't be enough money in the guns to interest him.

"The guns would be loaded at a pier, all regular, masquerading as something else. Your house is used for the return. Chang may or may not be tied up with the coolie and opium game, but it's a cinch he'll let The Whistler do whatever he likes if only The Whistler will run his guns across. So, you see, you have been gypped!"

"But ——"

"But nothing! You're helping Chang by taking part in the coolie traffic. And, my guess is, your servants were killed, not because they were spies, but because they wouldn't sell you out."

She was white-faced and unsteady on her feet. I didn't let her recover.

"Do you think Chang trusts The Whistler? Did they seem friendly?"

I knew he couldn't trust him, but I wanted something specific.

"No-o-o," she said slowly. "There

was some talk about a missing boat."

That was good.

"They still together?"

"Yes."

"How do I get there?"

"Down these steps, across the cellar —straight across— and up two flights of steps on the other side. They were in a room to the right of the second-floor landing."

Thank God I had a direct set of instructions for once!

I jumped up on the table and rapped on the ceiling.

"Come on down, Garthorne, and bring your chaperon.

"Don't either of you budge out of here until I'm back," I told the boob and Lillian Shan when we were all together again. "I'm going to take Hsiu Hsiu with me. Come on, sister, I want you to talk to any bad men I meet. We go to see Chang Li Ching, you understand?" I made faces. "One yell out of you, and —" I put my fingers around her collar and pressed them lightly.

She giggled, which spoiled the effect a little.

"To Chang," I ordered, and, holding her by one shoulder, urged her toward the door.

We went down into the dark cellar, across it, found the other stairs, and started to climb them.

A dim light burned on the first floor, where we had to turn to go up to the second floor. We had just made the turn when footsteps sounded behind us.

I lifted the girl up two steps, out of the light, and crouched beside her, holding her still. Four Chinese in wrinkled street clothes came down the first-floor hall, passed our stairs without a glance, and started on.

Hsiu Hsiu opened her red flower of a mouth and let out a squeal that could have been heard over in Oakland.

I cursed, turned her loose, and started up the steps. The four Chinese came after me. On the landing ahead one of Chang's big wrestlers appeared —a foot of thin steel in his paw. I looked back.

Hsiu Hsiu sat on the bottom step, her head over her shoulder, experimenting with different sorts of yells and screams, enjoyment all over her laughing doll's face. One of the climbing yellow men was loosening an automatic.

My legs pushed me on up toward the man-eater at the head of the steps. When he crouched close above me I let him have it.

My bullet cut the gullet out of him.

I patted his face with my gun as he tumbled down past me.

A hand caught one of my ankles.

Clinging to the railing, I drove my other foot back. Something stopped my foot. Nothing stopped me.

A bullet flaked some of the ceiling down as I made the head of the stairs and jumped for the door to the right.

Pulling it open, I plunged in.

The other of the big man-eaters caught me — caught my plunging hundred and eighty-some pounds as a boy would catch a rubber ball.

Across the room, Chang Li Ching ran plump fingers through his thin whiskers and smiled at me. Beside him, a man I knew for The Whistler started up from his chair, his beefy face twitching.

"The Prince of Hunters is welcome," Chang said, and added something in Chinese to the man-eater who held me.

The man-eater set me down on my feet, and turned to shut the door on my pursuers.

The Whistler sat down again, his red-veined eyes shifty on me, his bloated face empty of enjoyment.

I tucked my gun inside my clothes before I started across the room toward Chang. And crossing the room, I noticed something.

Behind The Whistler's chair the velvet hangings bulged just the least bit, not enough to have been noticed by anyone who hadn't seen them bulge before. So Chang didn't trust his confederate at all!

"I have something I want you to see," I told the old Chinese when I was standing in front of him.

"That eye is privileged indeed which may gaze on anything brought by the Father of Avengers."

"I have heard," I said, as I put my hand in my pocket, "that all that starts for China doesn't get there."

The Whistler jumped up from his chair again, his mouth a snarl, his face a dirty pink. Chang Li Ching looked at him, and he sat down again.

I brought out the photograph of The Whistler standing in a group of Japs, the medal of the Order of the Rising Sun on his chest. Hoping Chang had not heard of the swindle and would not know the medal for a counterfeit, I dropped the photograph on the table.

Chang Li Ching looked at it for a long moment over his clasped hands, his old eyes shrewd and kindly, his face gentle. No muscle in his face moved. Nothing changed in his eyes.

The nails of his right hand slowly cut a red gash across the back of the clasped left hand.

"It is true," he said softly, "that one acquires wisdom in the company of the wise."

He unclasped his hands, picked up the photograph, and held it out to the beefy man. The Whistler seized it. His face drained grey, his eyes bulged out.

"Why, that's —" he began, and stopped, let the photograph drop to his lap, and slumped down in an attitude of defeat.

That puzzled me. I had expected to argue with him, to convince Chang that the medal was not the fake it was.

"You may have what you wish in payment for this," Chang Li Ching was saying to me.

"I want Lillian Shan and Garthorne cleared, and I want your fat friend here, and I want anybody else who was in on the killings."

Chang's eyes closed for a moment — the first sign of weariness I had seen on his round face.

"You may have them," he said.

"The bargain you made with Miss

Shan is all off, of course," I pointed out. "I may need a little evidence to make sure I can hang this baby," nodding at The Whistler.

Chang smiled dreamily.

"That, I am regretful, is not possible."

"Why — ?" I began, and stopped.

There was no bulge in the velvet curtain behind The Whistler now, I saw. One of the chair legs glistened in the light. A red pool spread on the floor under him. I didn't have to see his back to know he was beyond hanging.

"That's different," I said, kicking a chair over to the table. "Now we'll talk business."

I sat down and we went into conference.

Two days later everything was cleared up to the satisfaction of police, press and public. The Whistler had been found in a dark street, hours dead from a cut in his back, killed in a bootlegging war, I heard. Hoo Lun was found. The gold-toothed Chinese who had opened the door for Lillian Shan was found. Five others were found. These seven, with Yin Hung, the chauffeur, eventually drew a life sentence apiece. They were The Whistler's men, and Chang sacrificed them without batting an eye. They had as little proof of Chang's complicity as I had, so they couldn't hit back, even if they knew that Chang had given me most of my evidence against them.

Nobody but the girl, Chang and I knew anything about Garthorne's part, so he was out, with liberty to spend most of his time at the girl's house.

I had no proof that I could tie on Chang, couldn't get any. Regardless of his patriotism, I'd have given my right eye to put the old boy away. That would have been something to write home about. But there hadn't been a chance of nailing him, so I had had to be content with making a bargain whereby he turned everything over to me except himself and his friends.

I don't know what happened to Hsiu Hsiu, the squealing slave-girl. She deserved to come through all right. I might have gone back to Chang's to ask about her, but I stayed away. Chang had learned that the medal in the photo was a trick one. I had a note from him:

> *Greetings and Great Love to the Unveiler of Secrets:*
> *One whose patriotic fervor and inherent stupidity combined to blind him, so that he broke a valuable tool, trusts that the fortunes of worldly traffic will not again ever place his feeble wits in opposition to the irresistible will and dazzling intellect of the Emperor of Untanglers.*

You can take that any way you like. But I know the man who wrote it, and I don't mind admitting that I've stopped eating in Chinese restaurants, and that if I never have to visit Chinatown again it'll be soon enough.

You will find in John Heywood's PROVERBES, *Part 1, Chapter XI, that "Better one byrde in hand than ten in the wood." And Plutarch expressed the same thought in* OF GARRULITY *as "He is a fool who lets slip a bird in the hand for a bird in the bush." In* DON QUIXOTE *Miguel de Cervantes trimmed the proverb to "A bird in hand is worth two in the bush."*

We do not know if Eric Ambler's Dr. Jan Czissar — late Prague Police, at your service! — is familiar with the works of Heywood, Plutarch, or Cervantes, but we would not be surprised if he is — Dr. Czissar has an aura of being familiar with even the most unfamiliar things. In any event, Dr. Czissar's knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of the classics would have seemed totally irrelevant the afternoon he busybodied himself into the Mortons Hind case. It was all quite straightforward in Assistant Commissioner Mercer's opinion — a clear case of Scotland Yard pinning the guilt on the only possible culprit — a clear case, that is, until that clever Czech refugee-detective proved that a bird in the tree is worth two clues in a ballistic expert's testimony . . .

A BIRD IN THE TREE

by ERIC AMBLER

IT WAS generally felt by his subordinates at Scotland Yard that the best time to see Assistant Commissioner Mercer was while he was drinking his afternoon tea. It was at tea time, therefore, that Detective-Inspector Denton took care to present a verbal report on the Mortons Hind case.

The village of Mortons Hind, Denton reported, was five miles from the market town of Penborough. Near the corner of the Penborough and Leicester roads, and about half a mile from the village, stood Mortons Grange, now the home of Mr. Maurice Wretford, a retired Londoner, and his wife.

At half-past three in the afternoon of November 10th, Mr. Wretford's chauffeur, Alfred Gregory (40), had left the Grange to drive his employer's car to a Penborough garage which was to repair a damaged fender. He had taken his bicycle with him in the back of the car so that he could ride home. He had never returned to the Grange. At half-past five that evening, a motorist driving along a deserted stretch of road about a mile from the Grange had seen the bicycle lying in a ditch and stopped. A few yards away, also in the ditch and dead, had been Gregory. He had a bullet in his head. The gun which fired it had not been found.

According to the garage manager, Gregory had left him soon after four o'clock. A waitress in a Penborough teashop, where Gregory was known, had stated that he had left the teashop just before five o'clock. This had fitted

in with the opinion expressed by the police surgeon, who had examined the body at about six o'clock, that Gregory had died less than an hour previously. Obviously, Gregory had started for home immediately after he had left the teashop, and had been shot shortly before he had been found by the motorist.

The bullet, which was of .22 calibre, had entered the left temple, leaving a small circular wound halfway between the ear and the eye.

The news of the shooting had spread quickly round the village, and late that night a gamekeeper, Harry Rudder (52), had reported to the police that that same afternoon he had seen a 19-year-old youth, Thomas Wilder, shooting at birds with a rifle not far from the spot where Gregory's body had been found. Wilder was the son of a local farmer, and the following day the police had visited his home. He had admitted that he had been firing the rifle the previous day, but denied that he had been near the Penborough road. His rifle had been examined and found to be of .22 calibre.

It had not been until later that day that the post-mortem findings given above had been made known to the police. The fatal bullet had been handed to them at the same time. To their disgust, it had been badly distorted by its impact against the bones of the head. Any identification of rifling marks had been rendered impossible. The bullet might have been fired from any .22-calibre weapon.

Gregory had had no living relatives. His employer, Mr. Wretford, had given woebegone evidence of identification. The ballistics expert, Sergeant Blundell, had later given evidence. The bullet had been fired some distance from the deceased and at a level slightly below that of his head. The witness had agreed that a shot, fired from a rifle held to the shoulder of a man six feet in height (Wilder's height was six feet) standing in the meadow to the left of the road, at a bird in the tree on the opposite side of the road, could hit a passing cyclist in the head. After that statement, young Wilder's protestations that he had not fired across the road had left the jurymen unmoved. They had returned a verdict of "accidental death caused by the criminal negligence of Thomas Wilder."

Young Wilder had then been immediately arrested.

Mercer stirred his second cup of tea rather irritably. "Yes, yes. All quite straightforward, isn't it? It's Blundell's show now. Send in your report in the usual way, Denton. I can't see why you didn't do so in the first place. There's nothing to be discussed about the affair."

Denton drew a deep breath. Then: "I don't think Wilder's guilty, sir," he said.

Mercer's frown deepened. "You don't? Why?"

Denton squirmed on his chair. "Well, sir, it isn't really my idea at all. It was that Czech refugee who was in the Prague police, that Dr. Czissar."

"Whom did you say?" asked Mercer ominously.

Denton recognized the tone of voice and went on hurriedly. "Dr. Czissar, sir. He was at the inquest. He spoke to me afterwards, and seeing that he was a friend of Sir Herbert at the Home Office, I thought I'd better humor him. He sort of buttonholed me and I couldn't really get away. He . . ."

But Mercer was scarcely listening. He was seeing a vision — a vision of a plump, pale man with thick glasses and cowlike brown eyes, of a man wearing a long gray raincoat and soft hat too large for him, and carrying an unfurled umbrella; of this same man sitting on the chair now occupied by Denton and politely telling him, Mercer, how to do his job. Twice it had happened. Twice had Dr. Czissar sat there and proved that he was right and that Scotland Yard was wrong. And now . . .

Mercer pulled himself together. "All right, Denton. I know Dr. Czissar. Go on."

Denton drew another breath. "Well sir, he oozed up to me after the inquest and asked me what I thought about the verdict."

Mercer smiled drily. "I'd forget Dr. Czissar's little fancies if I were you, Denton. You must remember that he's a refugee. His experiences have probably unhinged him a little. Understandable, of course."

"You mean he's dotty, sir?" Denton considered the proposition. "Well, he does look it a bit. But, begging your pardon, sir, he wasn't so dotty about that case. If it hadn't been for him . . . It's sort of worried me, him going on about Wilder being innocent." He hesitated. "He says he's coming in to see you this afternoon, sir," he concluded.

"Oh, does he!"

"Yes, sir. About five, after the Museum reading-room closes. He says he's working on that book of his. He wants to talk to you about the case." Denton looked anxious. "If you'd let me know what he says, I'd be grateful. It's sort of got me, this case."

"All right, Denton. I'll let you know."

He was staring at his untasted second cup of tea when Dr. Czissar was announced.

Dr. Czissar came into the room, clapped his umbrella to his side, clicked his heels, bowed and said: "Dr. Jan Czissar. Late Prague police. At your service."

Mercer watched this all-too familiar performance with unconcealed dislike. "Sit down, doctor," he said shortly. "Inspector Denton tells me that you wish to make a suggestion about the Mortons Hind case."

Dr. Czissar sat down carefully and leaned forward. "Thank you, assistant commissioner," he said earnestly. "It is so good of you to receive me again."

Mercer cleared his throat. "To me, the case seems perfectly straightforward. Our expert, Blundell . . ."

"Ah!" Dr. Czissar's eyes gleamed.

"That is the word. Expert. The witness whom the lawyers always attack, eh? It was so in Prague."

"What do you mean?"

"Sergeant Blundell was asked whether a shot fired from a rifle held to the shoulder of a man in the field to the left of the road at a bird in the tree on the right of the road could hit a passing cyclist and make a wound such as that found in Mr. Gregory. He very properly answered that it could."

"Well?"

Dr. Czissar smiled faintly. "Sergeant Blundell had taken measurements and made calculations. They were accurate. But he did not actually fire at any bird in that tree himself. His observations were therefore incomplete. His answer was legally correct. Mr. Gregory could have been so killed. But he was not so killed. And for a simple reason. For Wilder to have fired the shot at that particular angle, the bird would have had to be on a branch about eighteen feet from the ground. *The lowest branch on that tree is about ten feet above that!*"

Mercer sat up. "Are you sure, doctor?"

"I could not make a mistake about such a thing," said Dr. Czissar with dignity.

"No, no, of course not. Excuse me a moment, doctor." Mercer picked up the telephone. "I want Inspector Denton and Sergeant Blundell to see me immediately."

There was an embarrassed silence until they came. Then Dr. Czissar was asked to repeat his statement.

Mercer looked at Blundell. "Well?"

Blundell reddened. "It's possible, sir. I can't say that I looked at the thing from that standpoint."

Denton said: "That makes it murder, eh, doctor?"

Dr. Czissar frowned. "That," he said stiffly, "is for the assistant commissioner to decide." He turned courteously to Mercer. "If you will permit me, assistant commissioner, to make a further suggestion?"

Mercer nodded wearily. "Go ahead, doctor."

A thin smile stretched the doctor's full lips. He settled his glasses on his nose. Then he cleared his throat, swallowed hard and leaned forward. "Attention, please," he said sharply.

He had their attention.

"To you, Assistant Commissioner Mercer," began Dr. Czissar, "I would say that no blame in this matter belongs to Inspector Denton or Sergeant Blundell. They were obviously expected by the local police to prove a case of manslaughter against Wilder and they contrived to do so. The case was spoiled for them before they arrived.

"At the inquest," resumed Dr. Czissar, "Mr. Wretford, so sad at losing his good chauffeur, said that Gregory had been in his employ for three years, and that he was sober, steady and of excellent character. And the poor man had no friends or relations living. Such a pity and so unusual. I decided to investigate a little. I went to the garage at Penborough and talked to a

mechanic there. I found that Mr. Wretford had made a little mistake about his chauffeur. Gregory was not very sober. Also he bet a great deal. The mechanic was able to tell me that he dealt with a bookmaker in Penborough. To this bookmaker I went next."

Dr. Czissar looked suddenly embarrassed. "I'm afraid," he said apologetically, "that I have been guilty of an offense. You see, I wished for information from this bookmaker. I said that I was from the police without saying that it was the Prague police. I hope you will consider that the information I obtained will excuse me. I found that Gregory had, in the last year, lost £237 to this bookmaker."

Mercer jumped. "What!"

"Two hundred and thirty-seven pounds, assistant commissioner. In addition, he had asked for no credit. He had received his winnings and paid his losses in pound notes. The previous year, Gregory had lost slightly less. The year before that, less still. But in those three years quite a lot of money had passed through his hands. His wages could not have been sufficient to absorb such losses."

"He earned two pounds a week and his keep, according to Wretford," Denton put in.

Dr. Czissar smiled gently. "The bookmaker had concluded that the bets were really made by Mr. Wretford, who did not wish to have it known that he made bets. It seems that such reticences are not unusual. But Gregory was murdered. That *was* unusual. The bookmaker's conclusion did not satisfy me. I made other inquiries. Among other things, I found that eight years ago, just before Mr. Wretford retired, a clerk in his office was convicted of stealing £15,000 in bearer bonds and £300 in cash. I found a full report of the case in the newspaper files. The prosecution showed that he had got into debt through betting and that he had been systematically stealing small sums over a long period. The prosecution argued that, having gained confidence from the fact that his petty thefts went undiscovered, he had stolen the bonds. There was one curious feature about the affair. The bonds were not found and the prisoner refused to say anything about them except that he had stolen them. His sentence was five years in prison. His name was Selton."

"I remember the case," said Denton eagerly. "Gregory Selton — that was the name."

"Precisely!" said Dr. Czissar. "Gregory. A young man who, until his death, was too fond of betting. He must have changed his name when he came out of prison. He was chauffeur for Mr. Wretford, the man he robbed of £15,000!"

Mercer shrugged. "Generous gesture on Wretford's part. It doesn't explain why Gregory was shot or who shot him."

Dr. Czissar smiled. "Nor why Mr. Wretford lied at the inquest?"

"What are you getting at?"

Dr. Czissar held up a finger. "Attention, please. The only logical part of that case against Selton was that he had over a long period stolen sums in cash amounting to £300 and intended to pay off racing debts. That is the thieving of a clerk. That he should suddenly steal £15,000 is different. And we only have his word for it that he did steal them."

"But why on earth should . . . ?"

"Mr. Wretford's reputation," pursued Dr. Czissar, "was not very good in London. I was told that he was the proprietor of a bucket shop, which is some slang but means that he was only technically honest, I think. I believe that those bonds were converted by Mr. Wretford for his *own* profit, and that he was in danger of being found out when he discovered Selton's thefts. He was desperate, perhaps. Selton, he thought, would go to prison anyway. Let him agree to take a little extra blame and all would be well. Selton would have his reward when he came out of prison. Alas for Mr. Wretford. An idea that seems good when one is in danger is not so good when the danger has passed. Gregory Selton was not content with comfortable employment. He began, I think, to blackmail Mr. Wretford. Those racing debts, you see. More money, more money always. Threats. Blackmail. Mr. Wretford finally killed him."

"But . . ."

"But how? Ah, yes." Dr. Czissar smiled kindly upon them. "It was, I think, a sudden idea. The grounds of his house are extensive. He probably heard Wilder using the rifle nearby and thought of his own rifle. He used to be a member of a London rifle club. Selton would, he knew, be returning soon. It would be possible for him to get from his house to that place behind the hedge without going on to the road and risking being seen. When Selton was found, the blame would be put on this boy. For him, a few months in prison; for the respectable Mr. Wretford, safety — again. He stood behind the hedge at a range of perhaps ten feet from Selton as he cycled by. It would have been difficult to miss."

Dr. Czissar stood up. "It is a suggestion only, of course," he said apologetically. "You will be able to identify Selton from his fingerprints and arrest Mr. Wretford on a charge of perjury. The rifle will no doubt be found when you search the Grange. An examination of Mr. Wretford's accounts will show that he was being blackmailed by Selton. Those large sums in one pound notes . . . but it is not for me to teach you your business, eh?" He smiled incredulously at the idea. "It is time for me to go. Good evening, assistant commissioner. Good evening, inspector. Good evening, sergeant."

The answering "good evenings" echoed dismally in the corridor outside as Dr. Czissar departed.

For a moment there was a silence. Then:

"I knew there was something funny about this case, sir," said Denton brightly. "Clever chaps, these Czechs."

Your Editor is indebted to Mr. E. V. Halbmeier of Elmhurst, New York for the following quotation from John Raymond's ITINERARY, CONTAYNING A VOYAGE MADE THROUGH ITALY IN 1646–47, *published in London by H. Moseley in 1648:*

> *"At Venice I saw a pocket Church Booke with a Pistoll hid in the binding, which turning to such a Page, discharges. A plot (I conceive) to entrap him you hate, whilst you are at your devotions together, when there's least suspicion.*
>
> *"Another as rare, is a Pocket stone-Bow, which held under a Cloake shoots needles with a violence to pierce a mans body, yet leaves a wound scarce discernable.*
>
> *"A third is a walking staffe in appearance; at the top is a Spring which graspt hard, at the other end will jet forth a Rapier with force enough to kill at a yards distance.*
>
> *"A fourth is a Gunne to bee charg'd with winde, wich for six paces will not faile of execution with a small or no report."*

In the early days of the detective story these "gimmicks" were considered highly ingenious. Their ingenuity has faded, of course — note that we do not say their ingenuity has disappeared; alas, the book-booby-trap, the cane-concealed-weapon, and similar gadgets, still rear their hoary heads in many a contemporary detective story. But they are no longer regarded as "bright ideas."

The story, however, that is based on a "trick" idea still flourishes, and should continue to. For an example of the modern "trick" story, infinitely removed from the primitive tales that depended on mechanical devices, we give you Fredric Brown's "Don't Look Behind You" — and we warn you in all seriousness, DON'T!

DON'T LOOK BEHIND YOU

by FREDRIC BROWN

JUST sit back and relax, now. Try to enjoy this; it's going to be the last story you ever read, or nearly the last. After you finish it, you can sit there and stall a while, you can find excuses to hang around your house, or your room, or your office, wherever you're reading this; but sooner or later you're going to have to get up and go out. That's where I'm waiting for you: outside. Or maybe closer than that. Maybe in this room.

You think that's a joke, of course. You think this is just a story in a magazine, and that I don't really

mean you. Keep right on thinking so. But be fair; admit that I'm giving you fair warning.

Harley bet me I couldn't do it. He bet me a diamond he's told me about, a diamond as big as his head. So you see why I've got to kill you. And why I've got to tell you how and why and all about it first. That's part of the bet. It's just the kind of idea Harley would have.

I'll tell you about Harley first. He's tall and handsome, and suave and cosmopolitan. He looks something like Ronald Colman, only he's taller. He dresses like a million dollars, but it wouldn't matter if he didn't; I mean that he'd look distinguished in overalls. There's a sort of magic about Harley, a mocking magic in the way he looks at you; it makes you think of palaces and far-off countries and bright music.

It was in Springfield, Ohio, that he met Justin Dean. Justin was a funny-looking little runt who was just a printer. He worked for the Atlas Printing & Engraving Company. He was a very ordinary little guy, just about as different as possible from Harley; you couldn't pick two men more different. He was only thirty-five, but he was mostly bald already, and he had to wear thick glasses because he'd worn out his eyes doing fine printing and engraving. He was a good printer and engraver; I'll say that for him.

I never asked Harley how he happened to come to Springfield, but the day he got there, after he'd checked in at the Castle Hotel, he stopped in at Atlas to have some calling cards made. It happened that Justin Dean was alone in the shop at the time, and he took Harley's order for the cards; Harley wanted engraved ones, the best. Harley always wants the best of everything.

Harley probably didn't even notice Justin; there was no reason why he should. But Justin noticed Harley all right, and in him he saw everything that he himself would like to be, and never would be, because most of the things Harley has, you have to be born with.

And Justin made the plates for the cards himself, and printed them himself, and he did a wonderful job — something he thought would be worthy of a man like Harley Prentice. That was the name engraved on the card, just that and nothing else, as all really important people have their cards engraved.

He did fine-line work on it, free-hand cursive style, and used all the skill he had. It wasn't wasted, because the next day when Harley called to get the cards, he held one and stared at it for a while, and then he looked at Justin, seeing him for the first time. He asked, "Who did this?"

And little Justin told him proudly who had done it, and Harley smiled at him and told him it was the work of an artist, and he asked Justin to have dinner with him that evening after work, in the Blue Room of the Castle Hotel.

That's how Harley and Justin got

together, but Harley was careful. He waited until he'd known Justin a while before he asked him whether or not he could make plates for five and ten dollar bills. Harley had the contacts; he could market the bills in quantity with men who specialized in placing them, and — most important — he knew where he could get paper with the silk threads in it, paper that wasn't quite the genuine thing, but was close enough to pass inspection by anyone but an expert.

So Justin quit his job at Atlas and he and Harley went to New York, and they set up a little printing shop as a blind, on Amsterdam Avenue south of Sherman Square, and they worked at the bills. Justin worked hard, harder than he had ever worked in his life, because besides working on the plates for the bills, he helped meet expenses by handling what legitimate printing work came into the shop.

He worked day and night for almost a year, making plate after plate, and each one was a little better than the last, and finally he had plates that Harley said were good enough. That night they had dinner at the Waldorf-Astoria to celebrate and after dinner they went the rounds of the best night clubs, and it cost Harley a small fortune, but that didn't matter because they were going to get rich.

They drank champagne, and it was the first time Justin ever drank champagne and he got disgustingly drunk and must have made quite a fool of himself. Harley told him about it afterwards, but Harley wasn't mad at him. He took him back to his room at the hotel and put him to bed, and Justin was pretty sick for a couple of days. But that didn't matter, either, because they were going to get rich.

Then Justin started printing bills from the plates, and they got rich. After that, Justin didn't have to work so hard, either, because he turned down most jobs that came into the print shop, told them he was behind schedule and couldn't handle any more. He took just a little work, to keep up a front. And behind the front, he made five and ten dollar bills, and he and Harley got rich.

He got to know other people whom Harley knew. He met Bull Mallon, who handled the distribution end. Bull Mallon was built like a bull, that was why they called him that. He had a face that never smiled or changed expression at all except when he was holding burning matches to the soles of Justin's bare feet. But that wasn't then; that was later, when he wanted Justin to tell him where the plates were.

And he got to know Captain John Willys of the Police Department, who was a friend of Harley's, to whom Harley gave quite a bit of the money they made, but that didn't matter, either, because there was plenty left and they all got rich. He met a friend of Harley's who was a big star of the stage, and one who owned a big New York newspaper. He got to

know other people equally important, but in less respectable ways.

Harley, Justin knew, had a hand in lots of other enterprises besides the little mint on Amsterdam Avenue. Some of these ventures took him out of town, usually over weekends. And the weekend that Harley was murdered, Justin never found out what really happened, except that Harley went away and didn't come back. Oh, he knew that he was murdered, all right, because the police found his body — with three bullet holes in his chest — in the most expensive suite of the best hotel in Albany. Even for a place to be found dead in, Harley Prentice had chosen the best.

All Justin ever knew about it was that a long distance call came to him at the hotel where he was staying, the night that Harley was murdered — it must have been a matter of minutes, in fact, before the time the newspapers said Harley was killed.

It was Harley's voice on the phone, and his voice was debonair and unexcited as ever. But he said, "Justin? Get to the shop and get rid of the plates, the paper, everything. Right away. I'll explain when I see you." He waited only until Justin said, "Sure, Harley," and then he said, "Attaboy," and hung up.

Justin hurried around to the printing shop and got the plates and the paper and a few thousand dollars worth of counterfeit bills that were on hand. He made the paper and bills into one bundle and the copper plates into another, smaller one, and he left the shop with no evidence that it had ever been a mint in miniature.

He was very careful and very clever in disposing of both bundles. He got rid of the big one first by checking in at a big hotel, not one he or Harley ever stayed at, under a false name, just to have a chance to put the big bundle in the incinerator there. It was paper and it would burn. And he made sure there was a fire in the incinerator before he dropped it down the chute.

The plates were different. They wouldn't burn, he knew, so he took a trip to Staten Island and back on the ferry, and somewhere out in the middle of the bay, he dropped the bundle over the side into the water.

Then, having done what Harley had told him to do, and having done it well and thoroughly, he went back to the hotel — his own hotel, not the one where he had dumped the paper and the bills — and went to sleep.

In the morning, he read in the newspapers that Harley had been killed, and he was stunned. It didn't seem possible. He couldn't believe it; it was a joke someone was playing on him. Harley would come back to him, he knew. And he was right; Harley did, but that was later, in the swamp.

But anyway, Justin had to know, so he took the very next train for Albany. He must have been on the train when the police went to his hotel, and at the hotel they must have learned he'd asked at the desk about trains for Albany, because they

were waiting for him when he got off the train there.

They took him to a station and they kept him there a long, long time, days and days, asking him questions. They found out, after a while, that he couldn't have killed Harley because he'd been in New York City at the time Harley was killed in Albany, but they knew, also, that he and Harley had been operating the little mint, and they thought that might be a lead to who killed Harley, and they were interested in the counterfeiting, too, maybe even more than in the murder.

They asked Justin Dean questions, over and over and over, and he couldn't answer them, so he didn't. They kept him awake for days at a time, asking him questions over and over. Most of all they wanted to know where the plates were. He wished he could tell them that the plates were safe where nobody could ever get them again, but he couldn't tell them that without admitting that he and Harley had been counterfeiting, so he couldn't tell them.

They located the Amsterdam shop, but they didn't find any evidence there, and they really had no evidence to hold Justin on at all, but he didn't know that, and it never occurred to him to get a lawyer.

He kept wanting to see Harley, and they wouldn't let him; then, when they learned he really didn't believe Harley could be dead, they made him look at a dead man they said was Harley, and he guessed it was, although Harley looked different dead. He didn't look magnificent, dead. And Justin believed, then, but still didn't believe. And after that he just went silent and wouldn't say a word, even when they kept him awake for days and days with a bright light in his eyes, and kept slapping him to keep him awake. They didn't use clubs or rubber hoses, but they slapped him a million times and wouldn't let him sleep. And after a while, he lost track of things and couldn't have answered their questions even if he'd wanted to.

For a while after that, he was in a bed in a white room, and all he remembers about that are nightmares he had, and calling for Harley and an awful confusion as to whether Harley was dead or not, and then things came back to him gradually and he knew he didn't want to stay in the white room; he wanted to get out so he could hunt for Harley. And if Harley was dead, he wanted to kill whoever had killed Harley, because Harley would do the same for him.

So he began pretending, and acting, very cleverly, the way the doctors and nurses seemed to want him to act, and after a while they gave him his clothes and let him go.

He was becoming cleverer, now. He thought, What would Harley tell me to do? And he knew they'd try to follow him because they'd think he might lead them to the plates, which they didn't know were at the bottom of the bay, and he gave them the slip before he left

Albany, and he went first to Boston, and from there by boat to New York, instead of going direct.

He went first to the print shop, and went in the back way after watching the alley for a long time to be sure the place wasn't guarded. It was a mess; they must have searched it very thoroughly for the plates.

Harley wasn't there, of course. Justin left and from a phone booth in a drug store, he telephoned their hotel and asked for Harley and was told Harley no longer lived there; and to be clever and not let them guess who he was, he asked for Justin Dean, and they said Justin Dean didn't live there any more either.

Then he moved to a different drug store and from there he decided to call up some friends of Harley's, and he phoned Bull Mallon first and because Bull was a friend, he told him who he was and asked if he knew where Harley was.

Bull Mallon didn't pay any attention to that; he sounded excited, a little, and he asked, "Did the cops get the plates, Dean?" and Justin said they didn't, that he wouldn't tell them, and he asked again about Harley.

Bull asked, "Are you nuts, or kidding?" And Justin just asked him again, and Bull's voice changed and he said, "Where are you?" and Justin told him. Bull said, "Harley's here. He's staying under cover, but it's all right if you know, Dean. You wait right there at the drug store, and we'll come and get you."

They came and got Justin, Bull Mallon and two other men in a car, and they told him Harley was hiding out way deep in New Jersey and that they were going to drive there now. So he went along and sat in the back seat between two men he didn't know, while Bull Mallon drove.

It was late afternoon then, when they picked him up, and Bull drove all evening and most of the night and he drove fast, so he must have gone farther than New Jersey, at least into Virginia or maybe farther, into the Carolinas.

The sky was getting faintly gray with first dawn when they stopped at a rustic cabin that looked like it had been used as a hunting lodge. It was miles from anywhere, there wasn't even a road leading to it, just a trail that was level enough for the car to be able to make it.

They took Justin into the cabin and tied him to a chair, and they told him Harley wasn't there, but Harley had told them that Justin would tell them where the plates were, and he couldn't ever leave until he did tell.

Justin didn't believe them; he knew then that they'd tricked him about Harley, but it didn't matter, as far as the plates were concerned. It didn't matter if he told them what he'd done with the plates, because they couldn't get them again, and they wouldn't tell the police. So he told them, quite willingly.

But they didn't believe him. They said he'd hidden the plates and was

lying. They tortured him to make him tell. They beat him, and they cut him with knives, and they held burning matches and lighted cigars to the soles of his feet, and they pushed needles under his fingernails. Then they'd rest and ask him questions and if he could talk, he'd tell them the truth again, and after a while they'd start to torture him again.

It went on for days and weeks — Justin doesn't know how long, but it was a long time. Once they went away for several days and left him tied up with nothing to eat or drink. They came back and started in all over again. And all the time he hoped Harley would come to help him, but Harley didn't come, not then.

After a while what was happening in the cabin ended, or anyway he didn't know any more about it. They must have thought he was dead; maybe they were right, or anyway not far from wrong.

The next thing he knows was the swamp. He was lying in shallow water at the edge of deeper water. His face was out of the water; it woke him when he turned a little and his face went under. They must have thought him dead and thrown him into the water, but he had floated into the shallow part before he had drowned, and a last flicker of consciousness had turned him over on his back with his face out.

I don't remember much about Justin in the swamp; it was a long time, but I just remember flashes of it. I couldn't move at first; I just lay there in the shallow water with my face out. It got dark and it got cold, I remember, and finally my arms would move a little and I got farther out of the water, lying in the mud with only my feet in the water. I slept or was unconscious again and when I woke up it was getting gray dawn, and that was when Harley came. I think I'd been calling him, and he must have heard.

He stood there, dressed as immaculately and perfectly as ever, right in the swamp, and he was laughing at me for being so weak and lying there like a log, half in the dirty water and half in the mud, and I got up and nothing hurt any more.

We shook hands and he said, "Come on, Justin, let's get you out of here," and I was so glad he'd come that I cried a little. He laughed at me for that, and said I should lean on him and he'd help me walk, but I wouldn't do that, because I was coated with mud and filth of the swamp and he was so clean and perfect in a white linen suit, like an ad in a magazine. And all the way out of that swamp, all the days and nights we spent there, he never even got mud on his trouser cuffs, nor his hair mussed.

I told him just to lead the way, and he did, walking just ahead of me, sometimes turning around, laughing and talking to me and cheering me up. Sometimes I'd fall, but I wouldn't let him come back and help me. But he'd wait patiently until I could get up. Sometimes I'd crawl instead when I couldn't stand up any more.

Sometimes I'd have to swim streams that he'd leap lightly across.

And it was day and night and day and night, and sometimes I'd sleep, and things would crawl across me. And some of them I caught and ate, or maybe I dreamed that. I remember other things, in that swamp, like an organ that played a lot of the time, and sometimes angels in the air and devils in the water, but those were delirium, I guess.

Harley would say, "A little farther, Justin; we'll make it. And we'll get back at them, at all of them."

And we made it. We came to dry fields, cultivated fields with waist-high corn, but there weren't ears on the corn for me to eat. And then there was a stream, a clear stream that wasn't stinking water like the swamp, and Harley told me to wash myself and my clothes and I did, although I wanted to hurry on to where I could get food.

I still looked pretty bad; my clothes were clean of mud and filth but they were mere rags and wet, because I couldn't wait for them to dry, and I had a ragged beard and I was barefoot.

But we went on and came to a little farm building, just a two-room shack, and there was a smell of fresh bread just out of an oven, and I ran the last few yards to knock on the door. A woman, an ugly woman, opened the door and when she saw me she slammed it again before I could say a word.

Strength came to me from somewhere, maybe from Harley, although I can't remember him being there just then. There was a pile of kindling logs beside the door. I picked one of them up as though it were no heavier than a broomstick, and I broke down the door and killed the woman. She screamed a lot, but I killed her. Then I ate the hot fresh bread.

I watched from the window as I ate, and saw a man running across the field toward the house. I found a knife, and I killed him as he came in at the door. It was much better, killing with the knife; I liked it that way.

I ate more bread, and kept watching from all the windows, but no one else came. Then my stomach hurt from the hot bread I'd eaten and I had to lie down, doubled up, and when the hurting quit, I slept.

Harley woke me up, and it was dark. He said, "Let's get going; you should be far away from here before it's daylight."

I knew he was right, but I didn't hurry away. I was becoming, as you see, very clever now. I knew there were things to do first. I found matches and a lamp, and lighted the lamp. Then I hunted through the shack for everything I could use. I found clothes of the man, and they fitted me not too badly except that I had to turn up the cuffs of the trousers and the shirt. His shoes were big, but that was good because my feet were so swollen.

I found a razor and shaved; it took a long time because my hand wasn't steady, but I was very careful and

didn't cut myself much.

I had to hunt hardest for their money, but I found it finally. It was sixty dollars.

And I took the knife, after I had sharpened it. It isn't fancy; just a bone-handled carving knife, but it's good steel. I'll show it to you, pretty soon now. It's had a lot of use.

Then we left and it was Harley who told me to stay away from the roads, and find railroad tracks. That was easy because we heard a train whistle far off in the night and knew which direction the tracks lay. From then on, with Harley helping, it's been easy.

You won't need the details from here. I mean, about the brakeman, and about the tramp we found asleep in the empty reefer, and about the near thing I had with the police in Richmond. I learned from that; I learned I mustn't talk to Harley when anybody else was around to hear. He hides himself from them; he's got a trick and they don't know he's there, and they think I'm funny in the head if I talk to him. But in Richmond I bought better clothes and got a haircut and a man I killed in an alley had forty dollars on him, so I had money again. I went on to Philadelphia by bus, and Harley wanted me to stay there a while. So I got a job in a little printing shop. I got fired pretty quick, but the next job I held for a week. I wanted to go on to New York right away. I've got to find Bull Mallon, which will be easy, and the two men who helped him, which will be a little harder because I know only their first names.

But Harley keeps telling me to wait, that I need practice, that those fellows are big time and know their way around. Harley says we should travel around, too, and we've been doing that. Now we're here. I've learned a lot of things. I can hold a job down now, for one thing, and people don't think I'm too strange; they don't get scared when I look at them. I don't talk to Harley except in our room, and then only very quietly so the people in the next room won't think I'm talking to myself. And I've learned how to use the knife quickly and efficiently. You'll hardly feel it.

The bet I told you about came up because Harley kept telling me it's one thing to kill someone who isn't looking for it, and another thing to get a man who's on the alert, like Bull Mallon, and Harry and Carl. He said I wasn't ready for them yet, and I told him I bet I could warn a man I was going to use the knife on him, and tell him all about it, and why, and approximately when, and that I could still get away with it. And he bet me I couldn't.

That's where he's going to lose a bet, because I'm going to do just that. You see, I know you don't believe this. You think it's just another story in a magazine.

People are like that; you won't believe that this is the *only* copy of this magazine that contains this story. Even when I tell you how it was done.

That's where I'm putting one over on Harley; he didn't think of doing it this way. He never thought how easy it will be for a good all-around printer to counterfeit one story in a magazine. I'm setting this up now on the Linotype late at night in the shop where I work days. I even have the boss' permission — told him I was going to set up a story a friend of mine had written as a surprise for him and that I'd melt the lead back once I'd taken a proof for him.

I know the magazine I'm going to use, picked it because this shop can match the type-face and size perfectly. We've got a paper stock here that will match closely enough that you can't tell the difference. I've got a copy of the current issue here.

When I've finished this, I'll make up the type in pages, and then pick out a story that takes up just that many pages in the magazine. I'll folio these pages to match the ones of the story I'll substitute it for. And run off one backed-up copy on the proof press. There'll be a minute difference in type size because of mat shrinkage, but you won't notice that unless you're a printer.

It'll be just as easy to print a new title page, and to write myself a blurb to fit the story. Not really necessary and maybe you think I'm going to a lot of trouble, but Harley will get a kick out of it if I do a really artistic job, and so will I.

I'll cut the new pages to fit and bind them in; you won't be able to tell the difference, even if a faint suspicion may cause you to look at it. Don't forget I made five and ten dollar bills you couldn't have told from the original, and this is kindergarten stuff compared to that job.

Tomorrow I'll go to some newsstand or drug store — you know which one by now — and plant this copy with the others like it. I'll be watching when you buy it.

The rest I can't tell you, yet. You can be sure I followed you wherever you went after you bought this magazine. You can be sure I know who you are by the time you're reading this.

The rest depends on circumstances I won't know until I follow you. Maybe — if it's possible — I'm in the house with you right now. Maybe I'm in this very room, hidden, watching until you finish the story. Maybe I'm sitting near you on the streetcar or train, if you're reading it there. Maybe I'm on a fire escape outside your hotel room. But I'll be with you, or near you; you can count on that.

That little shiver of cold running down your spine — maybe it's a window opening silently.

Don't look around; you'll be happier if you don't know, if you don't see the knife coming. I've killed people from behind and they don't seem to mind so much.

Go on, just a little while, thinking this is just another fiction story. Don't look behind you. Don't believe this — *until you feel the knife.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Hugh Pentecost won the Dodd, Mead "Red Badge" Prize Competition in 1939 with his excellent novel,* CANCELLED IN RED. *He was born in a city in Massachusetts, now lives in upstate New York except for winters which he usually spends in New York City. His father was an opera singer, his mother an actress. When asked why he became a writer, Mr. Pentecost replied that his father would not let him sing, his mother would not let him act, and he had to get it out of his system somehow! He has been writing since the age of ten, and has never done anything else. He has written for pulps, for slicks, for newspapers, and for his own radio show — all under different names. Before graduating from a well-known university, Mr. Pentecost traveled all over Europe with his parents. "Having been brought up in a hotel bureau drawer as a child," he comments wryly, "I now have a particular passion to stay put in my own home." His hobbies include riding, cross country hacking (whatever that may be), and at one time he was the proud possessor of a golf handicap of 4 . . . All the above was supplied to your Editor by Mr. Pentecost's publisher. It tells something of the writer known as Hugh Pentecost; it tells little of the man. To know the man you have to sit with him at Board of Directors and Council meetings of the Mystery Writers of America; talk with him at his favorite restaurant or bar. Then you discover his charm, his quick smile, his genuine desire to help the underdog. The real Hugh Pentecost is forthright, deep-principled, and an advocate that right is might. To know even more of the real Hugh Pentecost, drop in at "The Inkwell" on Third Avenue near Grand Central Station, New York City, and hear Jud (that's what we call him) play the upright piano just beyond the bar and sing old songs of the days that used to be . . .*

CHALLENGE TO THE READER

by HUGH PENTECOST

THE blond man lay on his stomach on the lawn near the edge of the lake, a newspaper spread out on the grass in front of him. A large picture of Nancy Bradford and her small daughter, Sybil, stared up at him. Of course the picture showed Nancy Bradford and her child as they had looked *before* the murder, not afterwards.

The blond man's hair and heavy eyebrows were bleached almost white, probably by the bright August sunshine. Those eyebrows were drawn together in a concentrated frown as he read the newspaper story. It was

a Sunday Supplement with many pictures and a long rehash of the Bradford case written by the paper's leading crime reporter. The article purported to give all the known facts in the particularly brutal and sadistic killing of the lovely actress and her small daughter. They had been beaten to death, almost out of human semblance, with a heavy iron poker. It was the opinion of the medical examiner that the murderous beating had gone on, violently, long after both mother and child were dead. It was called a crime of passion — black, turbulent, sick passion.

The murderer had been described in the usual confusing fashion by the doorman in Nancy Bradford's apartment — described as a tall, short, fair, dark, fat, thin man who wore blue-tinted glasses, a tweed topcoat in July, and a dark-grey snap-brim hat. He had come into the foyer and asked for Nancy Bradford. The doorman had pointed to the house phone, and the tall, short, fair, dark, fat, thin man had called Nancy Bradford's apartment. The doorman heard him speak. He said: "Hello, darling. It's me." He was evidently invited up because he went direct to the automatic elevator and the doorman watched the indicator needle rise to Nancy's floor.

An hour later a certain Mrs. Carpenter, whose job it was to sit with small Sybil Bradford if Nancy went out for the evening, arrived and went up to the apartment. She reappeared in the foyer presently, screaming hysterically and making no sense whatever. The doorman phoned the police after he was able to distinguish the word "murder" amidst the jumble of Mrs. Carpenter's ravings. The doorman did *not* go upstairs. He justified this on the ground of duty. But there was a result from it. The doorman could swear that the tall, short, fair, dark, fat, thin man with the blue glasses and the tweed topcoat had never left the building. He hadn't come down in the elevator and he hadn't come down the inside fire stairs which also opened into the lobby, and there wasn't any other way out. The papers had made a lot of this, but the police were not overly concerned by this mystery angle. Whatever the testimony, the man was gone — perhaps like Chesterton's postman, perhaps by magic. The puzzle of *how* was not important. The important thing was that he must be found.

There wasn't much to go on. There had been money and jewelry in the apartment. The jewelry had been taken but the money — several hundred dollars — had been left. The police were of two minds about it. The jewelry had been stolen as a blind for the real motive — or it had been a gift from the murderer which he now took back. Outside of this one clue? Well, on the floor of the Bradford apartment were two extinguished lives, two dreadfully mutilated bodies, and — two pine needles.

The blond man raised his eyes from the newspapers and turned his head toward the hotel which was set back

about a hundred yards from the lake. Back of the hotel was the dark green mystery of a heavy pine forest. He stared for a long time as if he hoped somehow to penetrate the brooding darkness of the wood to some bright point of clarification. Finally he lowered his eyes to the newspaper once more.

The blond man's concentration was so intense that he was not aware of the approach of the fat man. The fat man came from the direction of the boathouse. He wore faded khaki pants, a corduroy hunting coat with deep, bulging pockets, and a battered grey hat with fishing flies stuck in the band. He was reaming out of the bowl of a short, black pipe with the blade of a pen-knife. The operation completed, he put the stem of the pipe in his mouth and blew hard to clear it. Then he paused, his grey eyes blinking through the lenses of his steel-rimmed spectacles at the newspaper reader. He moved quietly across the grass until he stood directly over the blond man.

"Pretty gruesome business — the Bradford case," he said.

The blond man moved as if someone had jabbed a pin into him. He rolled over onto his side, braced half-upright on his elbow, staring up at the fat man, his eyes dilated, his whole attitude defensive.

"Sorry if I startled you," the fat man said. His smile was slow and friendly.

"I — I didn't hear you coming," the blond man said. He fished for cigarettes in the breast pocket of his blue denim shirt.

"My name is Doyle," the fat man said. "I noticed you in the hotel dining room last night. You just arrived?"

"Yes. I'm Jerry Hartman — radio writer."

Doyle grinned. "You mean — 'Love that soap!'?"

"I write dramatic shows. The agencies handle the commercials."

Doyle's mild eyes moved back to the newspaper on the grass. "Maybe you knew Nancy Bradford. I understand she did a lot of radio acting."

"I never happened to meet her," Hartman said.

That seemed to end it. Doyle looked out at the shimmering expanse of the lake. "I was going out to try to catch a few bass," he said. "It's pretty sunny but there are some shady spots along the shore."

"I have a license," Hartman said, "but I don't know one fish from another."

"Same here," Doyle said. "It's just getting out and relaxing that counts. Seep in a little sun. Want to join me?"

Hartman had difficulty lighting the match for his cigarette. He finally managed and dragged the smoke deep into his lungs. "I — I don't know," he said. "I haven't any equipment. I —"

"I've got extra stuff," Doyle said. "We probably won't catch anything anyway. I just thought a little company — But if you feel like being alone —"

"I — I think I'd like it," Hartman said. He scrambled up to his feet and then bent down to pick up the paper. He rolled it up and stuck it under his arm.

"I've rented one of the rowboats," Doyle said. "You ready to start now?"

"Yes. Yes, I'm already if you've got some extra tackle."

"Let's go," Doyle said.

The rowboat was chained to the platform inside the boathouse. Doyle's tackle was in the back of the boat along with a small wicker hamper.

"I've got some sandwiches and a thermos of ice tea in there," Doyle said. "If you want some liquor —"

"I don't drink," Hartman said.

"And you in the radio business?" Doyle chuckled.

Hartman seemed to force a smile. "Maybe that's why. I'm on my second ulcer."

"Get in," Doyle said. "I'll row. I know a place where we might have some luck."

Hartman climbed into the back of the boat, balancing himself unsteadily. Doyle unfastened the chain and then climbed in and sat down in the middle seat. He reached out and pushed off with his hand. The boat moved slowly out of the boathouse shade into the bright sun. Once clear, Doyle fitted the oars into the oarlocks and began rowing. He used short but very powerful strokes that shot the boat forward in the water. He was the first one to speak.

"It seems impossible he could have got away without leaving a clearer trail," he said.

"Who could have got away from what?" Hartman asked.

"The Bradford murderer."

"Oh," Hartman said.

"I've toyed with the idea that the man with the blue glasses wasn't the murderer at all."

"Oh?" Hartman tossed his cigarette stub out onto the water. He watched it bob up and down in the boat's wake.

Doyle kept rowing steadily as he talked. "Suppose you were a friend of Nancy Bradford's. You went upstairs and walked into that shambles. *My* impulse would be to get away — not to be involved."

"But that couldn't have been the way it was," Hartman said.

Doyle stopped rowing, leaning forward on the oars. The boat continued to move slowly through the water. "Why not?"

"He spoke to her on the house phone," Hartman said. He tapped the newspaper which lay on the seat beside him. "The doorman heard him say 'Hello, darling. It's me.' He went right up. She must have been alive then, you see."

"Maybe the man in the glasses was bluffing."

Hartman shook his head. "If he was bluffing then he was involved anyway. No, it must have been that guy all right. Only the description of him just isn't any use. He wouldn't wear those blue glasses again. You can bank on that."

Doyle nodded slowly. "I guess

you're right," he said. He began rowing again.

"Those pine needles," Hartman said, after a moment.

"What about 'em?"

"Well, he must have come from some place where he'd walked in pine needles. They stuck to his shoes — or maybe to the bottom of his trousers." Hartman looked back across the lake toward pine forest behind the hotel. "Here, perhaps."

Doyle laughed. "Pleasant idea! The Bradford murderer may have been around here all the time I've been vacationing."

"It's quite possible," Hartman said. "There's the brooch."

Doyle stopped rowing. His grey eyes were fixed, unblinking, on Hartman's pale face. It was odd that Hartman's hair should be so bleached by the sun and yet his face was neither sunburned nor brown.

"What brooch?" Doyle asked.

"Why, Nancy Bradford's brooch," Hartman said. "It was found in a path in the woods here. Some local kid picked it up and turned it over to the cops."

"They found it *here?*"

"That's right. A day or two after the murder."

"How do you know that?" Doyle's voice was on a curious dead-level.

"Why — I guess I read it somewhere," Hartman said.

"That's funny. I thought I'd read everything about the case and I never saw anything about the brooch."

Hartman moistened his lips. "Well, I must have read it somewhere," he said. "I wouldn't have any other way of knowing."

"No," Doyle said, slowly. "No, I suppose not." He started rowing again, the rhythm a little slower than before. "If they found the brooch here you'd think the place would be swarming with detectives."

Hartman's smile was forced. "Maybe it is," he said. "They wouldn't necessarily come out in the open for fear of scaring off their man."

"Yes," Doyle said, "I suppose they would handle it that way. Since they have no way of identifying the man they'd just lie low till he made a mistake."

"What kind of mistake?"

"I don't know," Doyle said. "Probably they don't either. They'd just wait and hope." He pulled on the right oar and headed the boat in toward the shore. "Good shady place over there," he said, nodding toward a clump of willows whose branches spread shadow well over the water. When he had his bearings he started pulling on the oars again. He smiled. "You wouldn't kid me, would you, Hartman? About being a radio writer?"

"Well, it's a secret," Hartman said, in a mock-confidential tone, "but I'm really a junior G-man."

They both laughed.

Doyle pulled the boat into the shade of the willows. Then he shipped his oars and climbed to the bow of the boat. He lowered an anchor which was fastened to the boat by a heavy chain.

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ward the bathroom. The water was still running in the tub. He reached out — not toward the bottle but toward the top bureau drawer. He pulled the drawer open. He drew in his breath, sharply.

Lying on top of a stack of clean shirts were some photographs — theatrical photographs of Nancy Bradford. They'd been mutilated. Some of them were torn, some of them had been defaced with a heavy black crayon. Hartman picked them up. His hands shook so that the heavy photographic paper rattled in his fingers. Then he heard a faint squeaking noise. He dropped the pictures and swung around. His right hand dove into the pocket of his coat and came out holding the revolver.

"Well, well," Doyle said. He stood in the bathroom doorway, fully dressed. The sound of the water, still running in the tub, came from behind him. And he, too, was holding a gun, quite steadily, pointed at Hartman. "I had a feeling you'd snoop if you had the chance."

Hartman drew a deep breath. He spoke in a loud, very clear voice. "So you're the Bradford murderer," he said.

Doyle's mouth smiled, but the eyes behind the steel-rimmed spectacles were cold. "It won't work, Hartman," he said.

"I knew it," Hartman said, "when I saw you unhook that fish. I knew it when you pulled up that anchor. I knew it when you kept probing and probing to find out who I was. I knew it the way you reacted to my telling you about the brooch."

"It won't work, Hartman," Doyle said.

"How do you explain these pictures of Nancy Bradford in your bureau drawer?"

"They came from Nancy Bradford's apartment. Then Doyle asked, still smiling, "The murderer had to destroy even the symbols of Nancy Bradford. You must have hated her like hell, Hartman!"

"It was *you* who hated her," Hartman said. "Even after you'd murdered her you had to go on destroying everything that reminded you of her." His voice was loud, like an attorney addressing a courtroom.

"You ought to know," Doyle said. "You ought to know how the murderer felt. You even told me, Hartman. Some men would think of a turn down as treachery, you said."

"It was you, Doyle. You've been staying around here because you'd lost the brooch. You didn't know whether it had been found or not. No one knew that but the police."

"That's right, Hartman. No one knew but the police. You were fishing when you brought it up. You wanted to know if it *had* been found. You were trying to find out from me because you'd decided that maybe I was a cop looking for you. Well, you were right. I *was* looking for you."

Hartman laughed. "I'll bet you were," he said.

"The pretense that you weren't strong enough to lift the anchor.

Your pretended squeamishness when I yanked that hook out of the bass's mouth. I did that on purpose — just to see how you'd behave. You're a good actor, Hartman."

"This isn't getting us anywhere," Hartman said. "You'd better drop that gun."

"You've been in the radio and theater business, Hartman. You knew how easy it would be to fool the doorman at Nancy Bradford's apartment. You made yourself noticeable going in and unnoticeable coming out."

"Drop that gun," Hartman said.

Doyle laughed. "Stop kidding," he said. "It won't work, Hartman." He took a step forward.

Suddenly thunder shook the room — the thunder of two guns fired almost simultaneously. The two men stood there, swaying, pulling the triggers of the two guns. Slowly Hartman slumped to his knees, a bewildered, frightened look on his face. The smoking gun fell out of his hand and he pitched forward on his face.

Doyle leaned against the door jamb. There were bright red stains spreading on the front of his white shirt. He coughed — a wet, choking cough.

There were excited voices in the hall outside and the sound of running feet. The door burst open and the clerk and the hotel porter, in a blue uniform, burst into the room. They stopped just inside the door staring at the man on the floor — and at Doyle.

Doyle coughed. "He was the Bradford murderer," he said. He coughed again. "I'd been looking for him — special assignment."

The porter crossed the room and knelt beside Hartman. Presently he stood up. His face was very pale. "Dead," he said. He looked at Doyle. "You look as though you were pretty badly hurt," he said. "You better lie down on the bed while we get you a doctor." He walked over to Doyle.

"I — I feel a little sick at my stomach," Doyle said, smiling weakly.

The porter reached him. Then suddenly the porter's left hand knocked the gun from Doyle's flabby fingers and his right smashed squarely against Doyle's mouth in a pile-driving punch. Doyle staggered back and fell on the bathroom floor.

"Special assignment!" the porter shouted. "Special assignment for murder — you crazy killer!" He turned to the hotel clerk. From his pocket he took a small leather folder and opened it, disclosing a police badge. "There's your Bradford murderer," he said, pointing at Doyle. "Hartman was a homicide man. We worked as a team." His voice was bitter. "Why wasn't I around when they came in? He might have passed the tip to me. I might have saved him." He looked down at Hartman's body. "Poor guy! He was always scared as hell on a job like this — but he never flinched — never took a backward step."

The clerk's eyes moved from the body of Hartman to the still figure of Doyle.

"Why — why did he k-kill Nancy

Bradford?" It was almost a whisper.

"He was her first husband," the homicide man said. "A paranoid killer. She's been hiding from him — changed her name — remarried. Then he showed up — seemed all right — wanted to see his child. She thought he was cured — everything all right. Then ——"

"Maybe — maybe I b-better get a d-doctor for him," the clerk said.

"Let the — let him die," the homicide man said, grimly. "It'll save the state a lot of dough."

ABOUT THE STORY: *The most interesting anecdote we can relate about Hugh Pentecost's prize-winning story concerns its title. When the story first reached your Editor, it had a note attached in which the author admitted that he himself was not too happy with his original title — "Darling, It's Me!" We shared Mr. Pentecost's doubt: the original title not only seemed too emotional but it did not communicate to the reader the underlying motif of the story. Perfect titles are often extremely elusive; they're there — hidden in the story — but sometimes they are as hard to find as the proverbial needle in a bottle of hay. It happens to the best of stories and to the best of writers: for example, it has been told that W. Somerset Maugham did not hit upon his magnificent title,* OF HUMAN BONDAGE, *until long after he had finished correcting galley-proofs of the book.*

Anyway, Mr. Pentecost and your Editor went to work looking for the "needle." Every week or so we would call each other on the phone and discuss fresh possibilities. We both agreed that the title should project instantly the basic idea of the story. As you now know, the story revolves around two men, and as the tale progresses, the reader becomes increasingly aware that one man is the murderer and the other man is the detective. The question is: Which is which? At various points in the story you decide you know; then, with consummate cleverness, Mr. Pentecost twists the very fact which made up your mind one way into making you think exactly the opposite.

We weighed such titles as "Seesaw" and "Shuttlecock." Somehow, while both words described the essential plot device, they merely approximated it, and neither of us would compromise for a so-so title. We agreed that "Point Counter Point" was almost perfect, but we were reluctant to use a title already made famous by Aldous Huxley. The same reason, in

principle, ruled out another faultless title — "A Case of Identity," Conan Doyle's inspiration for one of the best-known Sherlock Holmes stories.

So we let our perplexity simmer.

Then one day your Editor got a strange feeling: hadn't this precise situation happened once before? Not just a titular road-block — but hadn't this identical problem given us insomnia long ago? Then we remembered. Yes, we had been faced with exactly the same quandary back in 1937. At that time we had been seeking a title for our first anthology. You will recall that the first Ellery Queen anthology was based on the idea of changing the names of famous sleuths and challenging the reader to identify the great fictional detectives from such internal evidence as their appearance and habits, their speech peculiarities, their manhunting methods, and other personal idiosyncrasies. Wasn't this another classic instance of homicide history repeating itself?

We promptly asked ourselves: How did we solve the problem then? And wouldn't the same solution apply now? We tried to recollect what titles we had juggled a decade ago — but ten years is a long time to remember fugitive thoughts on titles. Wait — it comes back to us now: at that time we considered calling the anthology WHO'S WHO. *That expressed the idea perfectly; it described the Pentecost story just as perfectly. But why hadn't we used it ten years ago? Oh, yes — it was too flippant then, and on further deliberation it seemed too flippant now. Wait! Why not use for the Pentecost story the very same title we finally decided on for the old Queen anthology? Of course! That was it!*

So we telephoned Mr. Pentecost. Would he have any objection to a former Queen title if that title fitted his story to a 'tec T? No, said Mr. P., not if Queen didn't mind — but what is the title?

We said: Challenge to the Reader.

Mr. Pentecost said: It's perfect!

Don't let anyone tell you differently: history is made in the mind . .

'Q'

Pulitzer Prize winner, Louis Bromfield, needs no introduction to American readers. The author of THE GREEN BAY TREE, EARLY AUTUMN, THE STRANGE CASE OF MISS ANNIE SPRAGG, *and* THE FARM, *has had his later novels — like* THE RAINS CAME *and* MRS. PARKINGTON — *transformed into super-budget Class A motion pictures that have spread his name all over the world. Once upon a time Mr. Bromfield announced that in his writing he would devote himself exclusively to the American scene; he has not, alas, kept that promise, but you will find the spirit of it in his short-short story, "The Wedding Dress."*

Yes, there is something very American in the short sketch Mr. Bromfield has written about Zenobia White, the queer old maid who lived for almost a century, spending her lonely days in the little house surrounded by bushes and pressed upon by the great trees of the forest, surrounded too by the scores of mongrel dogs and prowling cats. And yet, in this short character study, is the very stuff Hollywood delights in for its spectacular love pictures. Mr. Bromfield has the double-touch, and it has proved Midas-like to one of America's most famous gentlemen-farmers.

THE WEDDING DRESS

by LOUIS BROMFIELD

ZENOBIA WHITE is dead! This morning as I came down to breakfast I saw through the tall window that overlooks the meadows the figure of Jabez Torrence, who lives on the river farm, coming up the lane from the highroad. He was running, and when he saw me he cried out in a loud voice, "Zenobia White is dead!"

And then he fell silent, embarrassed, speechless, as if he understood at once how silly it was to be excited over the death of a queer old maid who had lived long past her time — an old woman who had lived for almost a century.

"Zenobia White is dead!"

Something had gone out of our world . . . the world of Jabez and me and all the county. Who could say what it was?

She had been dead for three days, said Jabez. No one would have found her in her little house among the bushes if her dogs had not set up a mournful unbroken howling. Jabez' father had walked in through the thicket surrounding her house. "Even the birds," said Jabez, "were still." He walked through the chickens and dogs and cats up to the door, and knocked. But there was only silence, as there had been only silence on one lonely night more than seventy years before. Inside on her bed Zenobia White lay dead. She was dressed in a wedding gown of white silk, with the

veil of a bride covering her immensely old and wrinkled face. The stuff of the dress was so old that it had turned yellow. It must have been made eighty years ago.

So something had gone out of our world, and Jabez, in his bewilderment knew it as well as I. We should never see Zenobia White again, walking down the highroad with the long train of her yellow taffeta dress trailing in the white dust, a basket over one arm, her lace mitts adjusted neatly, the plumes in her big hat waving in the breeze. . . . Zenobia White, walking down the white highroad, very tall and straight and proud for such an immensely old woman, her black eyes flashing proudly beneath the little veil of black lace that hung from her queer bedraggled bonnet . . . Zenobia White, immensely fierce and old, dressed always in yellow taffeta like Sarah Bernhardt in the picture by Carolus Duran . . . Zenobia White, followed by a whole procession of cats.

Far down the valley beyond the figure of Jabez I could see the little house surrounded by bushes. I could even see for a moment a glimpse of the old white horse which Zenobia had raised from a colt and which had never known harness or saddle . . . the old white horse which lived inside her garden and attacked any intruder with bared teeth and unshod hoofs . . . the old white horse which this morning had *not* attacked Jabez' father. This morning, when Zenobia White lay dead in her wedding dress, he stood sadly, waiting. . . . The garden was full of birds, orioles and wrens and cardinals and a great number of dogs — queer, yellow mongrel dogs, unwanted by anyone, which had come to live with old Zenobia. And cats too, scores of them, which prowled in peace beside the dogs.

Zenobia White, with a thousand stories clinging to her memory! The story of the night when robbers evaded the old white horse and tortured Zenobia by baking her feet in her own oven! But she had not told them where her money was. They had gone away when she fainted, defeated. And after that Zenobia's proud walk carried the hint of a limp. . . .

But she belonged to my grandfather's day — a tall, handsome girl of twenty who sat a horse like an Amazon and was courted by half the men of the county. But even in those days she had lived alone in the cottage. The mother of Zenobia White had been an Indian woman, an Iroquois princess, who died soon after she was born. At twenty she was an orphan.

Zenobia White at twenty, living alone in the days when prowlers and renegade Indians infested the county. But Zenobia, young and beautiful, had stayed in the little house by the river, alone, armed with her father's pistols.

"But Zenobia," my grandfather used to say, "could look out for herself." He knew, perhaps, because he was one of those who admired her.

But Zenobia loved, with all the

fierceness in her black eyes, young McDougal, red-haired and fiery-tempered, the fastest runner in all the county. And she was to marry him. They went in the long, still summer evenings to ride the tangled trails of the wild countryside. And they quarreled, for they were both of high tempers. And one night, two days before they were to be married, my grandfather, returning from the mill, saw them come home. They had quarreled, and Zenobia rode a little ahead of her lover, flushed and angry and handsome. And when they reached the cottage she turned in alone, without a word. . . . My grandfather says she was a beautiful woman.

And then (my grandfather said) Zenobia had gone into the house, and after bolting the doors and windows of the lonely house against intruders sat down to read her Bible and pray that her fierce spirit might be subdued. She sat reading thus until long after midnight . . . in a tiny house set in a clearing pressed upon by the great trees of the forest. And presently, as Zenobia read, the sound of footsteps stole in upon her consciousness — faint and confused in the rustling of the lilacs — the sound of footsteps — the footsteps of one or perhaps of many men.

Zenobia put out the flame of the single mutton tallow candle and sat listening, listening to the sounds in the garden, the sound of the owls and of the wind rising over the river. And slowly, when the sounds persisted, she took her father's pistol and, raising it, fired through the door, to frighten the ghostly intruders. The sound of a shot and then a silence while Zenobia stood there in the darkness with the smoking pistol in her hand, waiting — waiting!

There was only silence. They had gone away. There was nothing but the sighing of the wind and the faint hooting of the owls. . . .

And in the morning (my grandfather said) Zenobia was awakened by the brilliant spring sun streaming in at the window and by the happy clamor of the thrushes and cardinals in the garden. The sunlight fell upon the wedding dress that lay spread out over the chair at her side. And when she had dressed and gone downstairs (she was singing, she told my grandfather) she unbolted the doors and windows one by one until she came to the last which opened into the garden. And there, full in the path, face downward, his red hair flaming in the sunlight, lay Jock McDougal — dead — with a bullet through his heart.

I looked up and saw the figure of Jabez, sitting now under a tree in the lane, still puzzling. We shall never again see Zenobia White with the procession of cats at her heels, her yellow taffeta trailing the white dust. Zenobia White is dead. She is being buried tomorrow in her wedding dress.

DESIDERATA: or, THE MOUTH-WATERERS

Which half-dozen important books of detective short stories, published in the twentieth century, are now the hardest to find, and therefore the least accessible to the general public? That's an interesting question, and we decided to pose it to three of America's outstanding crime connoisseurs — Vincent Starrett, Anthony Boucher, and James Sandoe. Mr. Starrett nominated Clifford Ashdown's THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE *(1902), H. Frankish's* DR. CUNLIFFE, INVESTIGATOR *(1902), B. Fletcher Robinson's* THE CHRONICLES OF ADDINGTON PEACE *(1905), J. S. Fletcher's* THE ADVENTURES OF ARCHER DAWE, SLEUTH-HOUND *(1909), A. J. Rees's* INVESTIGATIONS OF COLWIN GREY *(1932), and C. Daly King's* THE CURIOUS MR. TARRANT *(1935). Mr. Boucher, leaning more on historical and qualitative significance, suggested William MacHarg's and Edwin Balmer's* THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT *(1910), T. S. Stribling's* CLUES OF THE CARIBBEES *(1929), Harvey J. O'Higgins's* DETECTIVE DUFF UNRAVELS IT *(1929), Percival Wilde's* ROGUES IN CLOVER *(1929), Frederick Irving Anderson's* BOOK OF MURDER *(1930), and C. Daly King's* THE CURIOUS MR. TARRANT *(1935). Mr. Sandoe's list included Clifford Ashdown's* THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE *(1902), Gilbert K. Chesterton's* THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES *(1905), T. S. Stribling's* CLUES OF THE CARIBBEES *(1929), Frederick Irving Anderson's* BOOK OF MURDER *(1930), Henry Wade's* POLICEMAN'S LOT *(1933), and C. Daly King's* THE CURIOUS MR. TARRANT *(1935).*

The truth is, there are a good hundred books of detective short stories published since 1900 that are now extremely-to-excessively hard to find. It is really unfair to try to isolate the six hardest — luck plays too large a part in every book collector's campaigning. Also, it is sometimes easier, paradoxical as it may seem, to locate an expensive rare book than an inexpensive one. One reason for this is that bookdealers and bookscouts naturally go after the high-priced rarities with infinitely more patience and persistence than they are willing to expend on books that, no matter how scarce and desirable, will bring them only relatively small profits or commissions. Many a time in the early stages of our own collecting we came upon a notoriously difficult book standing unwept, unhonored, and unsung on some obscure dealer's shelf, and modestly priced to boot; but we have learned through bitter experience that this apparent availability did not mean the book in question was common. We were just lucky — another copy of the volume might not turn up in the next ten years. The internationally famous collector, Ned Guymon of San Diego, once told us that

at the very beginning of his collecting career he received a large carton of miscellaneous books from England which averaged him a mere shilling per copy; yet in that "grab-bag" he found a paperback first edition of which there are still only three known copies in the United States!

Judging from our own experience, we would agree with Messrs. Starrett, Boucher, and Sandoe on five of their choices. ROMNEY PRINGLE *is without question one of the Kohinoor rarities — there are only four copies extant, including the one in the British Museum of London.* MR. TARRANT, DR. CUNLIFFE (*the only title in the three lists, by the way, which is still missing in your Editor's collection*), *and* ARCHER DAWE *are tremendously elusive gentlemen of the genre. And the English first edition of Chesterton's* THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES *is also a permanent entry on most collectors' want-lists — although the U. S. first edition is not too uncommon.*

For the sixth scarcity-of-scarcities we would unqualifiedly name a book which fails to appear on any of the lists above. To our mind it is second only to ROMNEY PRINGLE *in sheer unbelievable rarity. We refer to Victor L. Whitechurch's* THRILLING STORIES OF THE RAILWAY (*1912*), *a paperback featuring Thorpe Hazell, fanatical devotee of vegetarianism and setting-up exercises and probably the first railway-detective to appear in covers. This book seems to have vanished almost completely into the limbo of lost literature. In twenty years we have seen but three copies of this book, and only one of them intact.*

So, continuing our policy of bringing to EQMM readers the rarest of the old as well as the finest of the new, we now offer you a Thorpe Hazell railway ratiocination. There are nine "cases in the private note-book" of Thorpe Hazell, all interesting, but one outstanding. Dorothy L. Sayers considers "Sir Gilbert Murrell's Picture" the most ingenious of Thorpe Hazell's investigations. We are in full accord with Miss Sayers's critical judgment. To the best of your Editor's knowledge this story has appeared in the United States only once — in one of Miss Sayers's anthologies. It deserves reprinting as a modern classic.

SIR GILBERT MURRELL'S PICTURE

by VICTOR L. WHITECHURCH

THE AFFAIR of the freight car on the Didcot and Newbury branch of the Great Western Railway was of singular interest, and found a prominent place in Thorpe Hazell's note-book. It was owing partly to chance,

and partly to Hazell's sagacity, that the main incidents in the story were discovered, but he always declared that the chief interest to his mind was the unique method by which a very daring plan was carried out.

He was staying with a friend at Newbury at the time, and had taken his camera down with him, for he was a bit of an amateur photographer as well as book-lover, though his photos generally consisted of trains and engines. He had just come in from a morning's ramble with his camera slung over his shoulder, and was preparing to partake of two plasmon biscuits, when his friend met him in the hall.

"I say, Hazell," he began, "you're just the fellow they want here."

"What's up?" asked Hazell, taking off his camera and commencing some "exercises."

"I've just been down to the station. I know the station master very well, and he tells me an awfully queer thing happened on the line last night."

"Where?"

"On the Didcot branch. It's a single line, you know, running through the Berkshire Downs to Didcot."

Hazell smiled, and went on whirling his arms round his head.

"Kind of you to give me the information," he said, "but I happen to know the line. But what's occurred?"

"Well, it appears a freight train left Didcot last night bound through to Winchester, and that one of the cars never arrived here at Newbury."

"Not very much in that," replied Hazell, still at his "exercises," "unless the car in question was behind the brake and the couplings snapped, in which case the next train along might have run into it."

"Oh, no. The car was in the middle of the train."

"Probably left in a siding by mistake," replied Hazell.

"But the station master says that all the stations along the line have been wired to, and that it isn't at any of them."

"Very likely it never left Didcot."

"He declares there is no doubt about that."

"Well, you begin to interest me," replied Hazell, stopping his whirligigs and beginning to eat his plasmon. "There may be something in it, though very often a car is mislaid. But I'll go down to the station."

"I'll go with you, Hazell, and introduce you to the station master. He has heard of your reputation."

Ten minutes later they were in the station master's office, Hazell having re-slung his camera.

"Very glad to meet you," said that functionary, "for this affair promises to be mysterious. *I* can't make it out at all."

"Do you know what the missing car contained?"

"That's just where the bother comes in, sir. It was valuable property. There's a loan exhibition of pictures at Winchester next week, and this car was bringing down some of them from Leamington. They belong to Sir Gilbert Murrell — three of them, I be-

lieve — large pictures, and each in a separate packing case."

"H'm — this sounds very funny. Are you *sure* the car was on the train?"

"Simpson, the brakeman, is here now, and I'll send for him. Then you can hear the story in his own words."

So the brakeman appeared on the scene. Hazell looked at him narrowly, but there was nothing suspicious in his honest face.

"I know the car was on the train when we left Didcot," he said in answer to inquiries, "and I noticed it at Upton, the next station, where we took a couple off. It was the fifth or sixth in front of my brake. I'm quite certain of that. We stopped at Compton to take up a cattle car, but I didn't get out there. Then we ran right through to Newbury, without stopping at the other stations, and then I discovered that the car was not on the train. I thought very likely it might have been left at Upton or Compton by mistake, but I was wrong, for they say it isn't there. That's all I know about it, sir. A rum go, ain't it?"

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Hazell. "You must have made a mistake."

"No, sir, I'm sure I haven't."

"Did the engineer notice anything?"

"No, sir."

"Well, but the thing's impossible," said Hazell. "A loaded car couldn't have been spirited away! What time was it when you left Didcot?"

"About eight o'clock, sir."

"Ah! — quite dark. You noticed nothing along the line?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You were at your brake all the time, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir — while we were running."

At this moment there came a knock at the station master's door and a porter entered.

"There's a passenger train just in from the Didcot branch," said the man, "and the driver reports that he saw a car loaded with packing cases in Churn siding."

"Well, I'm blowed!" exclaimed the brakeman. "Why, we ran through Churn without a stop — trains never do stop there except in camp time."

"Where is Churn?" asked Hazell, for once at a loss.

"It's merely a platform and a siding close to the camp between Upton and Compton," replied the station master, "for the convenience of troops only, and very rarely used, except in the summer, when soldiers are encamped there."

"I should very much like to see the place, and as soon as possible," said Hazell.

"So you shall," replied the station master. "A train will soon start on the branch. Inspector Hill shall go with you, and instruction shall be given to the engineer to stop there, while a return train can pick you both up."

In less than an hour Hazell and Inspector Hill alighted at Churn. It is a lonely enough place, situated in a vast, flat basin of the Downs, scarcely relieved by a single tree, and far from

all human habitation, with the exception of a lonely shepherd's cottage some half a mile away.

The "station" itself is only a single platform, with a shelter and a solitary siding, terminating in what is known in railway language as a "dead end" — that is, in this case, wooden buffers to stop any cars. This siding runs off from the single line of rail at a switch from the Didcot direction of the line.

And in this siding was the lost car, right against the "dead end," filled with three packing-cases, and labeled "Leamington to Winchester, via Newbury." There could be no doubt about it at all. But how it had got there from the middle of a train running through without a stop was a mystery even to the acute mind of Thorpe Hazell.

"Well," said the inspector, "we'd better have a look at the switch. Come along."

There is not even a signal-box at this primitive station. The switch is actuated by two levers in a ground frame, standing close by the side of the line, one lever unlocking and the other operating the switch.

"How about this switch?" said Hazell as they drew near. "You use it so occasionally that I suppose it's kept out of action?"

"Certainly," replied the inspector. "A block of wood is bolted down between the end of the switch rail and the main rail, fixed as a wedge — ah! there it is, you see, quite untouched; and the levers themselves are locked — here's the keyhole in the ground frame. This is the strangest thing I've ever come across, Mr. Hazell."

Thorpe Hazell stood looking at the levers, sorely puzzled. They *must* have been worked to get that car in the siding, he knew well. But how?

Suddenly his face lit up. Oil evidently had been used to loosen the nut of the bolt that fixed the wedge of wood. Then his eyes fell on the handle of one of the two levers, and a slight exclamation of joy escaped him.

"Look," said the inspector at that moment, "it's impossible to pull them off," and he stretched out his hand towards a lever. To his astonishment Hazell seized him by the collar and dragged him back before he could touch it.

"I beg your pardon," he exclaimed, "hope I've not hurt you, but I want to photograph those levers first, if you don't mind."

The inspector watched him rather sullenly as he fixed his camera on a folding tripod stand he had with him, only a few inches from the handle of one of the levers, and took two very careful photographs of it.

"Can't see the use of that, sir," growled the inspector. But Hazell vouchsafed no reply.

"Let him find out for himself," he thought.

Then he said aloud: "I fancy they must have had that block out, inspector — and it's evident the switch must have been operated to get the car where it is. How it was done is a problem, but, if the doer of it was anything of a regular criminal, I think

we might find *him*."

"How?" asked the puzzled inspector.

"Ah," was the response, "I'd rather not say at present. Now, I should very much like to know whether those pictures are intact?"

"We shall soon find that out," replied the inspector, "for we'll take the car back with us." And he commenced undoing the bolt with a spanner, after which he unlocked the levers.

"H'm — they work pretty freely," he remarked as he pulled one.

"Quite so," said Hazell, "they've been oiled recently."

There was an hour or so before the return train would pass, and Hazell occupied it by walking to the shepherd's cottage.

"I am hungry," he explained to the woman there, "and hunger is Nature's dictate for food. Can you oblige me with a couple of onions and a broomstick?"

And she talks today of the strange man who "kept a swingin' o' that there broomstick round 'is 'ead and then eat them onions as solemn as a judge."

The first thing Hazell did on returning to Newbury was to develop his photographs. The plates were dry enough by the evening for him to print one or two photos on gaslight-paper and to enclose the clearest of them with a letter to a Scotland Yard official whom he knew, stating that he would call for an answer, as he intended returning to town in a couple of days. The following evening he received a note from the station master, which read:

"Dear Sir, — I promised to let you know if the pictures in the cases on that car were in any way tampered with. I have just received a report from Winchester by which I understand that they have been unpacked and carefully examined by the Committee of the Loan Exhibition. The Committee are perfectly satisfied that they have not been damaged or interfered with in any way, and that they have been received just as they left the owner's hands.

"We are still at a loss to account for the running of the car onto Churn siding or for the object in doing so. An official has been down from Paddington, and, at his request, we are not making the affair public — the goods having arrived in safety. I am sure you will observe confidence in this matter."

"More mysterious than ever," said Hazell to himself, "I can't understand it at all."

The next day he called at Scotland Yard and saw the official.

"I've had no difficulty with your little matter, you'll be glad to hear," he said. "We looked up our records and very soon spotted your man."

"Who is he?"

"His real name is Edgar Jeffreys, but we know him under several aliases. He's served four sentences for burglary and robbery — the latter a daring theft from a train — so he's in your line, Mr. Hazell. What's he been up to, and how did you get that fingerprint?"

"Well," replied Hazell, "I don't quite know yet what he's been doing. But I should like to be able to find him if anything turns up. Never mind

how I got the print — the affair is quite a private one at present, and nothing may come of it."

The official wrote an address on a bit of paper and handed it to Hazell.

"He's living there just now, under the name of Allen. We keep such men in sight, and I'll let you know if he moves."

When Hazell opened his paper the following morning he gave a cry of joy. And no wonder, for this is what he saw:

Mystery of a Picture

"The Committee of the Loan Exhibition of Pictures to be opened next week at Winchester are in a state of very natural excitement brought about by a strange charge that has been made against them by Sir Gilbert Murrell.

"Sir Gilbert, who lives at Leamington, is the owner of several very valuable pictures, among them being the celebrated 'Holy Family,' by Velasquez. This picture, with two others, was despatched by him from Leamington to be exhibited at Winchester, and yesterday he journeyed to that city in order to make himself satisfied with the hanging arrangements, as he had particularly stipulated that 'The Holy Family' was to be placed in a prominent position.

"The picture in question was standing on the floor of the gallery, leaning against a pillar, when Sir Gilbert arrived with some representatives of the Committee.

"Nothing occurred till he happened to walk behind the canvas, when he astounded those present by saying that the picture was not his at all, declaring that a copy had been substituted, and stating that he was absolutely certain on account of certain private marks of his at the back of the canvas, which were now missing. He admitted that the painting itself in every way resembled his picture, and that it was the cleverest forgery he had ever seen; but a very painful scene took place, the hanging Committee stating that the picture had been received by them from the railway company just as it stood.

"At present the whole affair is a mystery, but Sir Gilbert insisted most emphatically to our correspondent, who was able to see him, that the picture was certainly not his, and said that, as the original is extremely valuable, he intends holding the Committee responsible for the substitution which, he declares, has taken place."

It was evident to Hazell that the papers had not, as yet, got hold of the mysterious incident at Churn. As a matter of fact, the railway company had kept that affair strictly to themselves, and the loan Committee knew nothing of what had happened on the line.

But Hazell saw that inquiries would be made, and determined to probe the mystery without delay. He saw at once that if there was any truth in Sir Gilbert's story the substitution had taken place in that lonely siding at Churn. He was staying at his London flat, and five minutes after he had read the paragraph had called a hansom and was being hurried off to a friend of his who was well-known in art circles as a critic and art historian.

"I can tell you exactly what you want to know," said he, "for I've only just been looking it up, so as to have an article in the evening papers on it. There was a famous copy of the picture of Velasquez, said to have been painted by a pupil of his, and for some years there was quite a controversy among the respective owners as to which was the genuine one — just as there is today about a Madonna be-

longing to a gentleman at St. Moritz, but which a Vienna gallery also claims to possess.

"However, in the case of 'The Holy Family,' the dispute was ultimately settled once and for all years ago, and, undoubtedly, Sir Gilbert Murrell held the genuine picture. What became of the copy no one knows. For twenty years all trace of it has been lost. There — that's all I can tell you. I shall pad it out a bit in my article, and I must get to work on it at once. Goodbye!"

"One moment — where was the copy last seen?"

"Oh! the old Earl of Ringmere had it last, but when he knew it to be a forgery he is said to have sold it for a mere song, all interest in it being lost, you see."

"Let me see, he's a very old man, isn't he?"

"Yes — nearly eighty — a perfect enthusiast on pictures still, though."

"Only *said* to have sold it," muttered Hazell to himself, as he left the house; "that's very vague — and there's no knowing what these enthusiasts will do when they're really bent on a thing. Sometimes they lose all sense of honesty. I've known fellows actually rob a friend's collection of stamps or butterflies. What if there's something in it? By George, what an awful scandal there would be! It seems to me that if such a scandal were prevented I'd be thanked all round. Anyhow, I'll have a shot at it on spec. And I *must* find out how that car was run off the line."

When once Hazell was on the track of a railway mystery he never let a moment slip by. In an hour's time he was at the address given him at Scotland Yard. On his way there he took a card from his case — a blank one — and wrote on it, "From the Earl of Ringmere." This he put into an envelope.

"It's a bold stroke," he said to himself, "but if there's anything in it, it's worth trying."

He asked for Allen. The woman who opened the door looked at him suspiciously, and said she didn't think Mr. Allen was in.

"Give him this envelope," replied Hazell. In a couple of minutes she returned, and asked him to follow her.

A short, wiry-looking man, with sharp, evil-looking eyes, stood in the room waiting for him and looking at him suspiciously.

"Well," he snapped, "what is it — what do you want?"

"I come on behalf of the Earl of Ringmere. You will know that when I mention Churn," replied Hazell, playing his trump card boldly.

"Well," went on the man, "what about that?"

Hazell wheeled round, locked the door suddenly, put the key in his pocket, and then faced his man. The latter darted forward, but Hazell had a revolver pointing at him in a twinkling.

"You — detective!"

"No. I told you I came on behalf of the Earl. That looks like hunting up matters for his sake, doesn't it?"

"What does the old fool mean?" asked Jeffreys.

"Oh! I see you know all about it. Now, listen to me quietly, and you may come to a little reason. You changed that picture at Churn the other night."

"You seem to know a lot about it," sneered the other, but less defiantly.

"Well, I do — but not quite all. You were foolish to leave your fingerprints on that lever, eh?"

"How did I do that?" exclaimed the man, giving himself away.

"You'd been dabbling about with oil, you see, and you left your thumbprint on the handle. I photographed it, and they recognized it at Scotland Yard. Quite simple."

Jeffreys swore beneath his breath.

"I wish you'd tell me what you mean," he said.

"Certainly. I expect you've been well paid for this little job."

"If I have, I'm not going to take any risks. I told the old man so. He's worse than I am — he put me up to getting the picture. Let him take his chance when it comes out. I suppose he wants to keep his name out of it — that's why you're here."

"You're not quite right. Now, just listen to me. You're a villain, and you deserve to suffer; but I'm acting in a purely private capacity, and I fancy if I can get the original picture back to its owner that it will be better for all parties to hush this affair up. Has the old Earl got it?"

"No, not yet," admitted the other, "he was too artful. But he knows where it is, and so do I."

"Ah — now you're talking sense! Look here! You make a clean breast of it, and I'll take it down on paper. You shall swear to the truth of your statement before a commissioner for oaths — he need not see the actual confession. I shall hold this in case it is necessary; but, if you help me to get the picture back to Sir Gilbert, I don't think it will be."

After a little more conversation, Jeffreys explained. Before he did so, however, Hazell had taken a bottle of milk and a hunk of whole-meal bread from his pocket, and calmly proceeded to perform "exercises" and then to eat his "lunch" while Jeffreys told the following story:

"It was the old Earl who did it. How he got hold of me doesn't matter; perhaps I got hold of him — maybe I put him up to it — but that's not the question. He'd kept that forged picture of his in a lumber room for years, but he always had his eye on the genuine one. He paid a long price for the forgery, and he got to think that he *ought* to have the original. But there, he's mad on pictures.

"Well, as I say, he kept the forgery out of sight and let folk think he'd sold it, but all the time he was in hopes of getting it changed somehow for the original.

"Then I came along and undertook the job for him. There were three of us in it, for it was a ticklish business. We found out by what train the picture was to travel — that was easy

enough. I got hold of a key to unlock that ground frame, and the screwing off of the bolt was a mere nothing. I oiled the switch well so that the thing should work as I wanted it to.

"One pal was with me — in the siding, ready to clap on the side-brake when the car was running in. I was to work the switch, and my other pal, who had the most awkward job of all, was on the freight train — under a tarpaulin in a car. He had two lengths of very stout rope with a hook at each end of them.

"When the train left Upton, he started his job. Freight trains travel very slowly, and there was plenty of time. Counting from the back brake-van, the car we wanted to run off was No. 5. First he hooked No. 4 car to No. 6, fixing the hook at the side of the end of both cars, and having the slack in his hand, coiled up.

"Then, when the train ran down a bit of a decline, he uncoupled No. 5 from No. 4, standing on No. 5 to do it. That was easy enough, for he'd taken a coupling staff with him; then he paid out the slack till it was tight. Next he hooked the second rope from No. 5 to No. 6, uncoupled No. 5 from No. 6, and paid out the slack of the second rope.

"Now you can see what happened. The last few cars of the train were being drawn by a long rope reaching from No. 4 to No. 6, and leaving a space in between. In the middle of this space No. 5 ran, drawn by a short rope from No. 6. My pal stood on No. 6, with a sharp knife in his hand.

"The rest was easy. I held the lever, close by the side of the line, coming forward to it as soon as the engine passed. The instant the space appeared after No. 6 I pulled it over, and No. 5 switched to the siding, while my pal cut the rope at the same moment.

"Directly the car had run by and off, I reversed the lever so that the rest of the train following took the main line. There is a decline before Compton, and the last four cars came running down to the main body of the train, while my pal hauled in the slack and finally coupled No. 4 to No. 6 when they came together. He jumped from the train as it ran slowly into Compton. That's how it was done."

Hazell's eyes sparkled.

"It's the cleverest thing I've heard of on the line," he said.

"Think so? Well, it wanted some handling. The next thing was to unscrew the packing case, take the picture out of the frame, and put the forgery we'd brought with us in its place. That took us some time, but there was no fear of interruption in that lonely part. Then I took the picture off — rolling it up first — and hid it. The old Earl insisted on this. I was to tell him where it was, then he was going to wait for a few weeks and get it himself."

"Where did you hide it?"

"You're sure you're going to hush this up?"

"You'd have been arrested long ago if I were not."

"Well, there's a path from Churn

to East Ilsley across the downs, and on the right hand of that path is an old sheep well — quite dry. It's down there. You can easily find the string, fixed near the top."

Hazell took down the man's confession, which was duly attested. His conscience told him that perhaps he ought to have taken stronger measures.

"I told you I was merely a private individual," said Hazell to Sir Gilbert Murrell. "I have acted in a purely private capacity in bringing you your picture."

Sir Gilbert looked from the canvas to the calm face of Hazell.

"Who are you, sir?" he asked.

"Well, I rather aspire to be a book collector; you may have read my little monogram on *Jacobean Bindings?*"

"No," said Sir Gilbert, "I have not had that pleasure. But I must inquire further into this. How did you get this picture? Where was it — who —?"

"Sir Gilbert," broke in Hazell, "I could tell you the whole truth, of course. I am not in any way to blame. By chance, as much as anything else, I discovered how your picture had been stolen and where it was."

"But I want to know all about it. I shall prosecute — I ——"

"I think not. Do you remember where the forged picture was seen last?"

"Yes; the Earl of Ringmere had it — he sold it."

"What if he kept it all this time?" said Hazell, with a peculiar look.

There was a long silence.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert at length. "You don't mean *that*. Why, he has one foot in the grave — a very old man — I was dining with him only a fortnight ago."

"Ah! Well, I think you are content now, Sir Gilbert?"

"It is terrible — terrible! I have the picture back, but I wouldn't have the scandal known for worlds."

"It never need be," replied Hazell. "You will make it all right with the Winchester people?"

"Yes — yes — even if I have to admit I was mistaken, and let the forgery stay through the exhibition."

"I think that would be the best way," replied Hazell, who never regretted his action.

"Of course, Jeffreys ought to have been punished," he said to himself; "but it was a clever idea — a clever idea!"

"May I offer you some lunch?" asked Sir Gilbert.

"Thank you; but I am a vegetarian."

"I think my cook could arrange something; let me ring."

"It is very good of you, but I ordered a dish of lentils and a salad at the station restaurant. But if you will allow me just to go through my physical training ante-luncheon exercises here, it would save me the trouble of a more or less public display at the station."

"Certainly," replied the rather bewildered baronet; whereupon Hazell threw off his coat and commenced whirling his arms like a windmill.

"Digestion should be considered *before* a meal," he explained.

Most serious students of the detective story agree that the three outstanding French masters were Émile Gaboriau, Gaston Leroux, and Maurice Leblanc (Georges Simenon is not French, he is Belgian). The great Gallic triumvirate flourished in times when the detective story tended to be overlong rather than undershort. It comes as a stunning surprise, therefore, to discover that nearly forty years ago Maurice Leblanc wrote what we now call a short-short story, and that this curious little anecdote, this vignette of villainy, is not only unknown to American fans but was never, so far as we can check, included in any of Leblanc's published books.

Maurice Leblanc, as every schoolboy knows, created Arsène Lupin, the world's champion detective-rogue and one of the real imperishables of the genre. Among his many brilliant accomplishments, Lupin is famous for having assumed more aliases and disguises than all his colleagues in crime put together. At various times in his career Lupin has called himself Prince Rénine, Paul Sernine, Luis Perenna, Monsieur Lenormand, Jim Barnett, Paul Daubreuil, Captain Jeanniot, Horace Velmont, Bernard d'Andrézy, Désiré Baudru, Cavaliere Floriani, Jean Daspry, Ralph de Limézy, Jean d'Enneris, Victor Hautin, and le Duc de Charmerace.

Now read Leblanc's only short-short story and decide for yourself if a certain gentleman and sportsman, Prince Metcherski, is not really the great Arsène himself in one of his more obscure and more playful moments, but still up to his old tricks. "A Gentleman," like its title, is admittedly old-fashioned, unsophisticated, and even somewhat juvenile — but it has a vintage charm.

A GENTLEMAN

by MAURICE LEBLANC

I HAVE never met a more distinguished man, one of more charming manners, or one who inspired me with more sympathy and involuntary deference.

It was in the train from Paris to Havre that we made acquaintance and fell into conversation. A delightful interview of which I shall retain a lasting memory, of which I have every reason to retain a lasting memory.

His foreign accent lent to his voice a peculiar fascination. A gentleman in every sense of the word, a sportsman as I have rarely had the opportunity to encounter, he had upon things which were nearest to my heart ideas, precise, just, enthusiastic, and reasonable.

What was my surprise when, having

said to him incidentally that I was trying to sell my twenty-four horse-power machine in order to purchase a speedier one, I heard him answer that he had never been in an automobile.

"It is not the desire which is lacking," he added. "I will even confess that I have been on the point of purchasing one in Paris, but it is so hard to understand. It seems to me so complicated."

"No, indeed, not at all," I hastened to say. "Come and see mine one of these days. I will explain the mechanism in a few words and you will see how simple it is. That will decide you, perhaps."

"Perhaps. I don't know."

At Havre his servant, who had traveled in the same train with us, hastened to the door of our compartment. He was a very gentlemanly-appearing person, this valet — well-dressed, freshly gloved, and with highly polished shoes. He treated his master with the utmost deference, and offered his arm to aid him to alight.

My traveling companion drew from his pocketbook a visiting card, which he extended to me, saying:

"Well, it is understood, in two days I will go to see you at Montivilliers, Villa des Ifs, is it not? And you shall try to persuade me."

Having parted from him, I glanced at his card. Prince Metcherski.

"Well, well!" I thought. "My machine is sold!"

And I rubbed my hands in glee, for really if things had not turned out in this way, I don't know what I should have done. Tremendous expenses, losses at the races and at baccarat, youthful follies — I was, as they say, down and out. So Prince Metcherski appeared to me like a savior.

As for devoting the sum which the sale of my twenty-four horse-power would bring me to the purchase of a forty horse-power, as I had allowed him to understand, it is needless to say that I did not even dream of it.

So I waited. One day passed, then two, then three. I was beginning to be uneasy. But on the fifth day a carriage stopped before the Villa des Ifs. The prince alighted, accompanied by his valet.

He was extremely courteous, and after a turn in the garden, whose ill-kept condition he did not appear to notice, he expressed his admiration of my home, which embarrassed me, for the place had lost much in my eyes since it had been mortgaged. Finally the prince exclaimed:

"Shall we go to see her?"

We went to see her.

A nod of the head and a little click of the tongue proved to me that if the prince did not understand the mechanical part of an automobile, he knew at least how to appreciate at their just value the outward beauty and the harmonious proportions of one.

"And now," he said, after a moment, "let me understand ——"

I began the explanation in terms as clear as possible. But immediately I received the impression that he did

not understand and that he never would understand. I made use of words still more simple, and I spoke only of the essential parts. Pains lost! His questioning look revealed to me a mind absolutely blank to the most elementary notions of mechanics.

In despair, he summoned his valet.

"Come here, Jean. Perhaps you will prove less stupid than I.

Jean was as stupid as his master. The prince burst out laughing.

"No, you will surely be of no assistance. After all, is it absolutely necessary to understand? If I have a good chauffeur, everything will be all right."

But at least the convenience and comfort of the car appealed to him.

He jumped into it and seated himself in the driver's place. He seemed to enjoy being there.

"Perfect! Perfect!" he said. "Nothing could be more comfortable. But the canopy; there is a canopy?"

Of course there was.

Jean and I put up the canopy, not without difficulty.

Then all the accessories were necessary, the hampers, the umbrella stand, the lamps.

"And there's plenty of room for two. Come up here beside me, Jean. Why, there's a lot of elbowroom."

He examined the steering wheel, the brakes, the various controlling parts, and asked me:

"Then to start, you say that you must do this — and that?"

"This first, then that," I answered.

He did this first, then that. The machine trembled, took a rapid turn that evinced the skill of an experienced chauffeur, and flew away at full speed, leaving me standing there, petrified.

From that day to this I have never seen Prince Metcherski — nor my twenty-four horse-power, either.

'Tec tintype of Georges Simenon: Born in Liège, Belgium; reporter on the Liège "Gazette" at the age of sixteen; published his first novel, AU PONT DES ARCHES (ABOARD THE ARK), *at seventeen; married at twenty and moved to Paris. In the next ten years, between the ages of twenty and thirty, Georges Simenon published no less than two hundred popular novels under sixteen pseudonyms! Imagine that — twenty novels a year for a full decade! And they said Edgar Wallace was prolific! Why, no English or American writer, past or present, holds a candle to Simenon on sheer productivity! True, these two hundred novels were not detective stories — his first detective book was written after (shall we call it?) the apprenticeship of ten score novels; but once Georges Simenon began to invade the Coast of Criminalia, he produced a full-length Inspector Maigret novel at the incredible rate of one each month! What Simenon did in his spare time is not recorded, and while some of his books reveal the unavoidable singe of jet-propulsion, the great body of his detective work in print is of a high order of excellence. Simenon is a master of mood, as even the following episode in the career of detective G.7 so clearly proves . . .*

THE TRACY ENIGMA

by GEORGES SIMENON

(Translated by Anthony Boucher)

THE telephone rang one night around eleven, and we decided to take the train an hour later. These are, in brief, the facts that led G.7 to this sudden decision:

That very day, at four in the afternoon, the inhabitants of Tracy, a very small village on the banks of the Loire, saw the body of a young girl floating down the river.

They fished it out from a small boat. Though there was no sign of life, a vineyard worker drove off to Pouilly to fetch a doctor, who worked in vain at artificial respiration for two hours.

The girl did not revive. No one recognized her. The mayor was away. The Rural Guard was not available, there were no police. The police corporal from Pouilly was on his rounds through the region and couldn't arrive until the next day.

The railroad watchman had a small unused shack behind his house. They put the body there. At sundown the crowds dispersed.

Around ten in the evening the watchman left his house to signal a freight train. As he passed by the shack where the body had been laid, he was astonished to observe that the door, which he himself had closed,

was ajar.

Frightened, he sought out his wife. They approached with a lantern, peered through the opening . . .

The body had vanished! There was nothing in the shack!

We reached the town by six in the morning, and from the station we could see the shack and the peasants excitedly clustered about it.

The village of Tracy lies on the right bank of the Loire, at a spot where the river widens and is bestrewn with large sand islands. Across from the village you can see the chateau of Sancerre; but it's a long way around to the suspension bridge which leads to the chateau and to Saint-Satur, so that the village is relatively isolated.

The people whom we could see were almost all workers from the vineyards. Some of them, alerted by the watchman, had spent the night on the road on the lookout for the police.

The Pouilly police had arrived shortly before us. Now they were engaged in general questioning which was producing confused results.

One fact was certain: The girl, after two hours of artificial respiration, had shown no sign of life, and the doctor had unhesitatingly signed the death certificate.

But one old boatman had troubled the spirits of his listeners by relating the story of a curious event he had once witnessed: The daughter of a river boatman had fallen into the stream during her father's absence and had not been fished out till an hour later; two doctors had declared her dead; the father had come back, hurled himself on his child's body, and devoted himself to rhythmic movements for all of ten hours; the girl finally, bit by bit, had come back to life . . .

It would be impossible to describe the effect of this narrative. Suddenly the people began to tremble, and the watchman kept his eyes fearfully averted from the shack.

G.7 had seen no reason to announce his official position. We were there simply as curious spectators — to listen to everything and see everything. Though it was August and the weather had been dry for two weeks, a few from the crowd were persistently trying to find prints in the hard-baked dirt of the road.

The corporal of police had no notion what to do. He kept taking notes on whatever anyone wished to tell him, and had blackened page after page of his notebook.

Around ten in the morning came the first startling development. A carriage arrived from Loges, another village much like Tracy, situated four kilometers upstream. A large woman emerged in great distress.

She cried out. She wept. She groaned. An old peasant followed her in silence.

"It was my daughter, wasn't it?"

Someone began to describe the drowned girl and her clothes. The people argued; they couldn't agree on the color of her hair. But there was no

possible doubt: The drowned girl was Angélique Bourriau, whose parents had just arrived from Loges.

The father was so crushed by the discovery that he could not speak a word. He stared about stupidly. But the mother talked enough for two, her voice shrill and voluble.

"It's a trick of that Gaston's, for sure . . ."

People began to listen. They learned that Angélique, who was nineteen, had been smitten with a clerk in the tax office at Saint-Satur, a youth who hadn't a sou to his name, hadn't even performed his military service yet.

Of course the Bourriaus opposed the marriage. They had their eye on another bridegroom, a worker from the Pouilly vineyards, a solid rustic of thirty.

The marriage was to have taken place two months later.

G.7 and I were the first to reach Saint-Satur, leaving police, parents, and spectators still clustered around the empty shack.

It was eleven when we entered the Tax Collector's office. The clerk who greeted us at the window was Gaston himself — Gaston Verdurier, to give him his proper name.

He was a tall young man of twenty, with feverish eyes and lips that trembled at the slightest emotion.

"Please come outside for a moment."

"But . . ." Verdurier pointed at the clock, which was far short of the noon hour.

"Would you rather I talked here? It's about Angélique . . ."

The clerk hastily seized his cap and followed us outside.

"What time was it when you left her yesterday afternoon?"

"But . . . What do you mean? I didn't see her . . ."

"You loved her, didn't you?"

"Yes . . ."

"She loved you?"

"Yes."

"You didn't want her to belong to another?"

"It isn't true . . . !"

"What? What isn't true?"

"I didn't kill her!"

"But you knew something about it?"

"No . . . Yes . . . They found her, didn't they?"

"Yes, they found her. And in a few moments the police will be here . . ."

"Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter. What do you know? Why did you insist, before I gave any hint of my business, that you didn't kill her?"

"Because I knew Angélique would never accept that marriage. She kept telling me she'd sooner die . . ."

"And you?"

We were crossing the suspension bridge. Far away we could see the red roofs of Tracy.

"Me? I was going crazy . . ."

"Did you work in your office yesterday afternoon? Don't bother to lie; I can ask your boss."

"No. I asked for time off . . ."

"And you saw Angélique."

"Yes . . . Near Loges . . . We

went for a walk together . . ."

"When you left her, she was alive?"

"Yes!"

"And you didn't see anybody lurking around? Grosjean, for instance — that is the name of the man she was supposed to marry, isn't it?"

"I didn't see him . . ." The young man was gasping with anguish, his face sweating, his lips white. "Are we going to see her?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Oh . . . We're going . . . to . . ." He stopped.

"Well? Haven't you the guts to go through with it?"

"Oh, yes! I . . . But you've got to understand . . ." And suddenly he burst out sobbing.

G.7 let him weep. He said not another word to him until we arrived at the watchman's house, where the crowd parted to let Gaston Verdurier through.

The young man hid his face in his hands. He asked, "Where is she?"

But already the girl's mother was vehemently apostrophizing him and the scene was beginning to grow chaotic, at once tragic and grotesque.

The police corporal intervened. "He'll answer for this at Pouilly!" he said, seizing the youth by the wrist.

Verdurier was mad with suffering. I think I have never seen a human face so tortured. His eyes sought ours as though he counted on us to rescue him.

"I didn't kill her, I swear it!" he shouted as they pushed him into a cart to take him to the city.

And when the cart was a hundred meters away you could still hear his sobs.

All this had happened so rapidly and in so curious an atmosphere that I had not even tried to form an opinion of the case.

You could have shown me the girl restored to life and I shouldn't have been surprised. You could have told me that her official fiancé had killed her and I shouldn't have lifted an eyebrow.

It was a splendidly sunny day. The watchman's white house glistened.

The people couldn't decide to break up. The confusion of the parents, who had no idea even where their child's body might be, had something intensely dramatic about it, despite the farcical sidelights of the situation.

G.7 had not yet stepped forward officially. He looked about him. He listened.

"All right," he said suddenly to the old boatman who had told the story of the girl brought back to life. "You weren't at Saint-Satur yesterday evening?"

"Sure. I live there."

"And you didn't go to the café?"

"I dropped in for a drink. But why do you want to know?"

"You told your story there?"

"What story?"

G.7 had apparently heard enough. He turned his back indifferently and signaled me to follow him.

"No hurry," he said. "There's a

train for Pouilly at two. In the meantime we've time to lunch at the inn and sample the local white wine."

"But . . ."

"But what?" he asked, in the most natural manner, just as though we'd come down here for a breath of country air and a taste of the local products.

So I knew that he had just reached the solution of the case.

Two hours later we sat facing Gaston. His head hung low, his glance was evasive as he obstinately defended himself against the accusations of the police captain.

There were tears in his eyes. His face was marked with purple spots. His nails were gnawed to the quick.

"I didn't! It isn't true!" he sobbed with a mixture of rage and humility. "I didn't kill anybody!"

"No . . ." G.7's voice was calm. "You didn't even kill yourself . . ."

I was far from understanding that phrase. But Gaston started, stared at my friend sharply, with a maddened glint in his eye.

"How . . . how do you know . . .?"

There was a bitter smile on G.7's lips, a terribly human smile.

"All I had to do was look at you and I understood. Understood that at the last moment you wouldn't have the guts. The last kiss . . . the last embrace . . . the desire to die rather than give each other up! Angélique leaps into the river . . . And then you, suddenly coming to your senses, watching the body float off downstream, drawing back, standing there, motionless, a chilling fear in your heart . . ."

"Shut up!"

"That evening, at Saint-Satur, you drop in at the café. You need a drink to calm you. There's a man there, telling a horrible story. They've fished a girl out of the river at Tracy. They think she's dead. But he's got his own ideas, he has. He knew a case like that once . . . You listen. You're trembling all over. Maybe you imagine Angélique being buried alive. . . . You rush outdoors. You get to Tracy. You steal the body and carry it off into the woods . . .

"You try to bring her back!

"At least, that's what I want to believe. It's better that way, isn't it? You stole the body to redeem yourself. It wasn't, it couldn't have been to make sure that Angélique *was* dead? That she couldn't come back and accuse you of your cowardice?"

The young man let out a cry of horror.

"But she was dead enough," G.7 went on. "Dead for good . . ." He lowered his voice. "All right. Tell us where you left her."

And outside, five minutes later, he took a deep breath and sighed. "I don't know why . . . but I'd sooner have been handling a good nasty crime . . ."

Like me, no doubt, he felt a certain weight oppressing his chest as two policemen accompanied the twenty-year-old lover toward the woods.

Walter Duranty, one of the most famous foreign correspondents of our time, is especially noted for his factual reports on Russia, where for many years he represented the New York "Times." His career in the Soviet Union was climaxed in 1933 when he was chosen to accompany Maxim Litvinoff on the Russian statesman's first visit to the United States.

Born in England, Mr. Duranty was educated at Harrow, Bedford, and Cambridge, and won classical scholarships at all three colleges. He has been called "a straight reporter, with a flair for the bizarre." That flair has led Mr. Duranty into writing fiction. His success in two different literary fields is proved by his record — he is a Pulitzer Prize winner for reporting and an O. Henry Memorial Prize winner for short-story writing.

"A flair for the bizarre" would also lead a fiction writer — especially so aggressive and adventurous a newspaperman as Walter Duranty is in real life — to tales of crime and violence. In his story, "The Hit that Missed," Mr. Duranty combines his reporting background with his nose for the bizarre: this unusual tale concerns an American news correspondent in Paris (also Mr. Duranty's old stamping ground) who commits a "perfect" murder.

Why the quotation marks in the phrase "perfect" murder? Well, the tall, thin man in the smoking room of the transatlantic liner was listening to an Englishman, an American, and a Frenchman discussing murder. The tall, thin man disagreed with his drinking companions. He said: "The perfect murder is one that no one believes to be murder at all." But when a murder is not discovered, not even suspected, how can there be a story about it? Think it over, dear reader: it is a bizarre paradox.

THE HIT THAT MISSED

by WALTER DURANTY

"They do things better in England," said Colonel Hepplethwaite. "Of ninety murders committed in the metropolitan area of London last year the perpetrators were brought to trial in sixty-seven cases and there was only one acquittal. Forty-three of the murderers were hanged, twenty were sentenced to penal servitude for life, three were judged insane, and as I say, there was one acquittal. In fifteen of the remaining twenty-three cases the police were practically certain who had committed the crime but there was insufficient evidence to secure a conviction, which leaves only eight murders in a huge city like London that were unsolved mysteries, so to speak."

Dr. Peabody clicked his fingers at the steward. "Bring me a champagne cocktail . . . this infernal boat's roll-

ing again . . . if I'm going to enjoy my lunch . . . yes, Colonel, you're right. But in England you haven't known the delights of Prohibition that gave the gangster business such a boost with us, and there's our big alien population as well. In Boston last year there were two hundred and fifty killings. There were not more than a score of convictions, I'm sure of that, although I've forgotten the exact figures. I know, too, that only three of the murderers went to the chair."

"But there is a distinction," said the Frenchman, Dubois. "You speak of killings, and the Colonel referred to murders. Surely I am right in supposing that gang killings in your country are not really murder in the usual sense of the word but the results of a guerrilla, a little war, between different groups. They are —"

"But they're murders just the same," Hepplethwaite interrupted, "just as your *crimes passionnels* in France are murders, although the murderer is often acquitted, especially if she is a young and pretty woman."

"Oh, that happens at home too," said the American, laughing. "We not only acquit women murderers but give them a fat contract in the movies or vaudeville. But for all that the French police are pretty good, aren't they, Dubois?"

The Frenchman nodded. "Yes," he said, "we catch murderers all right in France, even if sometimes the young and pretty ones escape. In the long run, few of them go unpunished."

"That's what I say," resumed Hepplethwaite. "'Murder will out' — that's an old English proverb and it's true. Take these ninety cases in London —"

"Just wait a minute, Colonel," said the fourth member of the party in the liner's smoking room, a tall thin man who had hitherto taken no part in the discussion. "You are confusing the issue entirely; you speak of ninety murders in London, but what you really mean is ninety open, flagrant murders, ninety murders known to the police. You forget the other ones, the undiscovered crimes," He smoothed his gray hair reflectively with his hand.

The Colonel snorted. "Do you mean to say that our London police don't know when a murder's committed?" he asked indignantly.

The other smiled. "Of course I mean that. I'll go further and say that the fact that the police do know is a proof that the murder is a failure — from an artistic point of view." He waved his hand negligently. "Surely, sir, you must admit that the proof of any successful crime, especially murder, is that it is not discovered."

"I don't understand," said Dr. Peabody. "If nobody knows about it, how can you say it's a murder?"

"You can't say; that's just my point. Nobody can say, and nobody knows, except one person, the murderer himself . . . or herself. Let me give you an instance to explain what I mean, which in a nutshell is simply this: that the perfect murder, the artistic murder, is one that no one believes to be murder at all, in which the

murderer has the best of motives for killing his enemy, but naturally does not wish to pay the penalty for his crime, and succeeds in killing him in such a way that not only does he not pay the penalty, is not even suspected, but that no one for a moment has the slightest idea that a crime has been committed, unless perhaps one might call suicide a crime."

He gulped down his whisky-and-soda, put his hands flat on the table and leaned forward impressively towards Colonel Hepplethwaite. "The trouble with you, my dear sir," he said, "is that you're an Englishman and therefore cannot understand artists; the English never do. When you Englishmen say 'Murder will out' you are talking of banal, bourgeois crimes committed by the average 'man in the street.' But even in England there are other people besides the man in the street, and some of them are artists. . . . Steward, another whisky-and-soda, please, with a little more whisky this time and a little less soda."

The speaker was holding his audience as tight as the Ancient Mariner who clung to the button of the Wedding Guest. He paused for a moment.

"Now, gentlemen," he resumed, "I see that you don't appreciate the point I've been trying to make. Let me give you a definite instance, which happened to come to my notice several years ago. I may say that, although I became aware of the facts by an accident which is of no importance now, I can vouch for their authenticity.

"The story concerns an American news correspondent in France, who was what I believe they call 'second man' in the Paris bureau of one of the principal New York papers. He was a hard-working young man of average intelligence, or a little more, who had a most charming and beautiful wife. His chief, whom we may call Watkins, although that was not his name, was an old friend of this Anderson, a friend of his family, and a senior at college when the younger man was a freshman. He had helped Anderson to get the job in Paris and taught him a great deal about the work of a foreign newspaper correspondent. The two men were friends in the best sense of the word."

He took a drink of the raw spirit and added firmly, "Yes, they were friends, the best of friends, that is to say, they were friends until — until Anderson's home life began to go wrong. He loved his wife, you understand, loved her desperately and deeply, loved her more than his work or himself or anything in life.

"He thought she loved him too until somehow there in Paris he noticed a change in her. The first thing he noticed was that when he came home in the evening she didn't seem interested in what he had been doing that day. Before, when he came home, she asked him what the news was and what stories he had been working on. You know what newspapermen are — they aren't very well paid or anything, but if they're any good they take a tremendous interest in their work.

"Well, as I say, Anderson's wife

shared his interest, and then — somehow — seemed to stop sharing. Then, it seemed to him, she lost interest in him too. He knew what that meant, but there wasn't much that he could do about it. When two people are in love with each other and both cool off equally, there is something lost or broken and it is rather sad, but it doesn't really matter very much or hurt either of them. If one, however, stays in love and the other falls in love with someone else, then it's anguish and hot coals of fire for the one who stays in love. Anderson felt like that but there was nothing he could do about it, except watch and try to find out.

"The first thing which gave him a clue was that all of a sudden his wife began to come constantly to his office. Several times when he'd been out on a job he would return to find her sitting there talking with Watkins, who as head of the bureau had a room of his own beyond the main office where Anderson and two junior reporters worked. Anderson watched and waited until his suspicions became certainty. Watkins was the man, without a doubt. He was a tall and good-looking fellow, a bold lover and a bold gambler — always playing the market and for more than he could afford.

"Then one morning he came into his wife's room — they had separate rooms by this time — when she was having breakfast in bed, and she hastily pushed a letter behind the pillow. She was not so quick that he failed to see that it was written on stationery from his office. He looked at her and a slow wave of red flowed up from her breast to her forehead, but she didn't say anything. Then, at last, he *knew*."

The thin man finished his whisky and ordered another, and pointed a finger at Colonel Hepplethwaite. "I suppose a man like you," he said, "would have done nothing about it. The English always try to ignore unpleasant facts. And you, Doctor, might have gone frankly to your wife and offered her a divorce so that she could marry her lover. And a Frenchman, no doubt, would have shrugged his shoulders and taken a mistress for himself. But Anderson was different. You see, he loved his wife more than anything in the world. He loved her and he didn't want to lose her. He thought a good deal about what he ought to do, and one day he noticed that Watkins had a paper knife on his desk, one of those sharp dagger knives which Japanese samurai use to commit harakiri, with a long thin blade that slides in and slits their bowels, slips in smooth and easy as if it was hot and their flesh was butter. He saw what a dangerous weapon it was and it gave him an idea.

"In the offices of foreign news correspondents, you understand, they always work on Sundays because it's generally known that a story gets a better play on Monday in America, where Sunday is a quieter day than it is in Europe. I mean that all the sporting news and so on has been published in the Sunday paper, and so

there's more space for news from Europe in the Monday edition. Anyway, foreign correspondents think so and always work Sunday afternoons, but without their secretaries, doormen, and so forth.

"So one Sunday about six o'clock, when Anderson came into the bureau with three or four friends who had been to the races with him, he knew that he would find Watkins at work in his private room. He said to his friends, 'You sit here in the reading-room' — it was near the entrance — 'while I go along and look at the evening papers and try to earn my salary. I won't be long, because I expect my boss is there and he's a terribly decent fellow; he'll probably handle anything that has to be sent, if I tell him that I want to go out to dinner with you. I won't be more than half an hour at the outside and there are some magazines here and all the latest papers from New York. You don't mind waiting, do you?' They said no, they didn't mind.

"Then he went into the main room of the office, which was empty because one of the juniors was off on a trip to the South of France where they had had some floods, and the other was to cover the night shift from eleven onwards in the building of one of the Paris newspapers. Anderson sat down and read the papers for a few minutes, then typed out some notes on his machine, and Watkins came in from the inner room. He said, 'Is there anything worth sending?'

"Anderson showed him his notes and they talked a little, and Anderson said he'd like to go out to dinner with his friends because there didn't seem to be much to do. His chief replied, 'That's all right, Joe, I'll take care of this stuff. Just give me those notes of yours and that clipping from the *Temps*, and let's have a glass of beer before you run along.'

"Anderson knew he'd say that; he always said it. They kept the beer in an icebox in the corner. 'All right,' he said, 'I'll bring it along with a couple of glasses.' Watkins took the notes and the clipping and went back to his room. Anderson opened the bottle and poured out the beer, but in the glass for Watkins, his friend, whom he now knew to be his wife's lover, he put some knockout drops, methyl nitrate, or whatever you call it, not many of them, not enough to taint the breath or enlarge the pupils of the eyes; just enough to send a man quickly to sleep for an hour or less. They drank the beer and went on talking.

"After a very few minutes Watkins slumped in his chair and went to sleep. Anderson sat down at his chief's typewriter and began a letter to Watkins' brother, who worked in an insurance office in Los Angeles. He wrote, 'Bill, old man, I'm in a hell of a mess; I'm on the wrong side of the market and far too deep. My accounts are all muddled and . . .'

"Anderson left it at that. Then he took the paper knife by the blade and unbuttoned the other man's vest and unhitched his suspenders and pulled up his shirt, doing it all quietly

and gently so as not to wake him. Doing it quickly and neatly, humming a tune to himself, the *Plume au Vent* tune from Rigoletto about Love and Life being feathers on the breeze, humming the tune to himself as if he felt carefree and happy. He set the hands of the sleeping man upon the hilt of the dagger and fixed the point high up between his ribs and drove it in swiftly and smoothly, like a hot knife through butter, direct and deep in his heart.

"Watkins made no sound but his body arched back in a sudden convulsion, then fell forward on the desk.

"Anderson went to the little washroom next to the private office and washed his chief's glass, holding it carefully by the bottom with a towel so as not to blur the finger marks. Then he washed his hands, although there wasn't much blood on them; there isn't much outward blood when a thin blade pierces the heart; the victim bleeds to death internally. Next he poured some more beer into the glass, still holding it by the towel at the bottom, and whispered gently, 'I drink to your health in hell and to my wife's blue eyes,' and put the glass back on the desk.

"Then he went out through the reporters' office to the reading-room, saying as he went, 'Thanks awfully, old man, and good night,' and added to his friends out there, 'That's the kind of boss to have. There was a story tonight but he knew you folks were waiting, so he said, "Go ahead, Joe; I'll write it, they're waiting; go ahead and have a good time."'

"After that, you understand, the rest was easy. You know what it's like, Monsieur Dubois, in Paris on a Sunday; no one comes into the office and the outer door is shut, and the concierge just pulls the latch for those who go in or out. As I said, the night work is done in the building of whatever French paper you are linked with, so no one found the body until the next morning.

"Then there was a fuss and one of the stenographers fainted. When the police came, they rang up Anderson and he said, 'Why, it's impossible! When I left him last night he was quite all right and as cheerful as could be; indeed my friends and I remarked how kind he was to stay alone in the office and do some work that I should have done. What's that you say, a letter? I didn't know he was writing a letter. He said he was going to write a dispatch for me, the one I had given him some notes about and a clipping from the *Temps*. What . . . he said he's lost money on the Stock Market. . . . Oh, well, I knew he was playing the market, but I didn't know that he'd lost money.'

"It was as simple as that.

"You see, the French don't want scandal about American newspapermen; the French don't like scandal, anyway not that sort of scandal. So they hushed the story up as much as they could, and Anderson hushed it up as much as he could, and the coroner's inquest — you know how things go in such cases — they hushed

the story up too, with a neat little verdict of suicide while temporarily deranged by the strain of overwork. It was as simple as that.

"That's what I mean, gentlemen, by saying that you're all wrong about the percentage of detected murders and of murderers convicted, in Paris or London. This was a murder, but no one ever thought so; no one ever thought there was any crime at all — unless you call suicide a crime. Well, I suppose you want your lunch. I don't feel hungry myself, so I think I'll take a stroll round the deck. Perhaps we might meet this evening and have a rubber of bridge." He scrawled a signature across the steward's check for the drinks and walked out of the smoking-room.

The other three looked at each other in silence. Then Dubois laughed. "What a strange fellow," he said. "Where did you find him, Peabody?"

"Oh, we were chatting on the deck," said the doctor, "and he suggested a drink before lunch, and I said you were waiting for me and brought him along. That was a most curious story, and he told it with such intensity. I wonder who he is."

Colonel Hepplethwaite beckoned to the head steward, who happened to be passing. "George," he said, "do you know the gentleman who was sitting with us just now?"

The steward nodded. "Oh, yes, sir, he's crossed with us several times — Mr. Howard Jackson. He writes for one of the American newspapers, perhaps you've seen his name. A very nice gentleman, and always before so gay and cheerful, he'd keep the 'ole smoking-room in a roar. But" — he lowered his voice — "poor Mr. Jackson, he's had very 'ard luck this year. His best friend committed suicide recently, been speculating on the market, it seems, and got 'imself into a jam. That was a great blow to Mr. Jackson, because they were very old friends. And then on top of that his wife ran away from him with someone from his own office in Paris, one of his subordinates, a much younger man. Mr. Jackson isn't one to talk much, but I can see he's quite broken up about it."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Roy Vickers left Oxford (no, he was not sacked) because he was convinced that wealth and fame awaited him in his chosen profession — writing. For two solid years he wrote novels, short stories, articles, and plays, and all he had to show for his efforts was a collection of typewritten rejection slips. Bowing to the Great God Economo (although only on a part-time basis), Mr. Vickers became a salesman, dividing his energies between huckstering insurance, cigarettes, and houses, and continuing to write. It didn't work out: he realized that he was ruining his chances for literary success by leading a "double life." So he started all over again — as a "ghost writer." Immediately Mr. Vickers found that he had struck pay dirt; he built a high-powered industry for himself, turning out sermons, speeches, and lectures, all "strictly business" at four-and-six pence per thousand words (including finished manuscript). But Fate still carried a concealed weapon — a monkey-wrench: an ill-advised political article broke a scandal over Mr. Vickers's head and he retired from the ghost racket to accept a modest job on a popular weekly periodical. Here he rose to the exalted position of "Competitions Editor" and all went well until that Alice-in-Wonderland moment when 416 contestants all won first prize! Again Mr. Vickers beat a hasty retreat. He began afresh writing articles and once more the Wheel of Fortune turned his way: in the next three years he wrote 1,000 articles on soup-to-fish and sold two-thirds of them. But success can become boring: the monotony of a steady stream of checks instead of the old torrent of rejection slips drove Mr. Vickers back to writing fiction. But success can also become a habit: now he sold everything he wrote! Came an interlude (called the War to End War) when Mr. Vickers traded in the mightier weapon for the sword — but that is now over (we hope). Mr. Vickers is writing steadily again. You may have read his work and not known it — he has used pseudonyms, including John Spencer, David Durham, and Sefton Kyle . . .*

THE HOUSE-IN-YOUR-HAND MURDER

By ROY VICKERS

THE murder of Albert Henshawk, headlined as the House-in-Your-Hand Mystery, became a test case for plainclothes constables who had put in for promotion. It is still used to emphasize that the most trivial remark of a murderer — such as a comment on a work of commercial art — may contain the raw material of a clue.

Henshawk, who specialized in financing the purchase of houses, had

been running an advertisement showing, in an outstretched palm, a picturesque country cottage, with the slogan: *A House in Your Hand is Worth Two in the Clouds.* It is noteworthy that the picture in the advertisement was a photograph of a model. The whole model, including the outstretched hand, covered an area about equal to that of a pocket handkerchief. It was kept in Henshawk's office under a glass dome, flanked by the bronze statuette with which Henshawk was battered to death. It is an ironical comment on this amiable egotist that the statuette was the work of Henshawk, and the subject — Henshawk himself.

A tubby, chubby little man in the early forties, he was naïvely proud of himself and his not inconsiderable talent as an artist. "Neat bit of work, that model, eh! Supplied the idea myself," he would say, if you were a business acquaintance. Your attention would be directed to the seventeenth-century thatched cottage, to the oaks on one side of it, to the sloping meadow in which a cow drank at a sluggish brook, to a somewhat startling confusion of farm stock in the foreground.

"And, mind you, it isn't a studio fake, except for those pigs and things. Made from a drawing. A little effort of my own." You were urged to inspect a charcoal drawing — complete with farm stock but minus the outstretched palm — hung in a somewhat elaborate frame. "Of course, I'm only an amateur, but you can see it's drawn from life."

The last statement was confirmed, after the murder, by a number of experts, consulted independently. Each said, in his own words, that if the model had been a work of fancy it would have exhibited certain essential differences. Architects, also consulted independently, passed the house as structurally and historically correct; surveyors agreed that the layout of the land contained no absurdity.

The murder took place on February 16th, 1938, at about six forty-five, in Henshawk's office in Gorlay House, Westminster. After lunching at the Redmoon Restaurant, Henshawk had spent the afternoon at his club, discussing business with an official of a big investment trust, for which he was, in effect, an agent.

At a few minutes past six, when his staff had left, with the exception of his secretary, he entered his room by the private door, which opened directly on the corridor. In the wall on your right as you entered by this door was another door, now ajar, to the staff room, in which Miss Birdridge was waiting.

She heard his key, then his voice talking to a companion. Of the latter she had only an oblique view. But she was able to state that he was between forty and fifty, of medium height, regular features, and with an iron-grey mustache.

"I must have a word with my secretary — shan't be a minute," Henshawk was saying. "Suppose you look about until I get back. I think you'll

be pleased." He went into the staff room, leaving the communicating door open.

"Miss Birdridge, I simply must get that report off tonight. So will you go and have a meal right away, and be back here at seven sharp." Henshawk had a booming voice: the other man must have overheard him. "Oh, and you might 'phone Mrs. Henshawk that I shan't be home till about ten and I'll eat in Town."

There was nothing unusual in this. Miss Birdridge was a middle-aged woman with no home ties, who appreciated a restaurant dinner at the firm's expense and the extra payment for late work. Henshawk lingered in the doorway while she reported an item of minor importance, but she noticed that his attention had shifted to the other room.

"Ah! It caught your eye at once, old man. Neat bit of work, eh! Made from that drawing of mine on the wall there."

Then the other man's voice: "But, my dear fellow, that damned cow spoils the whole thing! And why is it perched on a giant's hand? Makes it look like a cartoon."

"You're not far off. I've been using it for an advertisement display. I felt sure you wouldn't mind. After all —"

At that point the communicating door was closed. Miss Birdridge was sure that it was exactly at that point, and sure that she had reported the exact words used by each man.

She went out to dinner, returning as Big Ben was striking seven. In the meantime the communicating door had been used and was again ajar. A couple of minutes later, having equipped herself for work on the report, she went into the inner office, to find Henshawk sprawling face downwards, over his chair patently murdered. She observed no more than this before rushing back into the outer office and calling the police.

By midnight, Detective Inspector Karslake had a clear outline. For about forty minutes, during which he had smoked four of Henshawk's cigarettes, the murderer had sat in the client's chair, with his back to both doors.

At about six-forty, Henshawk's wife had knocked on the private door. Henshawk had opened the door but had stepped into the corridor to speak to her. He told her, she said, that he was engaged with a client, so could not take her home. He himself expected to be home late.

Over her husband's shoulder Mrs. Henshawk had seen a man sitting in the client's chair with his back towards her. She did not take particular notice of him, because, she said, being a client he was of no interest to her. She was somewhat hurt because her husband had apparently forgotten that he had asked her to call for him at the office.

After getting rid of his wife, Henshawk had probably sat down again in his chair. But a few minutes later he had got up and turned his back, whereupon the other had struck him on the back of the head with the stat-

uette, causing almost instant death.

At the cupboard-toilette the murderer had washed bloodstains from his hands. He had not removed bloodstains from the soap well. He had left the statuette immersed in the basin.

Although his time was running perilously short, he had lingered in order to remove a drawing from its frame on the wall. As this drawing was the original from which the House-In-Your-Hand model was made, the incident gave emphasis to the remark, overheard by Miss Birdridge, seeming to connect the deceased with the cottage depicted in the model.

The murderer left by the outer office, within two minutes of seven o'clock, carrying the drawing loosely wrapped in tissue paper. In the hall he asked the porter to call him a taxi. He was getting into it when Miss Birdridge returned, though she noticed no more than that a man was getting into a taxi, carrying something flat and loosely wrapped in tissue paper. He told the driver to take him to the Westminster Station of the Underground. Nothing further was known of his movements.

"The porter is no good, sir," said young Rawlings. "All he can do is a 'middle aged, middle height, middling well-dressed gentleman with a mustache' — which of course will be shaved off by now."

"Never mind his mustache — he has practically left us his address, hasn't he!" snorted Karslake. He had recently had several big successes and was becoming a trifle didactic.

"Yes, sir — that cottage!" said Rawlings, who had not yet learned how to handle seniors.

"I guessed that myself," snapped Karslake. "Where is that cottage? What's it called?"

Rawlings slunk away and woke Miss Birdridge by calling her on the telephone.

But Miss Birdridge did not know, had always thought the cottage was an imaginary one until she had overheard the murderer's reference to it. Next he rang Mrs. Henshawk, who was equally unhelpful. Her husband was a prolific amateur artist, but she knew nothing about art and he never talked to her about his hobby.

"All right then — we'll advertise for that cottage," said Karslake. "The papers will make a news story of it, with picture. Warn all stations in the U. K. to study that picture in the Press and report to us if the cottage is in their district."

In his Appreciation for the Chief, Karslake wrote: "An unpremeditated murder (cigarettes) by a man on familiar terms with deceased, who was urging Henshawk to do something important enough to make the latter forget his appointment with his wife (Mrs. Henshawk's admitted annoyance). Mrs. Henshawk's interruption broke the trend of their talk. Henshawk rejected the proposition, whereupon the other lost his temper and struck with the nearest object, not necessarily intending to kill. The murderer owns, or has some direct or indirect interest in, the cottage (theft

of drawing: remark reported by Miss Birdridge — 'I felt sure you wouldn't mind' i.e., use of cottage as advertisement). There should be little difficulty in tracing such a cottage."

Karslake had Miss Birdridge's report under his hand as he wrote. Yet he missed the clue-value of that other remark about "that damned cow."

True, the murder was, in the legal sense, unpremeditated. But it might be argued that Harold Ledlaw had been unconsciously premeditating the murder for eighteen years, though he did not know that the victim would be Henshawk.

Ledlaw had been waiting outside Gorlay House expecting Henshawk to leave at the end of the office day. But he spotted him at once when he stepped out of the taxi that brought him from the club.

"Hullo, Albert! . . . Dammit, you've forgotten me!"

"I certainly have *not* —" a second's pause"— Harold Ledlaw, of course." He was pumping the other's hand. "You've changed a lot, old man, but I'd have known you at once anywhere. I suppose we shall both soon be what they call middle-aged. Well, I'm jiggered! We must fix something. Are you staying long?"

"I'm not going back to Canada. It has done me proud, but I'm back for keeps. I landed last week. Been getting acclimatized. I'm counting on you to give me the low-down on one thing and another."

"Look here, I'm rushed off my feet, but come up to the office for a few minutes and we'll fix something."

They ignored the lift and walked to the first floor, exchanging the commonplaces of an almost forgotten friendship, for Ledlaw had been in Canada for nearly eighteen years.

At the first pause, which occurred just outside Henshawk's private door, Ledlaw said:

"Whiddon Cottage! I heard some of the timber had been cut. Can you tell me anything about it?"

"It so happens I can tell you quite a lot about it — though I'm not in touch with — er — anyone." He unlocked the private door, said that he must speak to his secretary and, with a fatuous archness, invited the other to look about the office.

The first thing one noticed in that office was the model under its glass dome. Ledlaw stared at it, at first in confusion, then with full recognition.

"My God, what damned cheek, and what the hell does it mean!" he muttered under his breath, then warned himself that he must keep his temper. Albert Henshawk was braying at him from the doorway: he must say something in reply.

"But, my dear fellow, that damned cow spoils the whole thing!" Ledlaw heard his own voice making the protest, and asking what the hand meant, and Henshawk telling him it was a sort of advertisement.

"I felt sure you wouldn't mind. After all, a place like that belongs, at least in its artistic aspect — well, it belongs to England, don't you think!

It symbolizes the urban Englishman's dream of home. And that's my line of business now, Harold — helping the hard-up middle-class to own their homes. I had to put those beastly animals in afterwards on the advice of the advertising experts. You see, the town dweller always fancies he'll do a spot of spare-time farming, the stock to look after itself and pay off the mortgage."

There was a good deal of it, but Ledlaw barely listened. He had already decided that they would not "fix something." He would find out the two things he had come to find out, and then he need never see Henshawk again.

"You were going to tell me about the timber, Albert."

"Ah! Wheels within wheels! I have not seen — er — Mrs. Ledlaw. But I heard last year through a mutual acquaintance — a woman you don't know — that your daughter, Harold, wants to be a doctor. Let's see, she's nearly eighteen now, isn't she? That's a seven-year course. Well — er — my informant said that you would not be asked to make any further contribution. So Mrs. Ledlaw decided to sell the timber in Swallowsbath Rise. Mind you, it won't affect the look of the place, being the other side of the hill."

He had been speaking with some awkwardness which now slipped away.

"When I heard this, I thought perhaps Mrs. Ledlaw might want to sell the whole outfit, as I knew you had bought it outright for her. I went down to see her last year, but she was on holiday and the place was shut up. So I thought I'd sketch it. I wrote to her asking if it was in the market and got a reply, written in the third person, saying no. I don't suppose she remembers me. I haven't seen her since — well, *since*."

So that was that! He had the right to see that his daughter took her medical course in comfort. Now for that other question that must be approached circuitously. Twenty past six. He would have to hurry or he might fumble the showdown he had planned — if indeed it was to be a showdown, of which he was not yet certain.

"There's another thing I want to ask you, Albert. You perhaps remember that, when Ruth divorced me, I withdrew the defense I had previously entered denying infidelity. I then vamoosed to Canada. I want to know whether you believed what that Valerie Carmaen said — that I had been her lover?"

"Really, Harold, after all these years!" Henshawk was definitely embarrassed.

"You knew her. And you knew she was the kind of dirt I wouldn't touch if she were the only female left in the world."

"Yes, yes, Harold! Just as you say!"

"Then you believe she faked that bedroom incident — that my original pleading, which I showed you, stated the truth?"

"Of course, I believe it if you say so! Didn't I tell you at the time that

I believed you! I wondered why you didn't go on with the defense."

"I withdrew the defense because Ruth made it clear that, whatever was proved in court, she would believe me guilty. That broke me up, Albert. Ruth and I hadn't started too well. The first few months had been difficult. But we were just getting right. Life was going to be grand. And then this thing happened."

"But it's more than eighteen years ago, old man!"

"To me it's as if it were yesterday. I know it's an obsession and not quite sane, and all that. But all these years, when I've not been actually working, I've felt much as I felt at the time — humiliated, washed up, finished."

Henshawk was making soothing noises. He looked sympathetic, not afraid. Perhaps, thought Ledlaw, there was no reason why he should be afraid. Perhaps the information he had received about Henshawk had been incorrect. He glanced at the clock — he would know in a few minutes.

"Have you any idea why that girl picked on me? I didn't like her, but I never insulted her. She had no reason to hate me."

"No, of course not! You shouldn't let your mind dwell on it, old man. What about seeing a good psychiatrist?"

"She didn't hate me. She just used me callously because she wanted to be divorced."

He was not thinking now of Henshawk. In the grip of his obsession, he repeated the words he had been repeating for eighteen years.

"She had an income in her own right and could have fixed it with a professional co-respondent for a tenner and a little bother. But what she did to me is worse than positive cruelty, which at least has the excuse of malice or perversion. I think of that woman as the lowest moral type — a moral slug."

"You're working yourself up, Harold. It's bad for you, and it's very distressing for me — ah, excuse me!"

There had come a knock on the private door — the knock for which Ledlaw had been waiting. Both glanced at the clock. It was twenty-two minutes to seven.

Henshawk went to the door. Ledlaw remained still, his back — as Superintendent Karslake had inferred — to both doors. He would let her get well into the room before he turned and faced her. And if she were not *the* woman, he would just acknowledge the introduction and go.

"I am in conference," he heard Henshawk say.

Too late, Ledlaw turned round. Henshawk had stepped into the corridor and was speaking to her there. Ledlaw could see neither. He sprang up, intending to thrust himself into the corridor. But Henshawk had already returned alone and shut the door.

"Only an anxious client! Look here, I don't want to turn you out, old man, but I must get some work ready for my secretary who will be back presently. What about dining with me

at the club tomorrow night?"

Ledlaw saw that a simple bluff would give him the answer he must have.

" 'An anxious client', you said, Albert. Why did you say it?"

"I don't get you, old man."

"Was it your wife, Albert? I ask, because I sent Mrs. Henshawk a wire in your name asking her to call here at six-thirty. I 'phoned it from the Redmoon — where you were lunching. She was a little late." He paused, decided it was safe to add: "I saw her face, Albert. I must apologize for having called *your wife* a moral slug."

Ledlaw got up, actually intending to go. The love of self-torture that accompanies such an obsession as his had something new to feed on. Fate had used him even more vilely than he had known, for Henshawk had been his friend since school days.

But Henshawk, the frank egotist who had delighted in making a statuette of himself, could not endure the loss of face.

"I am sorry you saw Valerie. It can only deepen the tragedy for all three of us. To know all, Harold, is to forgive all. I want you to sit down again and let me explain."

"Go ahead." Ledlaw dropped back into the client's chair. "It might be amusing to hear why she smashed up my life to save herself a tenner. Why, surely, she could have got the tenner from you! And you'd have gladly taken all the bother off her hands."

"I didn't know what she was doing until she had done it," Henshawk began. "And I didn't know the man was you until you yourself told me. It all originated in my refusal to deceive her husband. I'm like that, as you know — I can't bear anything underhand. Well, I went to Carmaen and asked him to divorce her and let us marry. If ever there was a dog-in-the-manger it was Carmaen. He refused. But, being a beast, he gave Valerie to understand that, if it was anybody but myself, he would gladly divorce her. I happened to mention that I had recommended that hotel when you had to run down to Frensmouth for the night, and Valerie ran down too — but without my knowledge."

"But what about your knowledge when I showed you the writ and my defense? You didn't believe that I had been her lover?"

"No, of course not! Naturally, I put it to Valerie. And she refused to budge an inch. Said it was entirely her affair, and that I could take what attitude I pleased. What could I do? Telling you about it wouldn't have made any difference."

"Yet you married her! Built your marriage on the ruin of mine!"

"Ruin of my grandmother's aunt!" exploded Henshawk. Both were standing, glaring at each other across the table. "Can't you see you're pulling your own leg? Ever asked yourself why Ruth didn't believe you? Of *course* she believed you! Your marriage had crashed. D'you think I didn't know that much? Ruth couldn't stick you any longer, and she jumped

at the chance of release which Valerie had given her."

To Ledlaw the words brought horrifying self-suspicion, the glimpse of an utterly unbearable truth. As Henshawk turned his back, Ledlaw snatched up the object nearest his hand and struck. He struck at the image of a self-pitying poltroon, at himself posing and strutting for eighteen years in order to hide from himself the truth that his wife had been unable to endure his affection — that she had been driven to a mean escape.

But what he had actually done was to kill Henshawk.

Returning clarity brought, not remorse, but renewed self-pity.

"Just my luck! I lost my head for half a second and now I shall be hanged."

Not death, but the dreadful ritual of trial and execution, awakened self-preservation. He remembered the danger of fingerprints. When he had washed his hands, he refilled the basin and put the statuette in it. With Henshawk's sponge he wiped the ashtray and the arms of the chair.

"That secretary may have heard him blithering to me about the cottage. I shall be hanged! Steady! I shall just have to bet she didn't hear — or that he hasn't told anybody where it is."

He stood over the model, wondering whether there would be any safety in smashing it.

"That damned cow!" Taut nerves and muscles suddenly relaxed, and he giggled like a schoolgirl. A moment later he had sobered and turned to the charcoal drawing on the wall.

"It looks more realistic without the hand. And the damned cow isn't so pronounced." About to pass on, he turned back on impulse, dipped his hands in the basin and removed the drawing from its frame.

"The outer office would be better — more people turn the handles." With hands still wet he opened the communicating door. In the outer office he caught up a piece of tissue paper and wrapped it loosely round the drawing.

Downstairs the porter was loafing about the hall. If he were to try to slink past, the fellow might think he had stolen the drawing. What was the most ordinary and natural thing to do?

"Get me a taxi, please."

In the taxi he checked his first impulse to leave the drawing under the mat. That drawing must be burned — the mill board was too stiff to be torn in small pieces. He re-wrapped it in the tissue paper.

At Westminster he traveled by Underground to Earl's Court. He was staying at the Teneriffe Hotel, near the station. He emptied a dispatch case and put the drawing in it. He would take it out to the countryside and burn it tomorrow. He had the illusion of forgetting Henshawk and his own peril. Active thought was suspended. He dined in the hotel, and afterwards went back to the West End to a music hall.

The next morning the London

editions carried the photograph of the model. When Ledlaw opened a paper over breakfast he instantly accepted failure.

With a certain coolness he worked out how arrest would come. Ruth would see the picture and the police appeal. As a respectable citizen, she would write to Scotland Yard. A detective would call, would learn from her that she had passed her childhood in the cottage, that her father had been compelled to sell it, that some years later, on her marriage, her husband had bought it and made it over to her, that they had lived in it for a short time. Then the divorce and his departure to Canada. They would hardly need to trace him through the bank. The shipping lists would show that he had arrived six days ago and put up at the Teneriffe Hotel.

At a guess, he would have about forty-eight hours — at worst, twenty-four, unless Ruth telephoned, which was improbable.

Before he died, he wanted to see his daughter. Even more than that, he wanted to know whether Henshawk's taunt had any foundation. In short, he would go at once to the cottage and see Ruth, whether she wanted to see him or not.

In his baggage were some things he had left her in his will — a photograph album of snapshots he had taken during their first year, a packet of her letters to him before marriage, a rare edition of *Canterbury Tales* which her father had given him. In half an hour he had sorted them out.

He put them in the dispatch case on top of the drawing, which no longer had any importance. In his sense of defeat, he thought only that he had been a fool for his pains in bringing it away. He had forgotten that Ruth would be sure to recognize the photograph of the model at once. And she would remember Henshawk's name.

He would take no further precautions against arrest. He would not even shave his mustache.

By the middle of the morning, he was in the train for Hallery-on-Thames. There was no taxi at the little station and no car to be hired in the village, so he had to walk the half mile along the towpath and then tackle the stiff climb up the hillside.

He was hot when he arrived at Whiddon Cottage, and stopped to rest a minute by the oaks. While he was getting his breath, he reflected, with the self-conscious wistfulness of one who believes that his days are numbered, that the beauty of Whiddon was even greater than his memory of it. Set high on a hill on the edge of the Berkshire Downs, there was a clear view of undulating country for fifteen miles. To the rear of the cottage the downland sloped half a mile in a green carpet to the Thames. And now for Ruth.

She opened the door to him. She was a tall woman who had once been pretty and was now handsome, but with an air of masterfulness that was not romantically attractive. Yet at sight of him, he thought, she had

looked afraid.

"Harold! Why have you come?" Her tone was reproachful, but not unfriendly.

"I want to see Aileen. I imagine you will not raise objections."

"Of course not! But she's away for a few days with friends."

"I also wanted to see you. May I?"

It was ridiculously formal, not in the least as he had planned. It chilled them both into small talk. She offered him lunch, and he said he had already lunched, which was untrue. They chattered about Canada and London. He congratulated her on her success as an author.

"Well, of course, only students read my books and only a few of those, though I get good reviews. Harold, is that man who has been murdered the Henshawk you used to know?"

"Yes. You've seen the paper, I gather. I rather took it for granted that you had already notified Scotland Yard. I knew you must recognize the picture, in spite of the pigs and hens and that preposterous cow."

"*Harold?*"

"Yes, Ruth — I killed him." She had guessed before he said it. He added. "Did you know that he married Valerie Carmaen?"

She winced at the name. "No. But that was no reason for killing him."

"He knew that woman had borne false witness against me. I accused him of building his marriage on the ruin of mine. And I lost my temper when he said that you, too, knew it was false — that you had jumped at the chance of getting rid of me. Did you, Ruth?"

She was long in answering. His own tension had vanished. It was as if he were no longer interested in her answer.

"I believed her evidence at the time. But after a few years I began to suspect I was wrong. It would be meaningless to say that I am sorry. As young lovers — well, we were not successful, Harold. In our maturity, I can feel deep friendship as well as gratitude for your generosity."

"Well, my dear, that's that! This case —" he placed the dispatch case by the side of the huge open hearth "— contains a few purely personal knicknacks you might like to keep. I'll leave it." He got up to go.

"Will you be caught, Harold?"

"Yes, I think so. Someone will bring them to this cottage, and then they're bound to find me. I wish I could have seen Aileen."

"If they come here I shall do everything I can to put them off. You may say you do not wish me to make sacrifices on your behalf. I am thinking of Aileen and — frankly — my public, small though it is. If you are tried, and if you give your reason for — doing what you did — the scandal will hurt us both. I want to do everything we can both do — to ensure your escape."

Three quarters of a mile away, the village police sergeant was advising Scotland Yard of the existence of the seventeenth century cottage, known as Whiddon Cottage, identical in

appearance with that in the published picture.

There are more seventeenth century cottages in England than many Englishmen would believe. By midday, local police had reported eighty, of which thirty-three were "possibles." By the end of the week, the grand total for all Britain stood at one hundred and seventy-three "possibles."

In sorting, three features beside the cottage itself were deemed essential: oaks on left of cottage; contiguous, sloping meadow; brook from which it would be possible for an animal, such as a cow, to drink. Sixty of the hundred and seventy-three contained these essentials. But the balance included cottages, of the correct period and dimensions, whose oaks had been felled, whose meadow had been built over, whose brook had been diverted.

Within a week, the sixty "probables" had been inspected, without noteworthy result. In another fortnight, the balance of "possibles" had been eliminated. Detective Inspector Karslake felt that he had been handed a raw deal.

Within twenty-four hours identification of the cottage had become the solitary line of investigation. The comb had been run through all Henshawk's business and social acquaintances. The telegram to Mrs. Henshawk had been telephoned from a call box at the Redmoon Restaurant. This started new hope — until a client reported that he had lunched there with Henshawk, who had excused himself for a few minutes before lunch in order to telephone.

At the end of the month the Press, somewhat grudgingly, complied with the request to reprint the photograph of the model and the police appeal. They helped its newsvalue and at the same time got their own back by writing up the absurdity of such a cottage being untraceable. The comic artists were allowed free play. There was a rather unkind picture of a cow goggling at a model of Scotland Yard on an outstretched palm.

In short, Karslake was unable to advance in any direction. At the end of April the case was allowed to drift into the Department of Dead Ends.

By its very nature it was impossible for the Department to originate any investigation. Cases sent there were, in effect, put into cold storage against the chance of some other case accidentally criss-crossing, the chance of some unrelated circumstance happening to throw a sidelight.

A day or so after the statuette of Henshawk, the model under its glass dome, and the empty picture frame had been sent to Detective Inspector Rason, Karslake made a perfunctory inquiry and received a somewhat voluble answer.

"Well, sir, since you ask me, I think that, instead of looking for the cottage, we ought to have looked for that cow."

It was a dangerous moment, for there had been a comic picture in the *Daily Record* rather in that sense.

"I mean, I think there's something

funny about this case — something psychological, if you understand me."

"I don't," said Karslake.

"There's that remark in the girl's statement about what he calls 'that damned cow.' Why was it a 'damned' cow? And why should it spoil the whole thing? A cow is just what you'd look for in those surroundings. You'd miss it if it wasn't there. Now, suppose that man had been frightened by a cow when he was very little — too young to remember? All his life, though he doesn't know why —"

"Now look here, Rason, if you talk to the Press with a tale of a man frightened of cows, there'll be trouble good and hot, and all of it for you."

"I was thinking of the mental hospitals —"

"So was I — only I don't mean what you mean. It's facts we want, Rason. And if you're lucky enough to find any, then we'll fix 'em up with a theory."

Lucky enough! Rason's past successes in linking apparently unconnected events, in perceiving method in that which seemed blind chance, had never earned him a pat on the back for anything but his "luck." Even when he found Harold Ledlaw, Karslake ungenerously asserted that success was thrown into his lap solely because he chanced to go to a particular picture theatre on a particular night with his sister-in-law.

He had invited his niece, whom he regarded, since his brother's death, as an honorary daughter; but her mother had come instead.

They had arrived too early and were afflicted with a "short," advertising a breakfast food, in which a spirit voice whispered to a young wife that her husband could not do a hard day's work on just tea or coffee. What, therefore, should she put in his cup, held in a slender bejeweled hand? Trick photography then showed a huge cow galloping into the picture and leaping into the breakfast cup.

"Sorry, Meg," said Rason. "I've got to go."

"Why, George, what is it?"

"That damned cow!" chuckled Rason, and left her.

That was not luck, in Karslake's sense. The whole of Scotland Yard might have seen that film without learning anything from its apparent irrelevance. But it was lucky that Ledlaw happened to be at Whiddon Cottage when Rason took Karslake there — though they would have caught him just the same if he had been elsewhere.

The day after his visit to Whiddon, Ledlaw had met his daughter. They had met as strangers and had approved of each other. When a month had gone by and the chances of his escape now seemed overwhelming, Mrs. Ledlaw consented to another meeting.

After the failure of the second Press campaign, Ledlaw was convinced that the trail was utterly lost, and Mrs. Ledlaw concurred. He reasoned that, if the police ever succeeded in finding the cottage, they would inevitably reach him through Mrs. Ledlaw.

Therefore he risked nothing by taking his daughter home — which he did one evening in June. The efficient domesticity he witnessed awakened dormant longings.

"I have been thinking, Ruth," he said at the end of June, "that if anything were to happen — not that we need fear it now — but if it *were* to happen, you would be in a dangerous position for having shielded me. You would certainly go to prison. But if we were married, you could successfully plead that you acted under my domination — absurd, my dear, though it may sound."

On the understanding that it was to be a marriage of companionship only and on the further understanding that he would take steps to pursue his profession of engineering, Mrs. Ledlaw re-married him on July 11th.

By this time he had long lost all sense of peril. Indeed his crime, when he thought of it, seemed no more than a bad dream, of which the details were already blurred.

In August there was a strike at the engineering works, leaving nothing for the supervising engineer to do. So Ledlaw was pottering in the garden when the car containing the detectives arrived towards the end of the morning. Mrs. Ledlaw, hearing the car, came out of the cottage.

Rason, carrying a largish bag, was in nominal charge. As they got out of the car, Karslake muttered: "It's not the place. It's not a bit like it, except for the cottage itself. It's no different from sixty others."

"Mr. Ledlaw?" asked Rason, having learned the name at the local police station. "We are from Scotland Yard. I believe you knew Albert Henshawk?"

"The fellow who was murdered? We wondered." He turned to his wife. "This is Mrs. Ledlaw. We knew an Albert Henshawk slightly some twenty years ago. But we lost touch. Anyhow, what did you want to ask us about him?"

"I want to know when you last saw Albert Henshawk, Mr. Ledlaw."

"But you aren't connecting my husband with the murder?" boomed Mrs. Ledlaw, "because we live in a seventeenth century cottage. The local sergeant told me he had reported this cottage at the time, and it was inspected by a Scotland Yard man."

"It isn't very like the one in the picture, you know," said Ledlaw tolerantly. "True, there are somewhat similar oaks. But there —" he waved his hand at the half-mile of hillside sloping down to the Thames.

Karslake maintained a glum silence, wondering how they would explain Rason's ineptitude. Rason opened his bag, took out the original model of the cottage, and laid it on the ground.

"I admit it's not a bit like it," he said.

Ledlaw smiled, while Karslake looked glummer than ever. Rason continued:

"But that is because — *that damned cow spoils the whole thing*, Mr. Ledlaw."

Ledlaw's face was expressionless.

"I can't follow that," said Mrs. Ledlaw.

"Funny thing, Mrs. Ledlaw. I went to the pictures last night. Saw a film where a whopping big cow appears to jump into a tea cup. Clever bit of photography — messing about with perspective. Made me think of this cow. So I thought — well, look here!"

The last was addressed mainly to Karslake. As Rason spoke, he plucked the figure of the cow from the model.

"Good Lord!" muttered Karslake, gaping from the model to the landscape and back again at the model.

With the removal of the cow, *the meadow had vanished!* It became, in fact, a half-mile of sloping hillside, while the "brook" was instantly recognizable as the Thames, half a mile away in the valley below.

"No deception in this trick, ladies and gentlemen!" chirped Rason, and fitted the peg back into its socket — thus restoring the meadow, with a brook from which a cow was drinking.

"It's messing about with perspective. Got the idea from that cow jumping into the tea cup." he told them all over again. "That's what you meant when you told Henshawk the damned cow spoiled the whole thing, wasn't it, Mr. Ledlaw! I suppose you can account for your movements on the evening of February 16th?"

"I can, if he can't," said Mrs. Ledlaw. "He was here. I remember the date, because he was asking me to marry him."

"*Last* February, madam!" cut in Karslake. "We are informed that you have a grown-up daughter. And that she's known as 'Miss Ledlaw'."

"Yes, but it's all quite simple, really," said Mrs. Ledlaw. "You see, we were divorced some years ago. And then we thought better of it — you look as if you didn't believe me."

"It's of no great importance at the moment, Mrs. Ledlaw —"

"It is of great importance to me," retorted Mrs. Ledlaw. "I insist on your inspecting my marriage certificate. I will not keep you more than a couple of minutes."

When she had gone, Karslake spoke to Ledlaw.

"If you deny that you saw Henshawk that day, Mr. Ledlaw, are you willing to come back with us to London and let us see if Henshawk's secretary and the porter recognize you?"

"Certainly not. You've no case against me. You can darned well bring them down here, if you're so keen to waste your time."

Mrs. Ledlaw was coming from the house carrying his dispatch case, which had become hers.

With horror he suddenly remembered.

"The certificate is not in there, dear. I took it out last week. Don't you remember, Ruth?"

"Oh, of course! How stupid of me!"

But there had been altogether too much anxiety in Ledlaw's voice. Karslake strode forward.

"I'll have that opened, please, Mrs. Ledlaw!"

"Oh, very well, if you wish!" Mrs.

Ledlaw did not know why her husband had shouted that nonsense about removing the certificate. It surely couldn't matter much when they re-married.

Inside the case were: a packet of Mrs. Ledlaw's letters, a photograph album, a rare edition of *Canterbury Tales*, the marriage certificate, a few other oddments and — Henshawk's drawing of the cottage, loosely wrapped in tissue paper.

ABOUT THE STORY: *The first Department of Dead Ends story was Roy Vickers's "The Rubber Trumpet." The moment we finished that tale of The Merry Widower we realized that we had just completed a rare experience — we had read a contemporary classic in the field of the detective short story. Immediately we set about purchasing the story for EQMM, and with it all the other Department of Dead Ends stories written up to that time — a half-dozen or so; further, we urged the author's American literary agent to persuade Mr. Vickers to continue the series by writing originals especially for EQMM — we were that certain from the very beginning that readers of EQMM would find the Department of Dead Ends one of the most fascinating criminological bureaus in all the annals of detection and the stories themselves one of the most satisfying crime series in modern fiction.*

We were not wrong: constant readers of EQMM have testified to that. Like present-day Oliver Twists they keep asking for more.

A short time after we published "The Rubber Trumpet" we received professional confirmation of our critical opinion. One day we traveled to Morningside Heights with Herbert Mayes, the remarkably perceptive editor of "Good Housekeeping," to serve as one of his panel of "guest experts" in the post-graduate course in Journalism at Columbia University. Sitting next to us on the platform was Carl Van Doren, the famous author, critic, biographer, and Pulitzer Prize winner. At the end of the class the "lecturers" tarried long enough to talk shop. Imagine our delight when Mr. Van Doren complimented us on having published "The Rubber Trumpet"! He was so impressed by the story that he considered it one of the finest detective shorts he had ever read. Mr. Mayes was piqued by Mr. Van Doren's enthusiasm and asked to be let in on a good thing. The very next day we sent a copy of EQMM containing "The Rubber Trumpet" to Mr. Mayes by special messenger and subsequently Mr. Mayes added his editorial accolade. Indeed, in the three and a half years since "The Rubber Trumpet" originally appeared in EQMM, we have heard nothing but extravagant praise for that first tale of the Department of Dead Ends. Such connoisseurs as Christopher Morley, Vincent Starrett, Anthony Boucher, Howard

Haycraft, James Sandoe, Charles Honce, E. A. Osborne, and other true aficionados, have written or spoken to your Editor, unanimously selecting that great story for the Honor Roll Award.

Well, the Department of Dead Ends series has grown mightily since the publication of "The Rubber Trumpet." No less than a dozen D.D.E. stories have appeared in EQMM up to the time of this writing. Naturally, the level of quality has varied from story to story — no writer can produce a masterpiece every time he sits in front of his typewriter. Some of the later tales — like "The Man Who Murdered in Public" and "The Case of the Merry Andrew" — are four-star accomplishments; but while it can be said in absolute truth that Mr. Vickers has never written an indifferent Department of Dead Ends tale, no story that followed "The Rubber Trumpet" ever quite equaled that first major triumph.

Then, for EQMM's Second Annual Contest, Mr. Vickers submitted another D.D.E. story — "The House-in-Your-Hand Murder." Perhaps this new story also falls short of "The Rubber Trumpet"; but if it does, it falls short by the narrowest of margins. In your Editor's opinion "The House-in-Your-Hand Murder" is the closest Mr. Vickers has yet come to performing a literary miracle — making lethal lightning strike twice in the same place. Like all the other stories in the series, "The House-in-Your-Hand Murder" projects a kind of realism unmatched in its field. That realism, however, is not drab or prosaic. It is shot through with the credible fantasy which occurs repeatedly in real life — that peculiar touch of the unreal which somehow stamps all works of genuine imagination with the very trademark of reality. You know what we mean — you've read the story . . .

'Q'

The author of "Asphodel," the curiously disturbing tale we now present, was born in Texas on October 11, 1904. He graduated from Williams College, then studied art in New York and Paris. In 1930 he became a newspaperman, and still belongs to that wondrous tribe of legend-making scribblers. His best-known serious novel is THUNDER IN THE EARTH, *which he wrote on a Guggenheim scholarship. In past years Edwin Lanham has been a steady contributor to "Collier's" — in 1946 his serial,* IT SHOULDN'T HAPPEN TO A DOG, *was filmed by Twentieth Century-Fox under the same title and emerged from the Hollywood assembly line as an extremely amusing picture starring Carole Landis and Allyn Joslyn.*

Also last year Mr. Lanham published his first detective novel — SLUG IT SLAY. *Howard Haycraft ranked it as one of the best mystery books of the year, and nearly every other critic agreed. It is interesting to note that Mr. Lanham wisely uses his own experience as the background of his stories.* SLUG IT SLAY *(provocative title!) is a newspaper story, authentically peopled with real newspapermen and newspaperwomen. And in "Asphodel" Mr. Lanham draws on his intimate knowledge of art (in this instance, sculpturing) to produce, in our opinion, one of the ten finest crime stories published during 1944.*

Perhaps we should warn you: "Asphodel" — where souls unbodied dwell — will positively haunt you . . .

ASPHODEL

by EDWIN LANHAM

EDWARD PETERS sat rigid in his chair, with his arms folded across his chest, his head bent slightly, and his eyes fixed on the point of high light on the bronze figurine of a faun. By looking at the faun he could hold the pose, and also he could avoid his wife's eyes.

Usually it was Elaine who avoided meeting his eyes. She had a habit of turning her head away, ever so slightly, so that her vision was out of line with his, so that her face was almost profile, and until recently he had thought it a trick of coquetry.

But as she worked, her eyes moved boldly because she was not looking at him at all. Her sure hands pressed the clay with precision and her eyes studied him with the curious, impersonal concentration of the artist. It was not this impersonal quality that disturbed him, but a strange intensity that was new, that had not been

apparent in the first six months of marriage. He sighed, moving one leg nervously.

Instantly she asked, "Tired, darling?"

"Head still aches." He realized that he had said it plaintively.

"One more sitting and I'll be finished," Elaine said. Her tone was formal, as if he were one of those who paid a thousand dollars for a bust by Elaine Peters. But their conversations had always been either formal or evasive, markedly so in the past few days, since he had found the letter in her handbag.

If he had been able to break through this impersonal barrier, this defense in depth she had developed, they might have talked about the letter and reached an understanding, but now it was impossible.

Before he married her he had known her nature was secretive, but he had thought it due to recent widowhood and to the engaging vagueness that artists seemed to have when not in the consuming concentration of their work. Now he knew that he had never understood this restrained, silent woman, nor the secret melancholy in her eyes that had first attracted him.

The first six months of marriage were, of course, the months and days and hours of knowing each other, of exploring character and emotion, and naturally there was a certain holding back, particularly in a woman who had suffered emotional shock.

But hers was such an instinctive, feminine manner of evasion that Edward had thought it entirely natural until that day in the small bar off Fifth Avenue when she had told him that she had been married twice — not once — before. It was an odd thing, he thought, that the only frank conversations he had with his wife were in public, over a cocktail.

That day he had said stiffly. "I wonder you didn't tell me before. Not that it makes any difference, darling. But, still!"

Her cheeks had been pink and her eyes bright as needles. "Do you mind very much, Edward?"

"I don't *mind.* But, darling, after all." He had turned his glass in a little puddle of spilled drink. "Who was he? What was his name?"

"George Partland. He was rather stuffy." Her laughter had been quick and so high that the noise seemed to make the glasses rattle on the bar. "Let's don't talk about poor George."

He had said bitterly, "So you're Mrs. Partland Rice Peters?"

It was unkind, and he remembered how abruptly the laughter had ceased, how the gray eyes had darkened as she said, "I shouldn't have told you."

He had tried to say that a man in love must know everything, every small experience and major suffering. A man in love had a relentless desire to know these things, he'd wanted to say, even if they hurt him. Instead he'd called the waiter and paid the check.

Edward had resolved to confine

George Partland to the pigeonhole reserved in his ordered lawyer's mind for the things he wanted to know but had no answer for.

Her age, for instance. She had told him she was thirty-one. Not that he cared, but she was young to have two marriages behind her and a successful career as a sculptor assured. And there were other things he wanted to know: her background, her schooling. She was an orphan, she had said. He did not even know the name of the town where she was born.

"Edward, please!" Elaine said sharply. "Your head is drooping."

He straightened, fixed his eyes again on the high light of the bronze faun. His head ached steadily, and the crispness of her tone annoyed him and made him remember the day when he had asked her about her first husband, in spite of his resolve.

"Edward, you have no right to be jealous of my past," she had said firmly. "Least of all of Larry."

"But it isn't jealousy," he had protested. "What was that? Larry! I thought you said his name was George."

For an instant she had actually met his eyes that day, and in their gray depths he'd seen a somber sadness. Her underlip had trembled noticeably.

"Good Lord," he had said. "How many husbands have you had, Elaine?"

Her eyes downcast again, she had waited a long moment, as if pondering whether to give him an answer at all. Then her voice had come, low but steady, "If you must know, four."

"Four?" Edward had dropped into a chair, staring up at her. He had tried a short laugh and accomplished a strange disturbing sound. He had asked, "You mean counting me?"

Again the hesitation, the low voice, "Not counting you, Edward."

"But this is grotesque" was all Edward had been able to say, then he had lost his temper and said many things, while she had stood tensely by the fireplace, with one elbow resting on the mantel, watching him. The expression of her eyes had been the impersonal, appraising expression that was in her eyes now as she worked on his bust. When he quieted he had asked, "I know Rice died, but what happened to the others? Divorced?"

"No, Edward."

He remembered the calm assurance of her tone, and it occurred to him now for the first time that she had met his eyes throughout the incident. She had never looked away, once she had told him there were four.

"They're dead, Edward," she had said flatly.

"All four? All four died on your hands?" he had exclaimed.

Thinking of it, Edward's heart seemed now to rustle like autumn leaves and her answer still was brittle in his ears: "I should think, Edward, you'd be more considerate. It isn't fair to cross-examine me about things past. I've had my share of misfortune and I'd like to forget it."

"But look here, Elaine, I'm your husband," he had said. "We were

married to share our lives, not just a part of them. Marriage is a contract and all the facts should be set forth, all the . . ."

"You're talking like a lawyer." She had waved one hand impatiently. "Oh, Edward, you know you'd have been even more upset if I'd told you in the beginning. I didn't tell you simply because I knew you'd mind."

"Well, I do mind," he'd said. "I mind like hell. I don't mean about George and Larry and whoever else. I mean, damn it, you should have told me. You shouldn't have kept it from me."

But later he had softened. He'd been sympathetic and, holding her hand, had said, "Darling, you've had a lot of bad luck, I know. I suppose I can understand your being secretive about it, but please, let's have no more of it. Let's tell each other everything. What do you say? No more secrets."

She had clung to him then and sobbed and whispered, "No more secrets, darling," and the next few days had been the best of their marriage. But he had been unable to get those four out of his head. He had known that it was pointless to ask about them, but he could not keep them out of his thoughts. After all — four husbands! He had begun to form mental pictures of them, to assign physical characteristics and character traits.

The last one, that man Rice, he knew about. Elaine had met him out on the Coast, been his wife about a year. It was heart disease that had taken Rice, he remembered. Then there was George, who was stuffy. Edward conceived of George as a large man with a prominent chin and rather choking high collars. She had passed Larry off rather casually. But what was his last name? And who in blazes was the other fellow, the one somewhere in between?

It was the one between, the man without a name, who troubled Edward most. Several times he had been on the point of asking about him, but he had not dared return to those bitter days of distrust and evasion. Often he had tried to lead the discussion around to the subject, such as the time they'd been to a cocktail party downtown and had stopped for one more at the Brevoort on a fine spring day when the hedges were set out and sunlight fell on the tables.

"Darling," he had said after the second Manhattan, "where were you born?"

"Where? In a hospital, I suppose. What difference does it make?"

"I mean what part of the country? What town?"

"I haven't any idea, Edward. You know I'm an orphan."

"But you know who your parents were, don't you?"

"Just their names."

"Then where were you brought up? In a foundling home?"

"Edward, are you going to pry again? Please. I had rather a rough childhood and I'd rather not talk about it."

"All right," he had said. "Sorry, Elaine."

But it did seem, he had thought, that she would know her home town. It couldn't be far from the foundling home. It would be in the same state, certainly. She must know the state.

That was the worst part of it, Edward reflected. He couldn't stop thinking about it, even though he told himself that he ought to let the matter drop before he caused a barrier more serious than her secretiveness, than the four husbands, the four dead men.

He wondered now if he should have consulted a psychiatrist. It was unhealthy the way his thoughts had returned to those four men, and he had realized that it could not go on so indefinitely. But there were things he had to know and she should have told him. This other fellow, this in-between man, he had a name, and Edward felt he ought to know it.

One day he had been reading Pope from a handsomely bound library set that Elaine had put in the shelves and he came across a marked passage in a translation from Homer that said:

"*And rest at last where souls unbodied dwell,*
In ever-flow'ring meads of asphodel."

He read it aloud, asked, "You mark it, dear?"

"I?" Elaine had raised her eyebrows. "Of course not. Why should I?"

"I wonder who did," Edward had said. "Asphodel. That's the flower of the dead that blooms in hell. Nice line, too . . . *where souls unbodied dwell, In ever flow'ring meads of asphodel.* Where did the book come from?"

She had moved her shoulders uneasily, her eyes turning aside in evasion. Edward had persisted, "Whom did it belong to? Rice?"

"I believe so." She had risen. "Time for bed, Edward."

"Yes, all right. In a moment."

But Edward had closed the book on his knees and sat staring into the fire. It was an odd passage to have marked, *where souls unbodied dwell,* and he wondered if Rice's hand had made the pencil lines in the margin, if Rice had known about the three before him, if those three had been unbodied, but present and accounted for, as all four were for Edward. It was a beautiful, exotic word, asphodel, and Edward had thought that it somehow suited Elaine. Then he had wondered if he had called her that, this fellow Rice. To himself he might have called her Asphodel.

It was that morbid line of thought again, running through his mind as he sat posing in the studio. That night he had tried to stop it by throwing the book to the floor. But sleepless in bed he had thought of Rice and found him as absorbing as the fellow in between, whose name he did not know. He'd been a newspaperman on the Coast, Edward knew, and rather small potatoes, at

that. An obvious mismatch for Elaine. But the man had liked poetry and he had found that passage and marked it. Asphodel, the pale lily of the dead.

The word repeated itself in Edward's brain now as he sat looking at the bronze faun, and his lips moved silently in saying it. Was it only three days since he had seen the letter in her handbag? It seemed like weeks.

They had been about to go out for the evening, and as Edward opened the door the telephone had rung. Elaine had answered it, and after a moment he heard her clear voice saying, "Wait, I'll get a pencil and jot it down."

She had returned. "Do you have a pencil, Edward?"

"No. Afraid not."

"I must have one." She had opened her handbag, found a pencil, and dropped the bag on a refectory table.

Edward had waited impatiently in the foyer. It had been one of those idle moments when the mind pauses and the eye strays, and for a long time he had looked at the sheet of green paper that had fallen from her bag before he bent over to pick it up. It was because of the letterhead, *Greenvale Cemetery*, that his eyes had dropped to the lines of type below. It was a bill for the upkeep of a cemetery plot in a small town fifty miles from New York. He had hardly digested the fact when Elaine returned.

"Edward," she had said, and her voice had broken off as she stared at the green paper in his hand. Then she had taken it from his fingers and tucked it in her bag, saying, "Shall we go?"

Descending in the elevator he had noticed that her eyes were shining and her face was flushed. She did not explain, and he had asked no questions, but he had thought, which one was it? Was it Rice or George or Larry or the other one, the one in between, whose memory was kept verdant in the Greenvale Cemetery.

During dinner that night he had tortured himself. He should have asked her outright, he had thought. After all, an explanation was due. He hadn't pried. The letter had fallen to the floor, and he had naturally picked it up. But since he'd seen it, the least she could do was explain. He had to know which one it was.

As he lit cigarettes for them both on the way home in a taxi she had said lightly, "Edward, do you know I haven't a commission? Not a single commission."

"Oh, one will come along."

"Not that. I mean for the first time since we were married I'm free. I haven't a commission and I can do what I want. Edward, I'd like to do a head of you."

Edward had been pleased. Her work had always been something apart, and he had been happy to be included in it, flattered that she should wish to do a bust of him.

"So, darling, let's get up early," she had said. "I want to get started on it first thing in the morning."

It was fascinating, he thought now to see the sureness of her strong fingers molding the clay. She was a small woman, with a high-bridged nose that gave her thin face a sharp, flat perspective in profile, and her gray eyes held a light of watchful perception, like a cat's. It was surprising, he thought, that her work should be so powerful, almost monumental.

The first day he had been enthusiastic as he watched his own head taking shape in the clay in massive, oversize planes. But the following morning something had gone wrong and she had mashed his clay nose, saying, "That's all for today, Edward." She had left the studio and he had not seen her again until dinner, when she talked little. He had been depressed and kept thinking of the letter from the Greenvale Cemetery.

As they were having coffee he had asked her bluntly, "Elaine, why the bill from a cemetery?"

Her eyes had met his for an instant, with a gleam of anger. "Edward, what do you mean by going through my pocketbook? Really, I've had enough of your prying."

"It fell out on the floor when you took the pencil. I simply picked it up. Darling, I wasn't prying into your affairs."

"Very well. Then let's not talk about it."

"But I did see it, Elaine, and I'm curious. Why the cemetery plot? No reason why you can't tell me about it, is there?"

"But I *won't* tell you, Edward. I simply will not encourage your morbid curiosity. We've talked this all out and you promised not to pry."

"We also said no secrets. Remember?"

She had risen to her feet and the angry shine of her eyes was almost hatred, surely contempt. She had said sharply, "Edward, we can't go on like this. Really, I think you'd better do something about it. See somebody. How about that man Betty West goes to, Doctor Lewis? Why don't you see him, Edward?"

He had banged his fist on the table. "I don't need a psychiatrist. That's a pretty shabby means of evasion, Elaine. That's no answer to a direct question."

"You need medical attention more than you realize, Edward," she had said quietly. "And I don't intend to answer any questions put like that. Good night."

Now Edward frowned at the faun, rigidly holding his pose. It was the bottle of Scotch he had opened last night, after she left, that had given him the headache. He had known then, while drinking the Scotch, as he was sure now, that there was nothing wrong with his mind, that there was nothing morbid about his curiosity. Perhaps it was unhealthy to keep thinking about those three and the other one, the in-between one, but if she would talk about them openly and honestly he'd be able to get them out of his head. And that letter from the cemetery ought to be

explained. He had the right to an explanation.

But her attitude had always bewildered him, her quick changes of mood. He had been surprised this morning when she prepared to work in the studio and came impatiently to ask if he was ready to pose. He had gazed at her, thinking that he would rather not sit another day staring at the high light on the faun, that he would rather not sit for his bust at all, and he had said, "Let's skip it, Elaine."

"Skip it? Why? I have a very good start, Edward."

"I don't feel so well, Elaine. I have a headache."

She had come a step nearer him. "It will be restful just to sit there and relax. We'll rest every five minutes, if you like."

"But I simply don't feel up to it, Elaine."

She had examined him with hard, impersonal eyes, and there had been a strange authority in her bearing. All she had said was, "Please, Edward," and he had shrugged his shoulders and followed her into the studio.

But now he thought uneasily that at some point in recent weeks their relationship had been reversed: he had taken the defensive and she had become increasingly dominant.

He stared morosely at the bronze faun, thinking that he must escape, he must free his brain of this absorbing doubt. If he was to be charged with prying, why not pry in earnest? Why not find out for himself? Go out to the cemetery and find out. Through the hours of posing he had become excited about it, and there was an anxious urgency in his mind that made him restless, unable to sit still.

"Time for rest," Elaine said. "I'll finish it by dark."

"Finish it? Finish what?"

"The bust, of course."

"Finish it this afternoon?"

"Edward, what's the matter with you? Of course."

"Nothing," Edward said. "Nothing at all." But he had a sense of dread. He could not wait; he must go at once. He could not wait for the bust to be finished. He said, "Elaine, I feel terrible. I'm going for a walk. Got to have some fresh air. I'll be back in no time."

He fled from the studio, caught up his hat in the hall. He found a taxicab at the corner and almost shouted, "Grand Central Terminal."

On the train he was nervous and could not relax. As the afternoon sun sank lower he thought of Elaine in the studio, waiting beside the head of clay, the bust that would never be finished. Never, never be finished. Let her wait in the fading light of the studio with the shadows lengthening the planes of her face, he thought, until eternity. Maybe he was crazy, maybe he should have seen a psychiatrist, but he was determined that the bust would never be completed.

It was a quiet town and a golden glow lay over it as the sun's rays

slanted from just above the hills of the horizon. The caretaker was a strong old man with faded, incurious eyes and an irritating manner of deliberating over each word.

"The Peters plot? Don't know it. Oh, Mrs. Edward Peters. Yes, Mrs. Rice that used to be. Just follow that path until you come to a big marble cross with the name Cowan on it. Turn right and the plot is along by the hedge, with dogwood around it."

The Cowan cross loomed against the sunset sky. Edward turned right on the paved walk, his heels ringing loud in the graveyard. There ahead was the tall green hedge, to the left the grove of dogwood. He turned aside on a gravel path and came to a gladelike plot where the grass was very green and saw what he had come to see.

There were four niches and four urns, and looking down on the dark green grass in the shadowy gloom of dusk were the four heads of the four men, modeled in massive, brooding planes and cast in bronze.

They were here as Edward had known they would be, and he shivered, thinking that here bloomed asphodel, the pale flower of the dead, where souls unbodied dwelt, and was this an act of innocent sentiment or a monument to death? Why had they died and how?

He glanced fearfully around and knew that he would never learn the truth. He would never go back and there would be no fifth bust here amid the dogwood.

Then he walked gently forward over the turf toward the ashes of the previous four, to read the name of the man in between.

Author's Solution to

THE CLUE OF THE MISSING MOTIVE

by CLAYTON RAWSON

"Wilbur Sloan," Merlini explained, "lost money on the horses for the same reason anybody does — because he was unlucky. Since none of the persons with opportunity and means had any reason to kill Wilbur and yet one of them did just that, it obviously means that Wilbur, as unlucky as ever, was killed *by accident — because in the dusk and from across the street the killer mistook him for someone else!*"

"Five foot two," Gavigan said. "Weight, 193. That makes him short and fat. He was wearing a mustache, glasses, and grey hair. The only other person who fits that description is —"

"Vanpool," Malloy finished.

"Yes." Merlini nodded. "But it's even simpler than that. Uncle James was the only one of the lot who, like Wilbur, was out there in the park — on his way across for his evening game of cards with his sister. Therefore, he was the only one of the lot for whom the bank embezzler could have been mistaken. The killer, waiting at the window for Vanpool, shot and killed the wrong man — the one who merely looked like Vanpool."

Gavigan was already on his feet as Merlini finished. "The murderer is, therefore, the one and only person in the house who had a motive for killing Uncle James J. Vanpool —"

"Excuse us," Malloy said, grabbing his hat. "We've got to go and arrest a Count!"

FIRST PRIZE WINNER

Ralph A. Garrison, Jr., Poca, West Virginia

SECOND PRIZE WINNERS

Jane Acton, Whittier, Cal.
Lt. George C. Beattie, Seattle, Wash.
Austin Bridgman, St. Louis, Mo.
Florence Bunn, Cleveland, Ohio
Robert L. Chamberlain, Madison, N. J.
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Murray N. Disraely, Brooklyn, N. Y.
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Mrs. Clara S. Johnston, Stockton, N. J.
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John W. Kidd, Baton Rouge, La.
Florence G. Kulp, Harrisburg, Pa.

Aileen Markham, Ogden, Utah
Faye Mays, Barberton, Ohio
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Virginia H. McNaul, Altoona, Pa.
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Pete Pickard, Glencoe, Ill.
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Barbara Sicherman, Buffalo, N. Y.
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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $3,000 as first prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, six (6) awards of $500 each will be made for the six (6) next best original detective-crime short stories. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at the magazine's regular rates.

2. Stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. Three judges will make the final decision in the Contest: Christopher Morley, noted author, critic, and connoisseur, and member of the Editorial Board of the Book-of-the-Month Club; Howard Haycraft, author of "Murder for Pleasure," the most authoritative history of the detective story; and Ellery Queen.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1947.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas, 1947.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $50 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $50 per story.

8. Every care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

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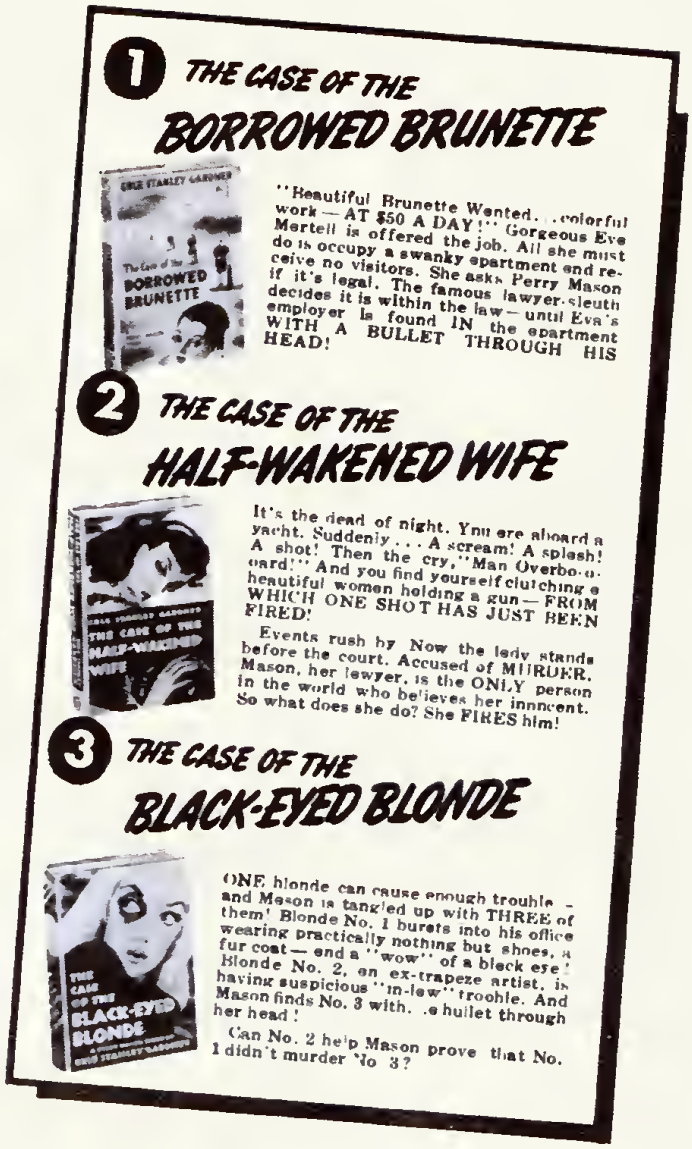

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