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Number 51

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**ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher* • ELLERY QUEEN, *Editor*

570 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

# ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE




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

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Q51

## *An open letter to readers of* ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

*Dear Reader:*

*For many months we have fought to maintain the original 25¢ price for Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Now it is no longer possible to do so and the price is being changed beginning with this issue to 35¢ a copy, $4.00 a year.*

*You may be interested to know what has been happening to publication costs: our paper has gone up 78%, our composition, printing, binding, and handling costs have gone up 84%, and various incidental costs have risen as much and more since 1941, when EQMM was first launched at 25¢ a copy. Until this issue we have absorbed all increases, but it is now no longer possible for us to do so.*

*In this issue we are giving you an extra sixteen pages — more than 8000 additional words. This permits us to bring you a Nero Wolfe novelette by Rex Stout complete in this issue, together with 11 other stories — 12 stories in all! — including some of the best work of Cornell Woolrich, Dorothy L. Sayers, Roy Vickers, O. Henry, Arnold Bennett and Lillian de la Torre. Next month there will be a complete novelette by Erle Stanley Gardner, and stories by Mary Roberts Rinehart, Craig Rice, Brett Halliday, Michael Arlen, Stuart Palmer and others. In the April issue we are looking forward with a great deal of excitement to the publication of the story which won the $3,000 First Prize in the 1947 EQMM Contest.*

*We can assure you that Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine will continue to give you the finest selection of crime and detective stories available in any one magazine, anywhere in the world.*

*Lawrence E. Spivak*, PUBLISHER

# HOW TO WIN $100.00 . . .
# AND HAVE FUN DOING IT!

*A NEW PRIZE CONTEST FOR READERS OF EQMM*

Most of you have noticed that George Salter's cover designs for EQMM never have any connection whatever with the stories inside — or, as the legal phrase goes, any resemblance between a Salter cover and one of the stories selected by your Editor is purely coincidental. The reason for this lack of coordination between picture and text is really quite simple: Production difficulties make it necessary for the cover design to be drawn and plated long before the contents of each issue is definitely decided upon.

Now, one day our Managing Editor, Mildred Falk, got an idea. Why not, she asked, capitalize on this illogical state of affairs? Why not give our readers an opportunity to fictionize Mr. Salter's imaginative and gory crime pictures? It is an established fact that most dyed-in-the-blood fans have a secret yen to write detective stories themselves. Why not give them a chance?

No sooner suggested than done! Here's your golden opportunity to become a writer — golden to the tune of $100.00 in cash! All you have to do is write a short-short story — only three pages of manuscript! — about this month's cover. For the best story submitted we will pay $100.00 — and print the story in EQMM!

Here are the simple rules:

(1) The plot of your story must tie in closely with this month's cover.

(2) Your story must not exceed 1,000 words.

(3) The prize-winning story will be judged on the bases of aptness to the cover, ingenuity of plot, and smoothness of expression. The editorial staff of EQMM will serve as judges and their decision will be accepted as final; in case of ties, however, duplicate prizes will be awarded.

(4) Your entry must be postmarked no later than Feb. 16, 1948 and the winning story will be published in our May issue, on sale April 6, 1948.

(5) No entries will be returned.

(6) The contest is open to everybody except employees of this publishing house and their relatives.

And one last condition, which is more a request than a rule:

(7) We ask all professional writers to please refrain from making submissions — their training and experience would give them too great an advantage. This contest is planned for amateur writers — for the detective-story fans to whom we all owe so much. Give them a chance to win!

Mail your story to: Ellery Queen's Cover Contest
570 Lexington Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.

# STOUT REX . . . WITH EAGLE EYES

*One of the brightest observations ever made about Rex Stout's work in the detective field, and seemingly one of the most penetrating ever advanced by an American critic, is credited to Howard Haycraft. Speaking of Nero Wolfe's "paint-fresh assistant," Archie Goodwin, Mr. Haycraft offers the opinion that Archie is "the one example in history of a Watson who steals the play from his Holmes, and a first-rate Holmes to boot." Your Editor does not agree. True, Archie Goodwin is something that most Watsons are not: he is a three-dimensional character in his own right and easily in the top rank of clever and engaging "narrators"; but when the shouting is over, Archie remains what he started out to be — the great Nero Wolfe's stooge. It is Nero Wolfe who is the criminological catalyst; it is Nero Wolfe who pulls the culprit out of the hat; it is the elephantine and elephant-memoried Nero Wolfe who always makes sense out of nonsense; and infinitely more important, it is Nero Wolfe who emerges as the fuller of two three-dimensional characters. Once you have met Nero, you will never forget him — and that is the test.*

*Consider: Can you ever forget the physical Nero Wolfe? No, the excessively fat man created by Rex Stout is as permanently lodged in your memory as the excessively thin man created by Dashiell Hammett. Can you ever forget the mental Nero Wolfe? No, he is one of our keenest razor-brains — a master manhunter. Can you ever forget the emotional Nero Wolfe? No, his mannerisms, his idiosyncrasies and eccentricities, are such stuff as emotions are made on. But can all this be said of Archie Goodwin? We chuckle at Archie's breeziness and brashness; we revel in the way Archie slings slang; we have more than a sneaking admiration for his wolfish tactics with the female of the species; but we really do not know Archie Goodwin as well as we know Nero Wolfe — physically, mentally, or emotionally. Archie is the modern, streamlined packaging: he is the quick sales appeal which attracts customers and excites comment — but the real merchandise is inside the package.*

*Critics of fiction and detectives of fiction have much in common: they both investigate after the fact; they both seek the truth; and they both have a weakness for subtlety. It is so easy not to see the forest for the trees; it is so easy — both for critics and detectives — to overlook the obvious. For example, Harrison Smith makes this perfectly obvious statement in his "The New Detectives" (Good Housekeeping, September 1947): "[Sherlock Holmes's] nearest equivalent in present-day fiction is Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe, that man of fat, foibles, and egotism who solves the murder while*

*he sits in his armchair, and without whom the best detectives in the New York Police Department are helpless."*

*So obvious — yet so true. The personal eccentricities are all there: Nero Wolfe's orchid-growing and beer-drinking are creative variations on Sherlock Holmes's violin-playing and cocaine-injecting, which in turn were creative variations on Auguste Dupin's day-hibernating and night-rambling. The methods? All laid down irrevocably by Edgar Allan Poe, revitalized by Conan Doyle, and perpetuated by Rex Stout. Yes, the original pattern still flourishes — that is the real secret of the detective story and its popularity. The original theme was an imperishable work of art, and we love every modern variation. That is why it is Nero Wolfe the sleuth, not Archie Goodwin the literary device, who has such a firm grip on our affections . . .*

*With which we now bring you the first in our new series of detective novelettes, each complete-in-one-issue. Within the next six months we shall bring you another Nero Wolfe novelette, and at that time tell you more about the man behind Nero and Archie — the dynamic, outspoken Rex Stout himself.*

# HELP WANTED, MALE

*by REX STOUT*

HE PAID us a visit the day he stopped the bullet.

Ben Jensen was a publisher, a politician, and, in my opinion, a dope. I had had a sneaking idea that he would have gone ahead and bought the inside Army dope that Captain Root had offered to sell him if he had been able to figure out a way of using it without any risk of losing a hunk of hide. But he had played it safe and had cooperated with Nero Wolfe like a good little boy. That had been a couple of months before.

Now, early on a Tuesday morning, he phoned to say he wanted to see Wolfe. When I told him that Wolfe would be occupied with the orchids, as usual, until eleven o'clock, he fussed a little and made a date for eleven sharp. He arrived five minutes ahead of time, and I escorted him into the office and invited him to deposit his big, bony frame in the red leather chair.

After he sat down he asked me, "Don't I remember you? Aren't you Major Goodwin?"

"Yep."

"You're not in uniform."

"I was just noticing," I said, "that you need a haircut. At your age, with your gray hair, it looks better trimmed. More distinguished. Shall we continue with the personal remarks?"

There was the clang of Wolfe's personal elevator out in the hall, and a moment later Wolfe entered, exchanged greetings with the caller and got himself, all of his two hundred and sixty-some pounds lowered into his personal chair behind his desk.

Ben Jensen said, "Something I wanted to show you — got it in the mail this morning," and took an envelope from his pocket and stood up to hand it across. Wolfe glanced at the envelope, removed a piece of paper from it and glanced at that, and passed them along to me. The envelope was addressed to Ben Jensen, neatly hand-printed in ink. The piece of paper had been clipped from something, all four edges, with scissors or a sharp knife, and it had printed on it, not by hand, in large, black type:

**YOU ARE ABOUT TO DIE —**
**AND I WILL WATCH YOU DIE!**

Wolfe murmured, "Well, sir?"

"I can tell you," I put in, "free for nothing, where this came from."

Jensen snapped at me, "You mean who sent it?"

"Oh, no. For that I would charge. It was clipped from an ad for a movie called *Meeting at Dawn*. The movie of the century. I saw the ad last week in *The American Magazine*. I suppose it's in all the magazines. If you could find —"

Wolfe made a noise at me and murmured again at the fidgeting Jensen, "Well, sir?"

"What am I going to do?" Jensen redemanded.

"I'm sure I don't know. Have you any notion who sent it?"

"No. None at all." Jensen sounded grieved. "Damn it, I don't like it. It's not just the usual junk from an anonymous crank. Look at it! It's direct and to the point. I think someone's going to try to kill me, and I don't know who or why or when or how. I suppose tracing it is out of the question, but I want some protection. I want to buy it from you."

I put up a hand to cover a yawn. I knew there would be nothing doing — no case, no fee, no excitement. In the years I had been living in Nero Wolfe's house on West 35th Street, acting as goad, prod, lever, irritant, and chief assistant in the detective business, I had heard him tell at least fifty scared people, of all conditions and ages, that if someone had determined to kill them and was going to be stubborn about it he would probably succeed.

On occasion, when the bank balance was doing a dive, he had furnished Cather or Durkin or Panzer or Keems as a bodyguard at a 100 per cent mark-up, but now they were all very busy fighting Japs, and anyhow we had just deposited a five-figure check from a certain client.

Jensen got sore, naturally, but Wolfe only murmured at him that he might succeed in interesting the police, or that we would be glad to give him a list of reliable detective agencies which would provide companions for his movements as long as he remained alive — at sixty bucks for

twenty-four hours. Jensen said that wasn't it, he wanted to hire Wolfe's brains. Wolfe merely made a face and shook his head. Then Jensen wanted to know what about Goodwin? Wolfe said that Major Goodwin was an officer in the United States Army.

"He's not in uniform," Jensen growled.

Wolfe was patient. "Officers in Military Intelligence on special assignments," he explained, "have freedoms. Major Goodwin's special assignment is to assist me in various projects entrusted to me by the Army. For which I am not paid. I have little time now for my private business. I think, Mr. Jensen, you should move and act with reasonable precaution for a while. For example, in licking the flaps of envelopes — such things as that. Examine the strip of mucilage. Nothing is easier than to remove mucilage from an envelope flap and replace it with a mixture containing a deadly poison. Any door you open, anywhere, stand to one side and fling the door wide with a push or a pull before crossing the sill. Things like that."

"Good God," Jensen muttered.

Wolfe nodded. "That's how it is. But keep in mind that this fellow has severely restricted himself, if he's not a liar. He says he will watch you die. That greatly limits him in method and technique. He or she has to be there when it happens. So I advise prudence and a decent vigilance. Use your brains, but give up the idea of renting mine. No panic is called for. . . . Archie, how many people have threatened to take my life in the past ten years?"

I pursed my lips. "Oh, maybe twenty-two."

"Pfui." He scowled at me. "At least a hundred. And I am not dead yet, Mr. Jensen."

Jensen pocketed his clipping and envelope and departed, no better off than when he came except for the valuable advice about licking envelopes and opening doors. I felt kind of sorry for him and took the trouble to wish him good luck as I escorted him to the front door and let him out to the street, and even used some breath to tell him that if he decided to try an agency, Cornwall & Mayer had the best men.

Then I went back to the office and stood in front of Wolfe's desk, facing him, and pulled my shoulders back and expanded my chest. I took that attitude because I had some news to break to him and thought it might help to look as much like an army officer as possible.

"I have an appointment," I said, "at nine o'clock Thursday morning, in Washington, with General Carpenter."

Wolfe's brows went up a millimeter. "Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. At my request. I wish to take an ocean trip. I want to get a look at a Jap. I would like to catch one, if it can be done without much risk, and pinch him and make some remarks to him. I have thought up a crushing remark to make to a Jap and

would like to use it."

"Nonsense." Wolfe was placid. "Your three requests to be sent overseas have been denied."

"Yeah, I know." I kept my chest out. "But that was just colonels and old Fife. Carpenter will see my point. I admit you're a great detective, the best orchid-grower in New York, a champion eater and beer-drinker, and a genius. But I've been working for you a hundred years — anyhow, a lot of years — and this is a hell of a way to spend a war. I'm going to see General Carpenter and lay it out. Of course he'll phone you. I appeal to your love of country, your vanity, your finer instincts what there is of them, and your dislike of Japs. If you tell Carpenter it would be impossible for you to get along without me, I'll put pieces of gristle in your crabmeat and sugar in your beer."

Wolfe opened his eyes and glared at me. The mere suggestion of sugar in his beer made him speechless.

That was Tuesday. The next morning, Wednesday, the papers headlined the murder of Ben Jensen on the front page. Eating breakfast in the kitchen with Fritz, as usual, I was only halfway through the report in the *Times* when the doorbell rang, and when I answered it I found on the stoop our old friend, Inspector Cramer, of the homicide squad.

Nero Wolfe said, "Not interested, not involved, and not curious."

He was a sight, as he always was when propped up in bed with his breakfast tray. The custom was for Fritz, his chef, to deliver the tray to his room on the second floor at eight o'clock. It was now 8:15, and already down the gullet were the peaches and cream, most of the bacon, and two thirds of the eggs, not to mention coffee and the green tomato jam. The black silk coverlet was folded back, and you had to look to tell where the yellow percale sheet ended and the yellow pajamas began. Few people except Fritz and me ever got to see him like that, but he had stretched a point for Inspector Cramer, who knew that from nine to eleven he would be up in the plant-rooms with the orchids, and unavailable.

"In the past dozen years," Cramer said in his ordinary growl, without any particular feeling, "you have told me, I suppose, in round figures, ten million lies."

The commas were chews on his unlighted cigar. He looked the way he always did when he had been working all night — peevish and put upon but under control, all except his hair, which had forgotten where the part went.

Wolfe, who was hard to rile at breakfast, swallowed toast and jam and then coffee, ignoring the insult.

Cramer said, "He came to see you yesterday morning, twelve hours before he was killed. You don't deny that."

"And I have told you what for," Wolfe said politely. "He had received that threat and said he wanted to hire my brains. I declined to work for him and he went away. That was all."

"Why did you decline to work for him? What had he done to you?"

"Nothing." Wolfe poured coffee. "I don't do that kind of work. A man whose life is threatened anonymously is either in no danger at all, or his danger is so acute and so ubiquitous that his position is hopeless. My only previous association with Mr. Jensen was in connection with an attempt by an army captain named Root to sell him inside army information for political purposes. Together we got the necessary evidence, and Captain Root was court-martialed. Mr. Jensen was impressed, so he said, by my handling of that case. I suppose that was why he came to me when he decided that he wanted help."

"Did he think the threat came from someone connected with Captain Root?"

"No. Root wasn't mentioned. He said he had no idea who intended to kill him."

Cramer humphed. "That's what he told Tim Cornwall, too. Cornwall thinks you passed because you knew or suspected it was too hot to handle. Naturally, Cornwall is bitter. He has lost his best man."

"Indeed," Wolfe said mildly. "If that was his best man . . ."

"So Cornwall says," Cramer insisted, "and he's dead. Name of Doyle; been in the game twenty years, with a good record. The picture as we've got it doesn't necessarily condemn him. Jensen went to Cornwall & Mayer yesterday about noon, and Cornwall assigned Doyle as a guard.

"We've traced all their movements — nothing special. In the evening Doyle went along to a meeting at a midtown club. They left the club at eleven-twenty, and apparently went straight home, on the subway or bus, to the apartment house where Jensen lived on Seventy-third Street near Madison. It was eleven-forty-five when they were found dead on the sidewalk at the entrance to the apartment house. Both shot in the heart with a thirty-eight, Doyle from behind and Jensen from the front. We have the bullets. No powder marks. No nothing."

Wolfe murmured sarcastically, "Mr. Cornwall's best man."

"Nuts," Cramer objected to the sarcasm. "He was shot in the back. There's a narrow passage ten paces away where the guy could have hid. Or the shots could have come from a passing car, or from across the street. We haven't found anybody who heard the shots. The doorman was in the basement stoking the water heater, the excuse for that being that they're short of men like everybody else. The elevator man was on his way to the tenth floor with a passenger, a tenant. The bodies were discovered by two women on their way home from a movie. It must have happened not more than a minute before they came by, but they had just got off a Madison Avenue bus at the corner."

Wolfe got out of bed, which was an operation deserving an audience. He glanced at the clock on the bed table. It was 8:35.

"I know, I know," Cramer growled. "You've got to get dressed and get upstairs to your horticulture. . . . The tenant going up in the elevator was a prominent doctor who barely knew Jensen by sight. The two women who found the bodies are Seventh Avenue models who never heard of Jensen. The elevator man has worked there over twenty years without displaying a grudge, and Jensen was a generous tipper and popular with the bunch. The doorman is a fat nitwit who was hired two weeks ago only because of the manpower situation and doesn't know the tenants by name.

"Beyond those, all we have is the population of New York City and the guests who arrive and depart daily and nightly. That's why I came to you, and for the lord's sake give me what you've got. You can see that I need it."

"Mr. Cramer." The mountain of yellow pajamas moved. "I repeat. I am not interested, not involved, and not curious." Wolfe headed for the bathroom.

Exit Cramer — mad.

Back in the office there was the morning mail. I was getting toward the bottom of the stack without encountering anything startling or promising when I slit another envelope, and there it was.

I stared at it. I picked up the envelope and stared at that. I don't often talk to myself, but I said, loud enough for me to hear, "My goodness." Then I left the rest of the mail for later and went and mounted the three flights to the plant-rooms on the roof. Proceeding through the first three departments, past everything from rows of generating flasks to Cattleya hybrids covered with blooms, I found Wolfe in the potting-room, with Theodore Horstmann, the orchid nurse, examining a crate of sphagnum that had just arrived.

"Well?" he demanded, with no sign of friendliness. The general idea was that when he was up there I interrupted him at my peril.

"I suppose," I said carelessly, "that I shouldn't have bothered you, but I ran across something in the mail that I thought you'd find amusing," and I put them on the bench before him, side by side: the envelope with his name and address printed on it by hand, in ink, and the piece of paper that had been clipped from something with scissors or a sharp knife, reading in large, black type, printed, but not by hand:

**YOU ARE ABOUT TO DIE —**
**AND I WILL WATCH YOU DIE!**

"It sure is a coincidence," I remarked, grinning at him.

Wolfe said without any perceptible quiver, "I'll look over the mail at eleven o'clock as usual."

It was the grand manner, all right. Seeing he was impervious, I retrieved the exhibits without a word, returned to the office, and busied myself with the chores.

It was eleven on the dot when he came down, and began the routine. Not until Fritz had brought the beer

and he had irrigated his interior did he lean back in his chair, let his eyes go half shut, and observe, "You will, of course, postpone your trip to Washington."

I let my frank, open countenance betray surprise. "I can't. I have an appointment with a Lieutenant General. Anyhow, why?" I indicated the envelope and clipping on his desk. "That tomfoolery? No panic is called for. I doubt the urgency of your peril. A man planning a murder doesn't spend his energy clipping pieces out of adver —"

"You are going to Washington?"

"Yes, sir. I have a date. Of course, I could phone Carpenter and tell him your nerves are a little shaky on account of an anony —"

"When do you leave?"

"I have a seat on the six o'clock train."

"Very well. Then we have the day. Your notebook."

Wolfe leaned forward to pour beer and drink, and then leaned back again. "I offer a comment on your jocosity. When Mr. Jensen called here yesterday and showed us that thing, we had no inkling of the character of the person who had sent it. It might have been merely the attempt of a coward to upset his digestion.

"However, we no longer enjoy that ignorance. This person not only promptly killed Mr. Jensen, with wit equal to his determination, but also killed Mr. Doyle, a stranger, whose presence could not have been foreseen. We now know that this person is cold-blooded, ruthless, quick to decide and to act, and an egomaniac."

"Yes, sir. I agree. If you go to bed and stay there until I get back from Washington, letting no one but Fritz enter the room, I may not be able to control my tongue when with you, but actually I will understand and I won't tell anybody. You need a rest, anyway. And don't lick any envelopes."

"Bah." Wolfe wiggled a finger at me. "That thing was not sent to you. Presumably you are not on the agenda."

"Yes, sir."

"And this person is dangerous and requires attention."

"I agree."

Wolfe shut his eyes. "Very well. Take notes as needed. . . . It may be assumed, if this person means business with me as he did with Mr. Jensen, that this is connected with the case of Captain Root. I had no other association with Mr. Jensen. . . . Learn the whereabouts of Captain Root."

"The court-martial gave him three years in the cooler."

"I know it. Is he there? Also, what about that young woman, his fiancée, who raised such a ruction about it? Her name is Jane Geer." Wolfe's eyes half opened for an instant. "You have a habit of knowing how to locate personable young women without delay. Have you seen that one recently?"

"Oh," I said offhand, "I sort of struck up an acquaintance with her. I guess I can get in touch with her. But I doubt —"

"Do so. I want to see her. . . . Excuse me for interrupting, but you have a train to catch. . . . Also, inform Inspector Cramer of this development and suggest that he investigate Captain Root's background, his relatives and intimates, anyone besides Miss Geer who might thirst for vengeance at his disgrace. I'll do that. If Captain Root is in prison, arrange with General Fife to bring him here. I want to have a talk with him. . . . Where is the clipping received yesterday by Mr. Jensen? Ask Mr. Cornwall and Mr. Cramer. There is the possibility that this is not another one like it, but the same one."

I shook my head. "No, sir. This one is clipped closer to the printing at the upper right."

"I noticed that, but ask, anyway. Inspect the chain bolts on the doors and test the night gong in your room. Fritz will sleep in your room tonight. I shall speak to Fritz and Theodore. All of this can easily be attended to by telephone except Miss Geer, and that is your problem. When will you return from Washington?"

"I should be able to catch a noon train back — my appointment's at nine. Getting here around five." I added earnestly, "If I can clear it with Carpenter to cross the ocean, I will, of course, arrange not to leave until this ad-clipper has been attended to."

"Don't hurry back on my account. Or alter your plans. You receive a salary from the Government." Wolfe's tone was dry, sharp, and icy. He went on with it: "Please get General Fife on the phone. We'll begin by learning about Captain Root."

The program went smoothly, all except the Jane Geer number. If it hadn't been for her I'd have been able to make the six o'clock train with hours to spare. Fife reported back on Root in thirty minutes, to the effect that Root was in the clink on government property down in Maryland, and would be transported to New York without delay for an interview with Wolfe.

Cornwall said he had turned the clipping and envelope Jensen had received over to Inspector Cramer, and Cramer verified it and said he had it. When I had explained the situation, Cramer emitted a hoarse chuckle, and said offensively, "So Wolfe is not interested, involved, or curious." I knew Wolfe would have a visit from him. Not pleasant.

On Jane Geer the luck was low. When, before noon, I phoned the advertising agency she worked for, I was told that she was somewhere on Long Island admiring some client's product for which she was to produce copy. When I finally did get her after four o'clock, she went willful on me, presumably because she regarded my phoning five times in one day as evidence that my primal impulses had been aroused and I was beginning to pant. She would not come to Nero Wolfe's place unless I bought her a cocktail first. So I met her a little after five at the Stork Club.

She had put in a full day's work, but, looking at her, you might have

thought she had come straight from an afternoon nap.

She darted her brown eyes at me. "Let me," she said, "see your right forefinger."

I poked it at her. She rubbed its tip gently with the tip of her own. "I wondered if it had a callus. After dialing my number five times in less than five hours."

She sipped her Tom Collins, bending her head to get her lips to the straw. A strand of her hair slipped forward over an eye and a cheek, and I reached across and used the same finger to put it back in place.

"I took that liberty," I told her, "because I wish to have an unobstructed view of your lovely phiz. I want to see if you turn pale."

"Overwhelmed by you so near?"

"No, I know that reaction — I correct for it. Anyhow, I doubt if I'm magnetic right now, because I'm sore at you for making me miss a train."

"I didn't phone you this time. You phoned me."

"Okay." I drank. "You said on the phone that you still don't like Nero Wolfe and you wouldn't go to see him unless you knew what for, and maybe not even then. So this is what for: He wants to ask you whether you intend to kill him yourself or hire the same gang that you got to kill Jensen and Doyle."

"Mercy." She looked my face over. "You'd better put your humor on a diet. It's taking on weight."

I shook my head. "Ordinarily, I would enjoy playing catch with you, as you are aware, but I can't miss all the trains. Because Wolfe's life has been threatened in the same manner as Jensen's was, the supposition is that Jensen was murdered for revenge, for what he did to Captain Root. Because of the cutting remarks you made when Root was trapped, and your general attitude, there is a tendency to want to know what you have been doing lately."

"Nero Wolfe seriously thinks I — did that? Or had it done?"

"I didn't say so. He wants to discuss it."

Her eyes flashed. Her tone took on an edge: "It is also extremely corny. And the police. Have you kindly arranged that when Wolfe finishes with me I proceed to headquarters?"

"Listen, Tiger-eyes." She let me cut her off, which was a pleasant surprise. "Have you noticed me sneaking up on you from behind? If so, draw it for me. I have explained a situation. Your name has not been mentioned to the police, though they have consulted us. But since the police are onto the Root angle they are apt to get a steer in your direction without us, and it wouldn't hurt if Wolfe had already satisfied himself that you wouldn't kill a fly."

"By what process?" She was scornful. "I suppose he asks me if I ever committed murder, and I smile and say no, and he apologizes and gives me an orchid."

"Not quite. He's a genius. He asks you questions like do you bait your own hook when you go fishing, and

you reveal yourself without knowing it."

"It sounds fascinating." Her eyes suddenly changed. "I wonder," she said.

"What is it? — and we'll both wonder."

"Sure." Her eyes had changed more. "This wouldn't by any chance be a climax you've been working up to? You, with a thousand girls and women, so that you have to issue ration books so many minutes to a coupon, and yet finding so much time for me? Leading up to this idiotic frame —"

"Turn that one off," I broke in, "or I'll begin to get suspicious, myself. You know darned well why I have found time for you, having a mirror as you do. I have been experimenting to test my emotional reaction to form, color, touch, and various perfumes, and I have been deeply grateful for your cooperation. I thank you — but that is all."

"Ha, ha." She stood up, her eyes not softening nor her tone melting. "I am going to see Nero Wolfe. I welcome an opportunity to reveal myself to Nero Wolfe. Do I go or are you taking me?"

I took her. I paid the check and we went out and got a taxi.

But she didn't get to see Wolfe.

Since chain-bolt orders were in effect, my key wouldn't let us in and I had to ring the doorbell for Fritz. I had just pushed the button, when who should appear, mounting the steps to join us on the stoop, but the army officer that they use for a model when they want to do a picture conveying the impression that masculine comeliness will win the war. I admit he was handsome; I admitted it to myself right then, when I first saw him. He looked preoccupied and concentrated, but, even so, he found time for a glance at Jane.

At that moment the door swung open and I spoke to Fritz: "Okay, thanks. Is Mr. Wolfe in the office?"

"No, he's up in his room."

"All right; I'll take it." Fritz departed, and I maneuvered into position to dominate the scene, on the doorsill facing out. I spoke to the masculine model: "Yes, Major? This is Nero Wolfe's place."

"I know it is." He had a baritone voice that suited him to a T. "I want to see him. My name is Emil Jensen. I am the son of Ben Jensen, who was killed last night."

"Oh." There wasn't much resemblance, but that's nature's lookout. I have enough to do. "Mr. Wolfe has an appointment. It would be handy if I could tell him what you want."

"I want to — consult him. If you don't mind, I'd rather tell him." He smiled to take the sting off. Probably Psychological Warfare Branch.

"I'll see. Come on in."

I made room for Jane, and he followed her. After attending to the bolt I escorted them to the office, invited them to sit, and went to the phone on my desk and buzzed Wolfe's room.

"Yes?" Wolfe's voice came.

"Archie. Miss Geer is here. Also,

Major Emil Jensen just arrived. He is the son of Ben Jensen and prefers to tell you what he wants to consult you about."

"Give them both my regrets. I am engaged and can see no one."

"Engaged for how long?"

"Indefinitely. I can make no appointments for this week."

"But you may remember —"

"Archie! Tell them that please." The line died.

So I told them that. They were not pleased. The Lord knows what kind of performance Jane would have put on if she hadn't been restrained by the presence of a stranger; as it was, she didn't have to fumble around for pointed remarks. Jensen wasn't indignant, but he sure was stubborn. During an extended conversation that got nowhere, I noticed a gradual increase in their inclination to cast sympathetic glances at each other.

I thought it might help matters along, meaning that they might clear out sooner if I changed the subject, so I said emphatically, "Miss Geer, this is Major Jensen."

He got to his feet, bowed to her like a man who knows how to bow, and told her, "How do you do? It looks as if it's hopeless, at least for this evening, for both of us. I'll have to hunt a taxi, and it would be a pleasure if you'll let me drop you."

So they left together. Going down the stoop, which I admit was moderately steep, he indicated not obtrusively that he had an arm there, and she rested her fingers in the bend of it to steady herself. That alone showed astonishing progress in almost no time at all, for she was by no means a born clinger.

Oh, well, I was a major too. I shrugged indifferently as I shut the door. Then I sought Wolfe's room, knocked, and was invited in.

Standing in the doorway to his bathroom, facing me, his old-fashioned razor in his hand, all lathered up, he demanded brusquely, "What time is it?"

"Six-thirty."

"When is the next train?"

"Seven o'clock. But what the hell, apparently there is going to be work to do. I can put it off to next week."

"No. It's on your mind. Get that train."

I tried one more stab. "My motive is selfish. If, while I am sitting talking to Carpenter in the morning, word comes that you have been killed, or even temporarily disabled, he'll blame me and I won't stand a chance. So for purely selfish reasons —"

"Confound it!" he barked. "You'll miss that train! I have no intention of getting killed. Get out of here!"

I faded. . . .

After the war I intend to run for Congress and put through laws about generals. I have a theory that generals should be rubbed liberally with neat's-foot oil before being taken out and shot. Though I doubt if I would have bothered with the oil in the case of General Carpenter that morning if I had had a free hand.

I was a major. So I sat and said

yessir yessir yessir, while he told me that he had given me the appointment only because he thought I wanted to discuss something of importance, and that I would stay where I was put, and shut my trap about it. When it was all over, he observed that since I was in Washington I might as well confer with the staff on various cases, finished and unfinished, and I would report immediately to Colonel Dickey.

I doubt if I made a good impression, considering my state of mind. They kept me around, conferring, all day Thursday and most of Friday. I phoned Wolfe that I was detained. By explaining the situation on 35th Street I could have got permission to beat it back to New York, but I wasn't going to give that collection of brass headgear an excuse to giggle around that Nero Wolfe didn't have brains enough to keep on breathing, in his own house, without me there to look after him. Wolfe would have had my scalp.

But I was tempted to hop a plane when, late Thursday evening, I saw the ad in the *Star*. I had been too busy all day to take more than a glance at the New York papers I'd been following for news of the Jensen case. I was alone in my hotel room when it caught my eye, bordered and spaced to make a spot:

**WANTED, A MAN**

weighing about 260–270, around 5 ft. 11; 45–55 years old, medium in coloring, waist not over 48, capable of easy and normal movement. Temporary. Hazardous. $100 a day. Send photo with letter. Box 292 Star.

I read it through four times, stared at it disapprovingly for an additional two minutes, and then reached for the phone and put in a New York call. I got Fritz Brenner on the phone, and he assured me Wolfe was all right.

Getting ready for bed, I tried to figure out in what manner, if I were making preparations to kill Nero Wolfe, I could make use of an assistant, hired on a temporary basis at a hundred bucks a day, who was a physical counterpart of Wolfe. The two schemes I devised weren't very satisfactory, and the one I hit on after I got my head on the pillow was even worse, so I flipped the switch on the nervous system and let the muscles quit. . . .

In the morning I finished conferring and made tracks for New York.

Arriving at Wolfe's house on 35th Street a little before eleven, I gave the button three short pushes as usual, and in a moment there were footsteps, and the curtain was pulled aside and Fritz was peering at me through the glass panel. Satisfied, he let me in.

I saw Wolfe was in the office, since the door to it was open and the light shining through, so I breezed down the hall and on in.

"I am a fug—" I began, and stopped. Wolfe's chair behind his desk, his own chair and no one else's under any circumstances, was occupied by the appropriate mass of mat-

ter in comparatively human shape — in other words, by a big, fat man — but it wasn't Nero Wolfe. I had never seen him before.

Fritz, who had stayed to bolt the door, came at me from behind, talking. The occupant of the chair neither moved nor spoke, but merely leered at me. Fritz was telling me that Mr. Wolfe was up in his room.

The specimen in the chair said in a husky croak, "I suppose you're Goodwin. Archie. Have a good trip?"

I stared at him. In a way I wished I was back at the Pentagon, and in another way I wished I had come sooner.

He said, "Fritz, bring me another highball."

Fritz said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Have a good trip, Archie?"

That was enough of that. I marched out to the hall and up a flight, went to Wolfe's door and tapped on it, and called, "Archie!" Wolfe's voice told me to come in.

He was seated in his number two chair, under the light, reading a book. He was fully dressed, and there was nothing in his appearance to indicate that he had lost his mind.

I did not intend to give him the satisfaction of sitting there smirking and enjoying fireworks. "Well," I said casually, "I got back. If you're sleepy we can wait till morning for conversation."

"I'm not sleepy." He closed the book, with a finger inserted at his page. "Are you going overseas?"

"You know damn well I'm not." I sat down. "We can discuss that at some future date when I'm out of the Army. It's a relief to find you all alive and well around here. It's very interesting down in Washington. Everybody on their toes."

"No doubt. Did you stop in the office downstairs?"

"I did. So you put that ad in the *Star* yourself. How do you pay him — cash every day? Did you figure out the deductions for income tax and social security? I sat down at my desk and began to report to him. I thought it was you. Until he ordered Fritz to bring him a highball, and I know you hate highballs. Deduction. It reminds me of the time your daughter from Yugoslavia showed up —"

"Archie. Shut up."

Wolfe put the book down and shifted in his chair, with the routine grunts. When the new equilibrium was established he said, "You will find details about him on a slip of paper in the drawer of your desk. He is a retired architect named H. H. Hackett, out of funds, and an unsurpassed nincompoop with the manners of a wart hog. I chose him, from those answering the advertisement, because his appearance and build were the most suitable and he is sufficiently an ass to be willing to risk his life for a hundred dollars a day."

"If he keeps on calling me 'Archie' the risk will become —"

"If you please." Wolfe wiggled a finger at me. "Do you think the idea of him sitting there in my chair is agreeable to me? He may be dead to-

morrow or the next day. I told him that. This afternoon he went to Mr. Ditson's place in a taxicab to look at orchids, and came back ostentatiously carrying two plants. Tomorrow afternoon you will drive him somewhere and bring him back, and again in the evening. Dressed for the street, wearing my hat and lightweight coat, carrying my stick, he would deceive anyone except you."

"Yes, sir. But why couldn't you just stay in the house? You do, anyway. And be careful who gets in. Until . . ."

"Until what?"

"Until the bird that killed Jensen is caught."

"Bah!" He glared at me. "By whom? By Mr. Cramer? What do you suppose he is doing now? Pfui! Major Jensen, Mr. Jensen's son, arriving home on leave from Europe five days ago, learned that during his absence his father had sued his mother for divorce. The father and son quarreled, which was not unique. But Mr. Cramer has a hundred men trying to collect evidence that will convict Major Jensen of killing his father! Utterly intolerable asininity. For what motive could Major Jensen have for killing me?"

"Well, now." My eyebrows were up. "I wouldn't just toss it in the wastebasket. What if the major figured that sending you the same kind of message he sent his father would make everybody react the way you are doing?"

Wolfe shook his head. "He didn't. Unless he's a born fool. He would have known that merely sending me that thing would be inadequate, that he would have to follow it up by making good on the threat; and he hasn't killed me, and I doubt if he intends to. General Fife has looked up his record for me. Mr. Cramer is wasting his time, his men's energy, and the money of the people of New York. I am handicapped. The men I have used and can trust have gone to war. You bounce around thinking only of yourself, deserting me. I am confined to this room, left to my own devices, with a vindictive, bloodthirsty maniac waiting an opportunity to kill me."

He sure was piling it on. But I knew better than to contribute a note of skepticism when he was in one of his romantic moods, having been fired for that once; and, besides, I wouldn't have signed an affidavit that he was exaggerating the situation. So I only asked him, "What about Captain Root? Did they bring him?"

"Yes. He was here today and I talked with him. He has been in that prison for over a month and asserts that this cannot possibly be connected with him or his. He says Miss Geer has not communicated with him for six weeks or more. His mother is teaching school at Danforth, Ohio; that has been verified by Mr. Cramer; she is there. His father, who formerly ran a filling station at Danforth, abandoned wife and son ten years ago, and is said to be working in a war plant in Oklahoma. Wife and son prefer not to discuss him. No brother or sister. Ac-

cording to Captain Root, there is no one on earth who would conceivably undertake a ride on the subway, let alone multiple murder, to avenge him."

"He might just possibly be right."

"Nonsense. There was no other slightest connection between Mr. Jensen and me. I've asked General Fife to keep Root in New York and to request the prison authorities to look over his effects there if he has any."

"When you get an idea in your head —"

"I never do. As you mean it. I react to stimuli. In this instance I am reacting in the only way open to me. The person who shot Mr. Jensen and Mr. Doyle is bold to the point of rashness. He can probably be tempted to proceed with his program." . . .

I went up to my room.

The gong was a dingus under my bed. The custom was that when I retired at night I turned a switch, and if anyone put his foot down in the hall within ten feet of Wolfe's door the gong gonged. It had been installed on account of a certain occurrence some years previously, when Wolfe had got a knife stuck in him. The thing had never gone off except when we tested it, and in my opinion never would, but I never failed to switch it on, because if Wolfe had stepped into the hall some night and the gong hadn't sounded it would have caused discussion.

This night, with a stranger in the house, I was glad it was there.

In the morning breakfast was all over the place. Afterward I spent an hour up in the plant-rooms with Wolfe.

We got to details. Jane Geer was making a nuisance of herself. I understood now, of course, why Wolfe had refused to see her Wednesday evening. After sending me to get her he had conceived the strategy of hiring a double, and he didn't want her to get a look at the real Nero Wolfe, because if she did she would be less likely to be deceived by the counterfeit and go to work on him.

She had phoned several times, insisting on seeing him, and had come to the house Friday morning and argued for five minutes with Fritz through the three-inch crack which the chain bolt permitted the door to open to. Now Wolfe had an idea for one of his elaborate charades. I was to phone her to come to see Wolfe at six o'clock that afternoon. When she came I was to take her in to Hackett. Wolfe would coach Hackett for the interview.

I looked skeptical.

Wolfe said, "It will give her a chance to kill Mr. Hackett."

I snorted. "With me right there to tell her when to cease firing."

"I admit it is unlikely, but it will give me an opportunity to see her and hear her. I shall be at the hole."

So that was really the idea. He would be in the passage, a sort of alcove, at the kitchen end of the downstairs hall, looking through into the office by means of the square hole in

the wall. The hole was camouflaged on the office side by a picture that was transparent one way. He loved to have an excuse to use it.

Major Jensen had phoned once and been told that Wolfe was engaged; apparently he wasn't as persistent as Jane.

When I got down to the office Hackett was there in Wolfe's chair, eating cookies and getting crumbs on the desk.

From the phone on my desk I got Jane Geer at her office. "Archie," I told her.

She snapped, "Archie who?"

"Oh, come, come. We haven't sicked the police onto you, have we? Nero Wolfe wants to see you."

"He does? Ha, ha. He doesn't act like it."

"He has reformed. I showed him a lock of your hair. I showed him a picture of Elsa Maxwell and told him it was you. This time he won't let me come after you."

"Neither will I."

"Okay. Be here at six o'clock and you will be received. Six o'clock today P.M. Will you?"

She admitted that she would.

I made a couple of other calls and did some miscellaneous chores. But I found that my jaw was getting clamped tighter and tighter on account of an irritating noise. Finally I spoke to the occupant of Wolfe's chair: "What kind of cookies are those?"

"Gingersnaps." Evidently the the husky croak was his normal voice.

"I didn't know we had any."

"We didn't. I asked Fritz. He doesn't seem to know about gingersnaps, so I walked over to Ninth Avenue and got some."

"When? This morning?"

"Just a little while ago."

I turned to my phone, buzzed the plant-rooms, got Wolfe, and told him, "Mr. Hackett is sitting in your chair eating gingersnaps. Just a little while ago he walked to Ninth Avenue and bought them. If he pops in and out of the house whenever he sees fit, what are we getting for our hundred bucks?"

Wolfe spoke to the point. I hung up and turned to Hackett and spoke to the point. He was not to leave the house except as instructed by Wolfe or me. He seemed unimpressed.

"All right," he said; "if that's the bargain I'll keep it. But there's two sides to a bargain. I was to be paid daily in advance, and I haven't been paid for today. A hundred dollars net."

I took five twenties from the expense wallet and forked it over.

"I must say," he commented, folding the bills neatly and stuffing them in his waistband pocket, "this is a large return for a small effort. I am aware that I may earn it — ah, suddenly and unexpectedly." He leaned toward me. "Though I may tell you confidentially, Archie, that I expect nothing to happen. I am sanguine by nature."

"Yeah," I told him, "me too."

I opened the drawer of my desk, the middle one on the right, where I kept

armament, got out the shoulder holster and put it on, and selected the gun that was my property — the other two belonged to Wolfe. There were only three cartridges in it, so I pulled the drawer open farther to get to the ammunition compartment, and filled the cylinder.

As I shoved the gun into the holster I happened to glance at Hackett, and saw that he had a new face. The line of his lips was tight, and his eyes looked startled, wary.

"It hadn't occurred to me before," he said, and his voice had changed, too. "This Mr. Wolfe is quite an article, and you're his man. I am doing this with the understanding that someone may mistake me for Mr. Wolfe and try to kill me, but I have only his word for it that that is actually the situation. If it's more complicated than that, and the intention is for you to shoot me yourself, I want to say emphatically that that would not be fair."

I grinned at him sympathetically, trying to make up for my blunder, realizing that I should not have dressed for the occasion in his presence. The sight of the gun, a real gun and real cartridges, had scared him stiff.

"Listen," I told him earnestly; "you said a minute ago that you expect nothing to happen. You may be right. I'm inclined to agree with you. But in case somebody does undertake to perform, I am wearing this little number" — I patted under my arm where the gun was — "for two purposes: first, to keep you from getting hurt; and, second, if you do get hurt, to hurt him worse."

It seemed to satisfy him, for his eyes got less concentrated, but he didn't resume with the gingersnaps. At least, I had accomplished that much.

To tell the truth, by the time the afternoon was over and I had him back in the house again, a little after five-thirty, I had to maintain a firm hold on such details as gingersnaps and his calling me "Archie" to keep from admiring him. During that extended expedition we made stops at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Botanical Gardens, and three or four stores. He occupied the rear seat, of course, because Wolfe always did, and the mirror showed me that he sat back comfortably, taking in the sights, a lot more imperturbable than Wolfe, himself, ever was in a car.

When we made one of our stops and Hackett got out to cross the sidewalk, he was okay. He didn't hurry or dodge or jerk or weave, but just walked. In Wolfe's hat and coat and stick, he might even have fooled me. I had to hand it to him, in spite of the fact that the whole show struck me as the biggest bust Wolfe had ever concocted.

Back in the house, I left Hackett in the office and went to the kitchen, where Wolfe was sitting at the big table drinking beer.

I reported: "They tried to get him from the top of the Palisades with a howitzer, but missed him. He was a little bruised on his left elbow from

the revolving door at Rusterman's, but otherwise unhurt."

Wolfe grunted. "How did he behave?"

"Okay."

Wolfe grunted again. "After dark we may more reasonably expect results. I repeat what I told you at noon; you will take an active part in the interview with Miss Geer, but you will restrain yourself. If you permit yourself to get fanciful, there is no telling what the effect may be on Mr. Hackett. As you know, his instructions are precise, but his discipline is questionable. See that she speaks up, so I can hear her. Seat her at the corner of my desk farthest from you, so I will have a good view of her face."

"Yes, sir."

But, as it turned out, I wasn't able to obey orders. It was then nearly six o'clock. When the doorbell rang, a few minutes later, and I went to answer it, glancing in at the office on my way down the hall to make sure that Hackett didn't have his feet up on the desk, I opened the door, to find that Miss Geer hadn't ventured alone on the streets of the great city, after all. Major Emil Jensen was there with her.

"Well," I said brightly, "two on one hook?"

Jensen said hello. Jane volunteered, "Major Jensen decided to come on the spur of the moment. We were having cocktails." She looked me up and down; it was true that I was blocking the way. "May we come in?"

Certainly I could have told Jensen we had only one extra chair so he had better go for a walk, but if there was going to be anything accomplished by having either of those two get the idea that Hackett was Nero Wolfe, I would have picked him for the experiment rather than her. On the other hand, with Hackett primed only for her, it would have been crowding our luck to confront him with both of them, and, anyway, I couldn't take such a chance on my own hook. I needed advice from headquarters. So I decided to herd them into the front room, ask them to wait, and go consult Wolfe.

"Sure," I said hospitably; "enter." I had got them seated, and was headed for the hall before noticing an unfortunate fact: The door from the front room to the office was standing open. That was careless of me, but I hadn't expected complications. If they moved across, as they naturally would, Hackett, sitting in the office, would be in plain sight. But what the hell, that was what he was there for. So I kept going, down the hall to the turn into the alcove at the far end, found Wolfe there ready to take position at the peephole, and muttered to him:

"She brought an outrider along. Major Jensen. I put them in the front room. The door into the office is open. Well?"

He scowled at me. He whispered, "Confound it. Return to the front room by way of the office, closing that door as you go. Tell Major Jensen to wait, that I wish to speak with Miss Geer privately. Take her to the office

by way of the hall, and when you —"

Somebody fired a gun.

At least, that's what it sounded like, and the sound didn't come from outdoors. The walls and the air vibrated. Judging by the noise, I might have fired it myself, but I hadn't. I moved. In three jumps I was at the door to the office. Hackett was sitting there, looking startled and speechless. I dashed through to the front room. Jensen and Jane were there, on their feet, she off to the right and he to the left, both also startled and speechless, staring at each other. Their hands were empty, except for Jane's bag. I might have been inclined to let it go for Hackett biting a gingersnap if it hadn't been for the smell. I knew that smell.

I snapped at Jensen, "Well?"

"Well yourself." He had transferred the stare to me. "What the hell was it?"

"Did you fire a gun?"

"No. Did you?"

I pivoted to Jane. "Did you?"

"You — you idiot," she stammered, trying not to tremble. "Why would I fire a gun?"

"Let me see the one in your hand," Jensen demanded.

I looked at my hand and was surprised to see a gun in it. I must have snatched it from the holster automatically en route. "Not it," I said. I poked the muzzle to within an inch of Jensen's nose. "Was it?"

He sniffed. "No."

I said, "But a gun was fired inside here. Do you smell it?"

"Certainly I smell it."

"Okay. Let's join Mr. Wolfe and discuss it. Through there." I indicated the door to the office with a flourish of the gun.

Jane started jabbering about a put-up job, but I followed Jensen into the other room.

"This is Mr. Nero Wolfe," I said. "Sit down." I was using my best judgment, and figured I was playing it right, because Wolfe was nowhere in sight. I had to decide what to do with them while I found the gun and maybe the bullet.

Jane was still trying to jabber, but she stopped when Jensen blurted, "Wolfe has blood on his head!"

I glanced at Hackett. He was standing up behind the desk, leaning forward with his hand on the desk, staring wildly at the three of us. Blood dribbled down the side of his neck.

I took in breath and yelled, "Fritz!"

He appeared instantly, probably having been standing by in the hall, and when he came I handed him my gun. "If anybody reaches for a handkerchief, shoot."

"Those instructions," Jensen said sharply, "are dangerous if he —"

"He's all right."

"I would like you to search me." Jensen stuck his hands toward the ceiling.

"That," I said, "is more like it," and crossed to him and explored him from neck to ankles, invited him to relax in a chair, and turned to Jane.

She darted me a look of lofty disgust.

I remarked, "If you refuse to stand inspection and then you happen to make a gesture and Fritz shoots you in the tummy, don't blame me."

She darted more looks, but took it. I felt her over not quite as comprehensively as I had Jensen, took her bag and glanced in it, and returned it to her, and then stepped around Wolfe's desk to examine Hackett. After Jensen had announced the blood he had put his hand up to feel, and was staring at the red on his fingers, with his big jaw hanging open.

"My head?" he croaked. "Is it my head?"

The exhibition he was making of himself was no help to Nero Wolfe's reputation for intrepidity.

After a brief look I told him distinctly, "No, sir. Nothing but a nick in the upper outside corner of your ear."

"I am not — hurt?"

I could have murdered him. Instead, I told Fritz, standing there with my gun, that unnecessary movements were still forbidden, and took Hackett to the bathroom in the far corner and shut the door behind us. While I showed him the ear in the mirror and dabbed on some iodine and taped on a bandage, I told him to stay in there until his nerves calmed down and then rejoin us, act detached and superior, and let me do the talking.

As I reappeared in the office, Jane shot at me, "Did you search *him?*"

I ignored her and circled around Wolfe's desk for a look at the back of the chair. The head-rest was upholstered with brown leather; and about eight inches from the top and a foot from the side edge, a spot that would naturally have been on a line behind Hackett's left ear as he sat, there was a hole in the leather. I looked behind, and there was another hole on the rear side. I looked at the wall back of the chair and found still another hole, torn into the plaster.

From the bottom drawer of my desk I got a screwdriver and hammer, and started chiseling, ran against a stud, and went to work with the point of my knife. When I finally turned around I held a small object between my thumb and finger. As I did so, Hackett emerged from the bathroom.

"Bullet," I said informatively. "Thirty-eight. Passed through Mr. Wolfe's ear and the back of his chair, and ruined the wall."

Jane sputtered. Jensen sat and gazed at me with narrowed eyes. Hackett shuddered.

"It could be," Jensen said coldly, "that Wolfe fired that bullet himself."

"Yeah?" I returned his gaze. "Mr. Wolfe would be glad to let you inspect his face for powder marks."

"He washed them off in the bathroom," Jane snapped.

"They don't wash off." . . . I continued to Jensen, "I'll lend you a magnifying glass. You can examine the chair, too."

By gum, he took me up. He nodded and arose, and I got the glass from Wolfe's desk, the big one. First he

went over the chair, the portion in the neighborhood of the bullet hole, and then crossed to Hackett and gave his face and ear a look. Hackett stood still with his lips compressed and his eyes straight ahead. Jensen gave me back the glass and returned to his seat.

I asked him, "Did Mr. Wolfe shoot himself in the ear?"

"No," he admitted. "Not unless he had the gun wrapped."

"Sure." My tone cut slices off of him. "He tied a pillow around it, held it at arm's length, pointing it at his ear, and pulled the trigger. How would you like to try demonstrating it? Keeping the bullet within an inch of your frontal lobe?"

He never stopped gazing at me. "I am," he declared, "being completely objective. With some difficulty."

"If I understand what happened —" Hackett began, but I cut him off.

"Excuse me, sir. The bullet helps, but the gun would help still more. Let's be objective, too. We might possibly find the object in the front room." I moved, touching his elbow to take him along. "Fritz, see that they stay put."

"I," said Jensen, getting up, "would like to be present —"

"The hell you would." I wheeled on him. My voice may have gone up a notch. "Sit down, brother. I am trying not to fly off the handle. Whose house is this, anyway, with bullets zipping around?"

He had another remark to contribute, and so did Jane, but I disregarded them and wangled Hackett ahead of me into the front room and shut the soundproof door.

"It seems incredible to me," Hackett said, choosing his words carefully, "that one of them could have shot at me from in here, through the open door, without me seeing anything."

"You said that before, in the bathroom. You also said you didn't remember whether your eyes were open or shut, or where you were looking, when you heard the shot."

I moved my face to within fourteen inches of his. "See here. If you are suspecting that I shot at you, or that Wolfe did, you have got fleas or other insects playing tag in your brain and should have it attended to. One thing alone: The way the bullet went, straight past your ear and into the chair-back, it had to come from in front, the general direction of that door and this room. It couldn't have come from the door in the hall or anywhere else, because we haven't got a gun that shoots a curve. Now, you will sit down and keep still."

He grumbled, but obeyed. I surveyed the field. On the assumption that the gun had been fired in that room, I adopted the theory that either it was still there or it had been transported or propelled without. As for transportation, I had got there not more than five seconds after the shot and found them there staring at each other. As for propulsion, the windows were closed and the Venetian blinds down. I preferred the first alternative.

I began to search, but I had the curious feeling that I probably wouldn't

find the gun, no matter how thoroughly I looked; I have never understood why.

If it was a hunch, it was a bad day for hunches, because when I came to the big vase on the table between the windows and peeked into it and saw something white, and stuck my hand in, I felt the gun. Getting it by the trigger guard, I lifted it out. Judging by smell, it had been fired recently, but of course it had had time to cool off. It was an old Granville thirty-eight, next door to rusty. The white object I had seen was an ordinary cotton handkerchief, man's size, with a tear in it through which the butt of the gun protruded. With proper care about touching, I opened the cylinder and found there were five loaded cartridges and one shell.

Hackett was there beside me, trying to say things. I got brusque with him:

"Yes, it's a gun, recently fired, and not mine or Wolfe's. Is it yours? No? Good. Okay, keep your shirt on. We're going back in there, and there will be sufficient employment for my brain without interference from you. Do not try to help me. If this ends as it ought to, you'll get an extra hundred. Agreed?"

I'll be damned if he didn't say, "Two hundred. I was shot at. I came within an inch of getting killed."

I told him he'd have to talk the second hundred out of Wolfe, and opened the door to the office and followed him through. He detoured around Jane Geer and went and sat in the chair he had just escaped being a corpse in. I swiveled my own chair to face it out.

Jensen demanded sharply, "What have you got there?"

"This," I said cheerfully, "is a veteran revolver, a Granville thirty-eight, which has been fired not too long ago." I lowered it onto my desk. "Fritz, give me back my gun."

He brought it. I kept it in my hand.

"Thank you. I found this other affair in the vase on the table in there, dressed in a handkerchief. Five unused cartridges and one used. It's a stranger here. Never saw it before. It appears to put the finishing touch on a critical situation."

Jane exploded. She called me an unspeakable rat. She said she wanted a lawyer and intended to go to one immediately. She called Hackett three or four things. She said it was the dirtiest frame-up in history. "Now," she told Hackett, "I know damned well you framed Captain Root! I let that skunk Goodwin talk me out of it! But you won't get away with it this time!"

Hackett was trying to talk back to her, making his voice louder and louder, and when she stopped for breath he could be heard:

". . . will not tolerate it! You come here and try to kill me! You nearly do kill me! Then you abuse me about a Captain Root, and I have never heard of Captain Root!" He was putting real feeling into it; apparently he had either forgotten that he was supposed to be Nero Wolfe, or

had got the notion, in all the excitement, that he really was Nero Wolfe. He was proceeding, "Young lady, listen to me! I will not —"

She turned and made for the door. I was immediately on my feet and after her, but halfway across the room I put on the brake, because the doorway had suddenly filled up with a self-propelled massive substance and she couldn't get through. She stopped, goggle-eyed, and then fell back a couple of paces.

The massive substance advanced, halted, and used its mouth: "How do you do? I am Nero Wolfe."

He did it well, at top form, and it was quite an effect. Nobody made a chirp. He moved forward, and Jane retreated again.

Wolfe stopped at the corner of his desk and wiggled a finger at Hackett. "Take another chair, sir, if you please?"

Hackett sidled out, without a word, and went to the red leather chair. Wolfe leaned over to peer at the hole in the back of his own chair, and then at the hole in the plaster, grunted, and got himself seated.

"This," Jensen said, "makes it a farce."

Jane snapped, "I'm going," and headed for the door, but I had been expecting that, and with only two steps had her by the arm with a good grip and was prepared to give her the twist if she went thorny on me. Jensen sprang to his feet with both of his hands fists. Evidently in the brief space of forty-eight hours it had developed to the point where the sight of another man laying hands on his Jane started his adrenalin spurting in torrents.

"Stop it!" Wolfe's voice was a whip. It turned us into a group of statuary. "Miss Geer, you may leave shortly, if you still want to, after I have said something. Mr. Jensen, sit down. Archie, go to your desk, but be ready to use the gun. One of them is a murderer."

"That's a lie!" Jensen was visibly breathing. "And who the hell are you?"

"I introduced myself, sir. That gentleman is my temporary employee. When my life was threatened I hired him to impersonate me."

Jane spat at him, "You fat coward!"

He shook his head. "No, Miss Geer, It is no great distinction not to be a coward, but I can claim it. Not cowardice. Conceit convinced me that only I could catch the person daring and witty enough to kill me. I wished to be alive to do so."

He turned abruptly to me: "Archie, get Inspector Cramer on the phone."

Jane and Jensen both started talking at once, with vehemence.

Wolfe cut them off: "If you please! In a moment I shall offer you an alternative: the police or me. Meanwhile, Mr. Cramer can help." He glanced at Hackett. "If you want to get away from this uproar, there is your room upstairs . . ."

"I think I'll stay here," Hackett declared. "I'm a little interested in

this myself, since I nearly got killed."

"Cramer on," I told Wolfe.

He lifted his phone from the cradle. "How do you do, sir? . . . No. . . . No, I have a request to make. If you'll send a man here right away, I'll give him a revolver and a bullet. First, examine the revolver for fingerprints and send me copies. Second, trace the revolver if possible. Third, fire a bullet from it and compare it both with the bullet I am sending you and with the bullets that killed Mr. Jensen and Mr. Doyle. Let me know the results. That's all. . . . No. . . . Confound it, no! If you come yourself you will be handed the package at the door and not admitted. I'm busy."

As he hung up I said, "Does Cramer get the handkerchief, too?"

"Let me see it."

I handed the gun to him, with its butt still protruding through the tear in the handkerchief. Wolfe frowned as he saw that the handkerchief had no laundry mark or any other mark and was of a species that could be bought in almost any dry-goods store.

"We'll keep the handkerchief," Wolfe said.

Jensen demanded, "What the devil was it doing there?"

Wolfe's eyes went shut. He was, of course, tasting Jensen's expression, tone of voice, and mental longitude and latitude, to try to decide whether innocent curiosity was indicated or a camouflage for guilt. He always shut his eyes when he tasted. In a moment they opened again halfway.

"If a man has recently shot a gun," he said, "and has had no opportunity to wash, an examination of his hand will furnish incontestable proof. You probably know that. One of you, the one who fired that shot, certainly does. The handkerchief protected the hand. Under a microscope it would be found to contain many minute particles of explosive and other residue. The fact that it is a man's handkerchief doesn't help. Major Jensen would naturally possess a man's handkerchief. Miss Geer could buy or borrow one."

"You asked me to stay while you said something," Jane snapped. She and Jensen were back in their chairs. "You haven't said anything yet. Where were *you* when the shot was fired?"

"Pfui." Wolfe sighed. "Fritz, pack the gun and bullet in a carton, carefully with tissue paper, and give it to the man when he comes. First, bring me beer. Do any of you want beer?"

Evidently no one did.

"Very well, Miss Geer. To assume, or pretend to assume, some elaborate hocus-pocus by the inmates of this house is inane. At the moment the shot was fired I was standing near the kitchen talking with Mr. Goodwin. Since then I have been at a spot from which part of this room can be seen and voices heard."

His eyes went to Jensen and back to Jane. "One of you two people is apt to make a mistake, and I want to prevent it if possible. I have not yet asked you where you were and what you were doing at the instant the shot was fired. Before I do so I want to say this, that

even with the information at hand it is demonstrable that the shot came from the direction of that door to the front room, which was standing open. Mr. Hackett could not have fired it; you, Mr. Jensen, satisfied yourself of that. Mr. Brenner was in the kitchen. Mr. Goodwin and I were together. I warn you — one of you — that this is sufficiently provable to satisfy a jury in a murder trial.

"Now, what if you both assert that at the instant you heard the shot you were together, close together perhaps, looking at each other? For the one who fired the gun that would be a blessing, indeed. For the other it might be disastrous in the end, for when the truth is disclosed, as it will be, the question of complicity will arise. . . . How long have you two known each other?"

Jane's teeth were holding her lower lip. She removed them. "I met him day before yesterday. Here."

"Indeed. Is that correct, Mr. Jensen?"

"Yes."

Wolfe's brows were up. "Hardly long enough to form an attachment to warrant any of the more costly forms of sacrifice. Unless the spark was exceptionally hot, not long enough to weld you into collusion for murder. I hope you understand, Miss Geer, that all that is wanted here is the truth. Where were you and what were you doing when you heard the shot?"

"I was standing by the piano. I had put my bag on the piano and was opening it."

"Which way were you facing?"

"Toward the window."

"Were you looking at Mr. Jensen?"

"Not at the moment, no."

"Thank you." Wolfe's eyes moved. "Mr. Jensen?"

"I was in the doorway to the hall, looking down the hall and wondering where Goodwin had gone to. For no particular reason. I was not at that moment looking at Miss Geer."

Wolfe poured beer, which Fritz had brought. "Now we are ready to decide something." He took them both in. "Miss Geer, you said you wanted to go to a lawyer, heaven protect you. But it would not be sensible to permit either of you to walk out of here, to move and act at your own will and discretion. Since that bullet was intended for me, I reject the notion utterly. On the other hand, we can't proceed intelligently until I get a report from Mr. Cramer. There is time to be passed."

Wolfe heaved a sigh. "Archie, take them to the front room and stay there till I send for you. Fritz will answer the bell."

Two hours of stony silence grow tiresome.

I appreciated the break in the monotony when, a little before nine, I heard the doorbell, and Fritz came in. He said, "Archie, Mr. Wolfe wants you in the office. Inspector Cramer is there with Sergeant Stebbins. I am to stay here."

If the situation in the front room had been unjovial, the one in the office was absolutely grim. One glance at

Wolfe was enough to see that he was in a state of uncontrollable fury, because his forefinger was making the same circle, over and over, on the surface of his desk. Hackett was not in the room, but Sergeant Purley Stebbins was standing by the wall, looking official. Inspector Cramer was in the red leather chair, with his face about the color of the chair.

Wolfe tapped a piece of paper on his desk. "Look at this, Archie."

I went and looked. It was a search warrant.

*Wowie!* I was surprised that Cramer was still alive, or Wolfe, either.

Cramer growled, holding himself in, "I'll try to forget what you just said, Wolfe. It was totally uncalled for. Damn it, you have given me a run-around too many times. There I was, with that gun. A bullet fired from it matched the bullet you sent me and also the two that killed Jensen and Doyle. That's the gun, and you sent it to me. All right; then you've got a client, and when you've got a client you keep him right in your pocket. I would have been a fool to come here and start begging you. I've begged you before."

He started to get up. "We're going to search this house."

"If you do you'll never catch the murderer of Mr. Jensen and Mr. Doyle."

Cramer dropped back in the chair. "I won't?"

"No, sir."

"You'll prevent me?"

"Bah!" Wolfe was disgusted. "Next you'll be warning me formally that obstruction of justice is a crime. I didn't say that the murderer wouldn't be caught, I said you wouldn't catch him. Because I already have."

Cramer said, "The hell you have."

"Yes, sir. Your report on the gun and bullets settles it. But I confess the matter is a little complicated, and I do give you a formal warning: You are not equipped to handle it. I am." Wolfe shoved the warrant across the desk. "Tear that thing up."

Cramer shook his head. "You see, Wolfe, I know you. Lord, don't I know you! But I'm willing to have a talk before I execute it."

"No, sir." Wolfe was murmuring again: "I will not submit to duress. I would even prefer to deal with District Attorney Skinner. Tear it up, or proceed to execute it."

That was a dirty threat. Cramer's opinion of Skinner was one of the defects of our democratic system of government. Cramer looked at the warrant, at Wolfe, at me, and back at the warrant. Then he picked it up and tore.

"Can the gun be traced?" Wolfe said.

"No. The number's gone. It dates from about nineteen-ten. And there are no prints on it that are worth anything. Nothing but smudges."

Wolfe nodded. "Naturally. A much simpler technique than wiping it clean or going around in gloves. . . . The murderer is in this house."

"I suspected he was. Is he your client?"

"The main complication," Wolfe said, in his purring tone, "is this: There are a man and a woman in that front room. Granting that one of them is the murderer, which one?"

Cramer frowned at him. "You didn't say anything about granting. You said that you have caught the murderer."

"So I have. He or she is in there, under guard. I suppose I'll have to tell you what happened, if I expect you to start your army of men digging, and it looks as though that's the only way to go about it. I have no army. To begin with, when I received that threat, I hired a man who resembles me —"

Purley Stebbins nearly bit the end of his tongue off, trying to get it all in his notebook.

Wolfe finished. Cramer sat scowling. Wolfe purred, "Well, sir, there's the problem. I doubt if it can be solved with what we have, or what is available on the premises. You'll have to get your men started."

"I wish," Cramer growled, "I knew how much dressing you put on that."

"Not any. I have only one concern in this. I have no client. I withheld nothing and added nothing."

"Maybe." Cramer straightened up like a man of action. "Okay, we'll proceed on that basis and find out. First of all I want to ask them some questions."

"I suppose you do." Wolfe detested sitting and listening to someone else ask questions. "You are handicapped, of course, by your official status. Which one do you want first?"

Cramer stood up. "I've got to see that room before I talk to either of them. I want to see where things are. Especially that vase."

Jane was seated on the piano bench. Jensen was on the sofa, but arose as we entered. Fritz was standing by a window.

Wolfe said, "This is Inspector Cramer, Miss Geer."

She didn't make a sound or move a muscle.

Wolfe said, "I believe you've met the inspector, Mr. Jensen."

"Yes, I have." Jensen's voice had gone unused so long it squeaked, and he cleared his throat. "So the agreement not to call in the police was a farce, too." He was bitter.

"There was no such agreement. I said that Mr. Cramer couldn't be kept out of it indefinitely. The bullet that was fired at me — at Mr. Hackett came from the gun that was found in that vase" — Wolfe pointed at it — "and so did those that killed your father and Mr. Doyle. So the field has become — ah, restricted."

"I insist," Jane put in, in a voice with no resemblance to any I had ever heard her use before, "on my right to consult a lawyer."

"Just a minute, now," Cramer told her in the tone he thought was soothing. "We're going to talk this over, but wait till I look around a little."

He proceeded to inspect things, and so did Sergeant Stebbins. They considered distances, and the positions of various objects. Then there was this

detail: From what segment of that room could a gun send a bullet through the open door to the office and on through the hole in Wolfe's chair and the one in the wall? They were working on that together when Wolfe turned to Fritz and asked him, "What happened to the other cushion?"

Fritz was taken aback. "Other cushion?"

"There were six velvet cushions on that sofa. Now there are only five. Did you remove it?"

"No, sir." Fritz gazed at the sofa and counted. "That's right. They've been rearranged to take up the space. I don't understand it. They were all here yesterday."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, sir. Positive."

"Look for it. Archie, help him."

It seemed like an odd moment to send out a general alarm for a sofa cushion, but since I had nothing else to do at the moment I obliged.

I finally told Wolfe, "It's gone. It isn't in here."

He muttered at me, "I see it isn't."

I stared at him. There was an expression on his face that I knew well. It wasn't exactly excitement, though it always stirred excitement in me. His neck was rigid, as if to prevent any movement of the head, so as not to disturb the brain, his eyes were half shut and not seeing anything, and his lips were moving, pushing out, then relaxing, then pushing out again.

Suddenly he turned and spoke: "Mr. Cramer! Please leave Mr. Stebbins in here with Miss Geer and Mr. Jensen. You can stay here, too, or come with me, as you prefer. Fritz and Archie, come." He headed for the office.

Cramer, knowing Wolfe's tones of voice almost as well as I did, came with us.

Wolfe waited until he was in his chair before he spoke: "I want to know if that cushion is on the premises. Search the house from the cellar up — except the south room; Mr. Hackett is in there lying down. Start in here."

Cramer barked, "What the hell is all this about?"

"I'll give you an explanation," Wolfe told him, "when I have one. I'm going to sit here and work, now, and must not be disturbed."

He leaned back and closed his eyes, and his lips started moving. Cramer slid farther back in his chair, crossed his legs, and got out a cigar and sank his teeth in it.

Half an hour had passed while I searched the office, when I heard Wolfe let out a grunt. I nearly toppled off the stepladder turning to look at him. He was in motion. He picked up his wastebasket, which was kept at the far corner of his desk, inspected it, shook his head, put it down again, and began opening the drawers of his desk. The first two, the one at the top and the one in the middle, apparently didn't get him anything, but when he yanked out the double-depth one at the bottom, as far as it would go, he looked in, bent over closer to see bet-

ter, then closed the drawer and announced, "I've found it."

In those three little words there was at least two tons of self-satisfaction and smirk.

We all goggled at him.

He looked at me: "Archie. Get down off that thing, and don't fall. Look in your desk and see if one of my guns has been fired."

I stepped down and went and opened the armament drawer. The first one I picked up was innocent. I tried the second with a sniff and a look, and reported, "Yes, sir. There were six cartridges, and now there are five. Same as the cushions. The shell is here."

"Tchah! The confounded ass! . . . Tell Miss Geer and Mr. Jensen that they may come in here if they care to hear what happened, or they may go home or anywhere else. We don't need them. Take Mr. Stebbins with you upstairs and bring Mr. Hackett down here. Use caution, and search him with great care. He is an extremely dangerous man."

Naturally, Jane and Jensen voted for joining the throng in the office, and their pose during the balloting was significant. They stood facing each other, with Jensen's right hand on Jane's left shoulder, and Jane's right hand, or perhaps just the fingers, on Jensen's left forearm. I left it to them to find the way to the office alone, told Purley Stebbins what our job was, and took him upstairs with me.

It was approximately ten minutes later that we delivered our cargo in the office. Even though Mr. Hackett staged one of the most convincing demonstrations of unwillingness to cooperate that I have ever encountered.

We got him to the office in one piece, nothing really wrong with any of us that surgical gauze wouldn't fix. We propped him in a chair.

I said, "He was reluctant."

I'll say one thing for Wolfe — I've never seen him gloat over a guy about to get it. He was contemplating Hackett more as an extraordinary object that deserved study.

I said, "Purley thinks he knows him."

Purley, as was proper, spoke to his superior: "I swear, Inspector, I'm sure I've seen him somewhere, but I can't remember."

Wolfe nodded. "A uniform makes a difference. I suggest that he was in uniform."

"Uniform?" Purley scowled. "Army?"

Wolfe shook his head. "Mr. Cramer told me Wednesday morning that the doorman on duty at the apartment house at the time Mr. Jensen and Mr. Doyle were killed was a fat nitwit who had been hired two weeks ago and didn't know the tenants by name, and also that he claimed to have been in the basement stoking the water heater at the moment the murders were committed. A phone call would tell us whether he is still working there."

"He isn't," Cramer growled. "He left Wednesday afternoon because he

didn't like a place where people were murdered. I never saw him. Some of my men did."

"Yeah," Purley said, gazing at Hackett's face. "By God, it's him."

"He is," Wolfe declared, "a remarkable combination of fool and genius. He came to New York determined to kill Mr. Jensen and me. By the way, Mr. Hackett, you look a little dazed. Can you hear what I'm saying?"

Hackett made no sound.

"I guess you can," Wolfe went on. "This will interest you. I requested Military Intelligence to have an examination made of the effects of Captain Root at the prison in Maryland. A few minutes ago I phoned for a report, and got it. Captain Root was lying when he stated that he was not in communication with his father and had not been for years. There are several letters from his father among his belongings, dated in the past two months, and they make it evident that his father, whose name is Thomas Root, regards him as a scion to be proud of. To the point of mania."

Wolfe wiggled a finger at Hackett. "I offer the conjecture that you are in a position to know whether that is correct or not. Is it?"

"One more day," Hackett said in his husky croak. His hands were twitching. "One more day," he repeated.

Wolfe nodded. "I know. One more day and you would have killed me, with the suspicion centered on Miss Geer or Mr. Jensen, or both, on account of your flummery here this afternoon. And you would have disappeared."

Jensen popped up. "You haven't explained the flummery."

"I shall, Mr. Jensen." Wolfe got more comfortable in his chair. "But first that performance Tuesday evening."

He was keeping his eyes on Hackett. "That was a masterpiece. You decided to kill Mr. Jensen first, which was lucky for me, and, since all apartment house service staffs are shorthanded, got a job there as doorman with no difficulty. All you had to do was await an opportunity, with no passers-by or other onlookers. It came the day after you mailed the threat, an ideal situation in every respect except the presence of the man he had hired to guard him.

"Arriving at the entrance to the apartment house, naturally they would have no suspicion of the doorman in uniform. Mr. Jensen probably nodded and spoke to you. With no one else in sight, and the elevator man ascending with a passenger, it was too good an opportunity to lose. Muffling the revolver with some piece of cloth, you shot Mr. Doyle in the back, and when Mr. Jensen whirled at the sound you shot him in the front, and skedaddled for the stairs to the basement and started stoking the water heater. I imagine the first thing you fed it was the cloth with which you had muffled the gun."

Wolfe moved his eyes. "Does that rattle anywhere, Mr. Cramer?"

"It sounds tight from here," Cramer said.

"That's good. Because it is for those murders that Mr. Hackett — or Mr. Root, I suppose I should say — must be convicted. He can't be electrocuted for hacking a little gash in his own ear." Wolfe's eyes moved again, to me. "Archie, did you find any tools in his pockets?"

"Only a boy scout's dream," I told him. "One of those knives with scissors, awl, nail file . . ."

"Let the police have it to look for traces of blood. Just the sort of thing Mr. Cramer does best."

"The comedy can wait," Cramer growled. "I'll take it as is for Tuesday night and go on from there."

Wolfe heaved a sigh. "You're rushing past the most interesting point of all: Mr. Hackett's answering my advertisement for a man. Was he sufficiently acute to realize that its specifications were roughly a description of me, suspect that I was the advertiser, and proceed to take advantage of it to approach me? Or was it merely that he was short of funds and attracted by the money offered?

"Actually, I am sure that he saw it as precisely the kind of opportunity I meant it to be — an opportunity to kill Nero Wolfe. Nor was my insertion of the advertisement a mere shot in the dark. I was very sure we were dealing with a dangerous killer and a bold ingenious personality.

"Accordingly, Archie, when, after you had left to meet Miss Geer, I looked out the window and saw this fellow pass by, and saw him again three times in the next three hours in the vicinity of the house, it occurred to me that a lion is much safer in a cage even if you have to be in the cage with him. I thought the advertisement should provide proper enticement for a character who had shown complete disregard for danger in his previous attempt at murder. . . .

"In any event, having answered the advertisement and received a message from me, he was, of course, delighted, and doubly delighted when he was hired.

"Now, from the moment he got in here, Mr. Root was concocting schemes, rejecting, considering, revising; and no doubt relishing the situation enormously. The device of the handkerchief to protect a hand firing a gun was no doubt a part of one of those schemes.

"This morning he learned that Miss Geer was to call on me at six o'clock, and he was to impersonate me. After lunch, in here alone, he got a cushion from the sofa in there, wrapped his revolver in it, and fired a bullet through the back of this chair into the wall.

"He stuffed the cushion into the rear compartment of the bottom right-hand drawer of this desk, then put the gun in his pocket."

"If the hole had been seen, the bullet would have been found," Cramer muttered.

"I have already pronounced him," Wolfe said testily, "an unsurpassable fool. Even so, he knew that Archie

would be out with him the rest of the afternoon, and I would be in my room. I had made a remark which informed him that I would not sit in that chair again until he was permanently out of it. At six o'clock Miss Geer arrived, unexpectedly accompanied by Mr. Jensen. They were shown into the front room, and that door was open. Mr. Root's brain moved swiftly, and so did the rest of him. He got one of my guns from Archie's desk, returned to this chair, opened the drawer where he had put the cushion, fired a shot into the cushion, dropped the gun in, and shut the drawer."

Wolfe sighed again. "Archie came dashing in, cast a glance at Mr. Root seated here, and went on to the front room. Mr. Root grasped the opportunity to do two things: return my gun to the drawer of Archie's desk, and use a blade of his knife, I would guess the awl, to tear a gash in the corner of his ear. That, of course, improved the situation for him. What improved it vastly more was the chance that came soon after, when Archie took him to the bathroom and left him there. He might have found another chance, but that was perfect. He entered the front room from the bathroom, put his own gun, handkerchief attached, in the vase, and returned to the bathroom, and later rejoined the others here.

"It was by no means utterly preposterous if I had not noticed the absence of that cushion. Since this desk sits flush with the floor, no sign of the bullet fired into the bottom drawer would be visible unless the drawer was opened, and why should it be? It was unlikely that Archie would have occasion to find that one of my guns in his desk had been fired, and what if he did? Mr. Root knows how to handle a gun without leaving fingerprints, which is simple."

Cramer slowly nodded. "I'm not objecting. I'll buy it. But you must admit you've described quite a few things you can't prove."

"I don't have to. Neither do you. As I said before, Mr. Root will be put on trial for the murder of Mr. Jensen and Mr. Doyle, not for his antics here in my house."

Cramer stood up. "Let's go, Mr. Root."

Back in the office, Wolfe, in his own chair with only one bullet hole that could easily be repaired, and with three bottles of beer on a tray in front of him, was leaning back, the picture of a man at peace.

He murmured at me, "Archie, remind me in the morning to telephone Mr. Viscardi about that tarragon."

"Yes, sir." I sat down. "And if I may, sir, I would like to offer a suggestion. Let's advertise for a man-eating tiger weighing around two hundred and sixty pounds capable of easy and normal movement. We could station him behind the big cabinet, and when you enter he could leap on you from the rear."

It didn't faze him. He was enjoying the feel of his chair and I doubt if he heard me.

# THE POISONED DOW '08

*by DOROTHY L. SAYERS*

"Good morning, miss," said Mr. Montague Egg, removing his smart trilby with something of a flourish as the front door opened. "Here I am again, you see. Not forgotten me, have you? That's right, because I couldn't forget a young lady like you, not in a hundred years. How's his lordship today? Think he'd be willing to see me for a minute or two?"

He smiled pleasantly, bearing in mind Maxim Number Ten of the *Salesman's Handbook*, "The goodwill of the maid is nine-tenths of the trade."

The parlormaid, however, seemed nervous and embarrassed.

"I don't — oh, yes — come in, please. His lordship — that is to say — I'm afraid ——"

Mr. Egg stepped in promptly, sample case in hand, and to his great surprise found himself confronted by a policeman, who, in somewhat gruff tones, demanded his name and business.

"Traveling representative of Plummet & Rose, Wines and Spirits, Piccadilly," said Mr. Egg, with the air of one who has nothing to conceal. "Here's my card. What's up, sergeant?"

"Plummet & Rose?" said the policeman. "Ah, well, just sit down a moment, will you? The inspector'll want to have a word with you, I shouldn't wonder."

More and more astonished, Mr. Egg obediently took a seat, and in a few minutes' time found himself ushered into a small sitting-room which was occupied by a uniformed police inspector and another policeman with a notebook.

"Ah!" said the inspector. "Take a seat, will you, Mr. — ha, hum — Egg. Perhaps you can give us a little light on this affair. Do you know anything about a case of port wine that was sold to Lord Borrodale last spring?"

"Certainly I do," replied Mr. Egg, "if you mean the Dow '08. I made the sale myself. Six dozen at 192*s*. a dozen. Ordered from me, personally, March 3rd. Dispatched from our head office March 8th. Receipt acknowledged March 10th, with check in settlement. All in order our end. Nothing wrong with it, I hope? We've had no complaint. In fact, I've just called to ask his lordship how he liked it and to ask if he'd care to place a further order."

"I see," said the inspector. "You just happened to call today in the course of your usual round? No special reason?"

Mr. Egg, now convinced that

something was very wrong indeed, replied by placing his order-book and road schedule at the inspector's disposal.

"Yes," said the inspector, when he had glanced through them. "That seems to be all right. Well, now, Mr. Egg, I'm sorry to say that Lord Borrodale was found dead in his study this morning under circumstances strongly suggestive of his having taken poison. And what's more, it looks very much as if the poison had been administered to him in a glass of this port wine of yours."

"You don't say!" said Mr. Egg incredulously. "I'm very sorry to hear that. It won't do us any good, either. Not but what the wine was wholesome enough when we sent it out. Naturally, it wouldn't pay us to go putting anything funny into our wines; I needn't tell you that. But it's not the sort of publicity we care for. What makes you think it was the port, anyway?"

For answer, the inspector pushed over to him a glass decanter which stood upon the table.

"See what you think yourself. It's all right — we've tested it for finger-prints already. Here's a glass if you want one, but I shouldn't advise you to swallow anything — not unless you're fed up with life."

Mr. Egg took a cautious sniff at the decanter and frowned. He poured out a thimbleful of the wine, sniffed, and frowned again. Then he took an experimental drop upon his tongue, and immediately expectorated, with the utmost possible delicacy, into a convenient flower-pot.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," said Mr. Montague Egg. His rosy face was puckered with distress. "Tastes to me as though the old gentleman had been dropping his cigar-ends into it."

The inspector exchanged a glance with the policeman.

"You're not far out," he said. "The doctor hasn't quite finished his post-mortem, but he says it looks to him like nicotine poisoning. Now, here's the problem. Lord Borrodale was accustomed to drink a couple of glasses of port in his study every night after dinner. Last night the wine was taken in to him as usual at 9 o'clock. It was a new bottle, and Craven — that's the butler — brought it straight up from the cellar in a basket arrangement ——"

"A cradle," interjected Mr. Egg.

"— a cradle, if that's what you call it. James the footman followed him, carrying the decanter and a wineglass on a tray. Lord Borrodale inspected the bottle, which still bore the original seal, and then Craven drew the cork and decanted the wine in full view of Lord Borrodale and the footman. Then both servants left the room and retired to the kitchen quarters, and as they went, they heard Lord Borrodale lock the study door after them."

"What did he do that for?"

"It seems he usually did. He was writing his memoirs — he was a famous judge, you know — and as some of the papers he was using were

highly confidential, he preferred to make himself safe against sudden intruders. At 11 o'clock, when the household went to bed, James noticed that the light was still on in the study. In the morning it was discovered that Lord Borrodale had not been to bed. The study door was still locked and when it was broken open, they found him lying dead on the floor. It looked as though he had been taken ill, had tried to reach the bell, and had collapsed on the way. The doctor says he must have died at about 10 o'clock."

"Suicide?" suggested Mr. Egg.

"Well, there are difficulties about that. The position of the body, for one thing. Also, we've carefully searched the room and found no traces of any bottle or anything that he could have kept the poison in. Besides, he seems to have enjoyed his life. He had no financial or domestic worries, and in spite of his advanced age his health was excellent. Why should he commit suicide?"

"But if he didn't," objected Mr. Egg, "how was it he didn't notice the bad taste and smell of the wine?"

"Well, he seems to have been smoking a pretty powerful cigar at the time," said the inspector (Mr. Egg shook a reproachful head), "and I'm told he was suffering from a slight cold, so that his taste and smell may not have been in full working order. There are no fingerprints on the decanter or the glass except his own and those of the butler and the footman — though, of course, that wouldn't prevent anybody dropping poison into either of them, if only the door hadn't been locked. The windows were both fastened on the inside, too, with burglar-proof catches."

"How about the decanter?" asked Mr. Egg, jealous for the reputation of his firm. "Was it clean when it came in?"

"Yes, it was. James washed it out immediately before it went into the study; the cook swears she saw him do it. He used water from the tap and then swilled it round with a drop of brandy."

"Quite right," said Mr. Egg approvingly.

"And there's nothing wrong with the brandy, either, for Craven took a glass of it himself afterwards — to settle his palpitations, so he says." The inspector sniffed meaningly. "The glass was wiped out by James when he put it on the tray, and then the whole thing was carried along to the study. Nothing was put down or left for a moment between leaving the pantry and entering the study, but Craven recollects that as he was crossing the hall Miss Waynfleet stopped him and spoke to him for a moment about some arrangements for the following day."

"Miss Waynfleet? That's the niece, isn't it? I saw her on my last visit. A very charming young lady."

"Lord Borrodale's heiress," remarked the inspector meaningly.

"A very *nice* young lady," said Mr. Egg, with emphasis. "And I understand you to say that Craven was

carrying only the cradle, not the decanter or the glass."

"That's so."

"Well, then, I don't see that she could have put anything into what James was carrying." Mr. Egg paused. "The seal on the cork, now — you say Lord Borrodale saw it?"

"Yes, and so did Craven and James. You can see it for yourself, it you like — what's left of it."

The inspector produced an ashtray, which held a few fragments of dark blue sealing-wax, together with a small quantity of cigar-ash. Mr. Egg inspected them carefully.

"That's our wax and our seal, all right," he pronounced. "The top of the cork has been sliced off cleanly with a sharp knife and the mark's intact. 'Plummet & Rose. Dow 1908.' Nothing wrong with that. How about the strainer?"

"Washed out that same afternoon in boiling water by the kitchenmaid. Wiped immediately before using by James, who brought it in on the tray with the decanter and the glass. Taken out with the bottle and washed again at once, unfortunately — otherwise, of course, it might have told us something about when the nicotine got into the port wine."

"Well," said Mr. Egg obstinately, "it didn't get in at our place, that's a certainty. What's more, I don't believe it ever was in the bottle at all. How could it be? Where *is* the bottle, by the way?"

"It's just been packed up to go to the analyst, I think," said the inspector, "but as you're here, you'd better have a look at it. Podgers, let's have that bottle again. There are no fingerprints on it except Craven's, by the way, so it doesn't look as if it had been tampered with."

The policeman produced a brown paper parcel, from which he extracted a port-bottle, its mouth plugged with a clean cork. Some of the original dust of the cellar still clung to it, mingled with fingerprint powder. Mr. Egg removed the cork and took a long, strong sniff at the contents. Then his face changed.

"Where did you get this bottle from?" he demanded sharply.

"From Craven. Naturally, it was one of the first things we asked to see. He took us along to the cellar and pointed it out."

"Was it standing by itself or with a lot of other bottles?"

"It was standing on the cellar floor at the end of a row of empties, all belonging to the same bin; he explained that he put them on the floor in the order in which they were used, till the time came for them to be collected and taken away."

Mr. Egg thoughtfully tilted the bottle; a few drops of thick red liquid, turbid with disturbed crust, escaped into his wineglass. He smelt them again and tasted them. His snub nose looked pugnacious.

"Well?" asked the inspector.

"No nicotine there, at all events," said Mr. Egg, "unless my nose deceives me, which, you will understand, inspector, isn't likely, my nose

being my livelihood, so to speak. No. You'll have to send it to be analyzed, of course; I quite understand that, but I'd be ready to bet quite a little bit of money you'll find that bottle innocent. And that, I needn't tell you, will be a great relief to our minds. And I'm sure, speaking for myself, I very much appreciate the kind way you've put the matter before me."

"That's all right; your expert knowledge is of value. We can probably now exclude the bottle straight away and concentrate on the decanter."

"Just so," replied Mr. Egg. "Ye-es. Do you happen to know how many of the six dozen bottles had been used?"

"No, but Craven can tell us, if you really want to know."

"Just for my own satisfaction," said Mr. Egg. "Just to be sure that this *is* the right bottle, you know. I shouldn't like to feel I might have misled you in any way."

The inspector rang the bell and the butler promptly appeared — an elderly man of intensely respectable appearance.

"Craven," said the inspector, "this is Mr. Egg of Plummet & Rose's."

"I am already acquainted with Mr. Egg."

"Quite. He is naturally interested in the history of the port wine. He would like to know — what is it, exactly, Mr. Egg?"

"This bottle," said Monty, rapping it lightly with his fingernail, "it's the one you opened last night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sure of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"How many dozen have you got left?"

"I couldn't say off-hand, sir, without the cellar-book."

"And that's in the cellar, eh? I'd like to have a look at your cellars — I'm told they're very fine. All in apple-pie order, I'm sure. Right temperature and all that?"

"Undoubtedly, sir."

"We'll all go and look at the cellar," suggested the inspector, who in spite of his expressed confidence seemed to have doubts about leaving Mr. Egg alone with the butler.

Craven bowed and led the way, pausing only to fetch the keys from his pantry.

"This nicotine, now," prattled Mr. Egg, as they proceeded down a long corridor, "is it very deadly? I mean, would you require a great quantity of it to poison a person?"

"I understand from the doctor," replied the inspector, "that a few drops of the pure extract, or whatever they call it, would produce death in anything from twenty minutes to seven or eight hours."

"Dear, dear!" said Mr. Egg. "And how much of the port had the poor old gentleman taken? The full two glasses?"

"Yes, sir; to judge by the decanter, he had. Lord Borrodale had the habit of drinking his port straight off. He did not sip it, sir."

Mr. Egg was distressed.

"Not the right thing at all," he

said mournfully. "No, no. Smell, sip, and savor to bring out the flavor — that's the rule for wine, you know. Is there such a thing as a pond or stream in the garden, Mr. Craven?"

"No, sir," said the butler, a little surprised.

"Ah! I was just wondering. Somebody must have brought the nicotine along in something or other, you know. What would they do afterwards with the little bottle or whatever it was?"

"Easy enough to throw it in among the bushes or bury it, surely," said Craven. "There's six acres of garden, not counting the meadow or the courtyard. Or there are the water-butts, of course, and the well."

"How stupid of me," confessed Mr. Egg. "I never thought of that. Ah! this is the cellar, is it? Splendid — a real slap-up outfit, I call this. Nice, even temperature, too. Same summer and winter, eh? Well away from the house-furnace?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, sir. That's the other side of the house. Be careful of the last step, gentlemen; it's a little broken away. Here is where the Dow '08 stood, sir. No. 17 bin — one, two, three and a half dozen remaining, sir."

Mr. Egg nodded and holding his electric torch close to the protruding necks of the bottles, made a careful examination of the seals.

"Yes," he said, "here they are. Three and a half dozen, as you say. Sad to think that the throat they should have gone down lies, as you might say, closed up by Death. I often think, as I make my rounds, what a pity it is we don't all grow mellower and softer in our old age, same as this wine. A fine old gentleman, Lord Borrodale, or so I'm told, but something of a tough nut, if that's not disrespectful."

"He was hard, sir," agreed the butler, "but just. A very just master."

"Quite," said Mr. Egg. "And these, I take it, are the empties. Twelve, twenty-four, twenty-nine — and one is thirty — and three and a half dozen is forty-two — seventy-two — six dozen — that's O.K. by me." He lifted the empty bottles one by one. "They say dead men tell no tales, but they talk to little Monty Egg all right. This one, for instance. If this ever held Plummet & Rose's Dow '08 you can take Monty Egg and scramble him. Wrong smell, wrong crust, and that splash of whitewash was never put on by our cellar-man. Very easy to mix up one empty bottle with another. Twelve, twenty-four, twenty-eight and one is twenty-nine. I wonder what's become of the thirtieth bottle."

"I'm sure I never took one away," said the butler.

"The pantry keys — on a nail inside the door — very accessible," said Monty.

"Just a moment," interrupted the inspector. "Do you say that that bottle doesn't belong to the same bunch of port wine?"

"No, it doesn't — but no doubt Lord Borrodale sometimes went in for a change of vintage." Mr. Egg

inverted the bottle and shook it sharply. "Quite dry. Curious. Had a dead spider at the bottom of it. You'd be surprised how long a spider can exist without food. Curious that this empty bottle, which comes in the middle of the row, should be drier than the one at the beginning of the row and should contain a dead spider. We see a deal of curious things in our calling, inspector — we're encouraged to notice things, as you might say. 'The salesman with the open eye sees commissions mount up high.' You might call this bottle a curious thing. And here's another. That other bottle — the one you said was opened last night, Craven — how did you come to make a mistake like that? If my nose is to be trusted, not to mention my palate, that bottle's been open a week at least."

"Has it indeed, sir? I'm sure it's the one I put here at the end of this row. Somebody must have been and changed it."

"But ——" said the inspector. He stopped in mid-speech, as though struck by a sudden thought. "I think you'd better let me have those cellar keys of yours, Craven, and we'll get this cellar properly examined. That'll do for the moment. If you'll just step upstairs with me, Mr. Egg, I'd like a word with you."

"Always happy to oblige," said Monty agreeably. They returned to the upper air.

"I don't know if you realize, Mr. Egg," observed the inspector, "the bearing, or, as I might say, the inference of what you said just now. Supposing you're right about this bottle not being the right one, somebody's changed it on purpose, and the right one's missing. And, what's more, the person that changed the bottle left no fingerprints behind him — or her."

"I see what you mean," said Mr. Egg, who had indeed, drawn this inference some time ago, "and what's more, it looks as if the poison had been in the bottle after all, doesn't it? And that — you're going to say — is a serious look-out for Plummet & Rose, seeing there's no doubt our seal was on the bottle when it was brought into Lord Borrodale's room. I don't deny it, inspector. It's useless to bluster and say 'No, no,' when it's perfectly clear that the facts are so. That's a very useful motto for a man that wants to get on in our line of business."

"Well, Mr. Egg," said the inspector, laughing, "what will you say to the next inference? Since nobody but you had any interest in changing that bottle over, it looks as though I ought to clap the handcuffs on you."

"Now, that's a disagreeable sort of an inference," protested Mr. Egg, "and I hope you won't follow it up. I shouldn't like anything of that sort to happen, and my employers wouldn't fancy it either. Don't you think that before we do anything we might have cause to regret, it would be a good idea to have a look in the furnace-room?"

"Why the furnace-room?"

"Because," said Mr. Egg, "it's the place that Craven particularly didn't mention when we were asking him where anybody might have put a thing he wanted to get rid of."

The inspector appeared to be struck by this line of reasoning. He enlisted the aid of a couple of constables, and very soon the ashes of the furnace that supplied the central heating were being assiduously raked over. The first find was a thick mass of semi-molten glass which looked as though it might once have been part of a wine bottle.

"Looks as though you might be right," said the inspector, "but I don't see how we're to prove anything. We're not likely to get any nicotine out of this."

"I suppose not," agreed Mr. Egg sadly. "But" — his face brightened — "how about this?"

From the sieve in which the constable was sifting the ashes he picked out a thin piece of warped and twisted metal to which a lump of charred bone still clung.

"What on earth's that?"

"It doesn't look like much, but I think it might once have been a corkscrew," suggested Mr. Egg mildly. "There's something homely and familiar about it. And, if you'll look here, I think you'll see that the metal part of it is hollow. And I shouldn't be surprised if the thick bone handle was hollow, too. It's very badly charred, of course, but if you were to split it open, and if you were to find a hollow inside it, and possibly a little melted rubber — well, that might explain a lot."

The inspector smacked his thigh.

"By Jove, Mr. Egg!" he exclaimed, "I believe I see what you're getting at. You mean that if this corkscrew had been made hollow, and contained a rubber reservoir, inside, like a fountain pen, filled with poison, the poison might be made to flow down the hollow shaft by pressure on some sort of plunger arrangement."

"That's it," said Mr. Egg. "It would have to be screwed into the cork very carefully, of course, so as not to damage the tube, and it would have to be made long enough to project beyond the bottom of the cork, but still, it might be done. What's more, it has been done, or why should there be this little hole in the metal, about a quarter of an inch from the tip? Ordinary corkscrews never have holes in them — not in my experience, and I've been, as you might say, brought up on corkscrews."

"But who, in that case ——?"

"Well, the man who drew the cork, don't you think? The man whose fingerprints were on the bottle."

"Craven? But where's his motive?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Egg, "but Lord Borrodale was a judge, and a hard judge too. If you were to have Craven's fingerprints sent up to Scotland Yard, they might recognize them. I don't know. It's possible, isn't it? Or maybe Miss Waynfleet might know something about him. Or he might just possibly be men-

tioned in Lord Borrodale's memoirs that he was writing."

The inspector lost no time in following up this suggestion. Neither Scotland Yard nor Miss Waynfleet had anything to say against the butler, who had been two years in his situation and had always been quite satisfactory, but a reference to the records of Lord Borrodale's judicial career showed that a good many years before he had inflicted a savage sentence of penal servitude on a young man called Craven, who was by trade a skilled metal-worker and had apparently been involved in a fraud upon his employer. A little further investigation showed that this young man had been released from prison six months previously.

"Craven's son, of course," said the inspector. "And he had the manual skill to make the corkscrew in exact imitation of the one ordinarily used in the household. Wonder where they got the nicotine from? Well, we shall soon be able to check that up. I believe it's not difficult to obtain it for use in the garden. I'm very much obliged to you for your expert assistance, Mr. Egg. It would have taken us a long time to get to the rights and wrongs of those bottles. I suppose, when you found that Craven had given you the wrong one, you began to suspect him?"

"Oh, no," said Mr. Egg, with modest pride, "I knew it was Craven the minute he came into the room."

"No, did you? But why?"

"He called me 'sir,' " explained Mr. Egg, coughing delicately. "Last time I called he addressed me as 'young fellow' and told me that tradesmen must go round to the back door. A bad error of policy. 'Whether you're wrong or whether you're right, it's always better to be polite,' as it says in the *Salesman's Handbook*."

'Q'

# THAT'S YOUR OWN FUNERAL

*By CORNELL WOOLRICH*

THE demure little lady stepped into the grocery store, rested her large parcel on the counter, and stood by to be waited on. Outside a man just passing glanced incuriously in through the glass front of the shop as he went by. Just a brief turn of his head, one quick glance, no more. The only unusual feature about it being that male passersby will glance at haberdasheries, cigar stores, even barber shops, but seldom at groceries as a rule.

She was a pretty little thing, and she gave her order in a low, pleasant, half-shy voice, keeping her eyes on the list in her hand. She looked absurdly like a child, gravely reciting a lesson. But there was a wedding ring on her ungloved hand. So she must have been at least eighteen.

"Want me to send it over for you?" he offered. "Kind of heavy —"

"No, thanks, I'll carry it myself," she murmured. "No trouble at all."

She emerged, her arms pretty full, and continued on her way. She wore a short sealskin jacket that swung as she walked; her clothes were plain and inexpensive looking.

The man who had passed the grocery as she'd gone in hadn't progressed very far. He had stopped at the newsstand at the next corner to buy a paper, then he retreated, his back to the line of buildings, to glance through it quickly before taking it home with him. The hands that held the paper wore stained pigskin gloves.

The little lady with the bundles passed him a moment later. Neither of them glanced at the other; there was no reason for them to. He was lost in the baseball scores boxed at the top of the page, she was eying a light diagonally opposite to make sure she could cross on red. Halfway down the next block she stopped in at another store, a bakery.

A moment after, by one of those coincidences that so often happen, Pigskin Gloves passed in front of the bakery. He was carrying the paper in his pocket now. Once more his eyes strayed indifferently to the inside of the store, then out again. But the average man on the street isn't particularly interested in the interiors of bakeries either. This one may have been thinking of the supper he was going home to — so leisurely.

She accepted her change from the counterman, put it in her purse, and came out more bebundled than ever. Pigskin Gloves, who was obviously in no great hurry to get home, had stopped at last at the proper kind of showcase — that of a men's furnishing store a few doors down — and was gazing in at a luscious display of trick shirts. The window had been recently washed, unlike most of its neighbors;

except that it lacked a little quicksilver backing, it was every bit as good as a mirror.

The busy little housewife marched by with her packages, and her watery reflection followed across the glass store front. But just as she came abreast of Pigskin Gloves who was standing there with his back to her, the pupils of her eyes flicked briefly sideward toward him, then looked away again. It was as instantaneous, as hard to catch, as the click of a camera shutter.

She went a few steps farther. But there was a change coming over her eyes now. Or rather over the skin around them. It was hardening, tensing a little. Instantly, as though she realized it herself, she relaxed them, and they became as smooth as ever. But she seemed to remember a purchase she had forgotten to make. She stopped, turned abruptly, and began doubling back the way she had just come.

Pigskin Gloves was still idly looking at shirts and ties as she passed behind him a second time. But this time her eyes were blankly unaware of him; there was no flick toward him; and his oblivious back expressed equal unawareness of her.

At the corner that had the traffic light, she didn't cross a second time but turned up the side street and passed from sight, remaining just a demure little figure carrying bundles.

Instantly, from nowhere at all a second man had materialized beside Pigskin Gloves. Pigskin Gloves gave him a quick almost unnoticeable prod in the side, as though urging him forward, and then they separated. No one could have seen it, it was no more than a gesture of recognition between two passing acquaintances. The second man, who was dressed in a gray ulster, a gray soft hat, reached the corner and turned it, taking the same direction as the little housewife. The first one, Pigskin Gloves, was hurrying onward to the corner above, but going much faster now. He took the second side street, parallel to this one.

On the one the little housewife had taken, Gray Hat also was going along briskly. A discarded bag full of groceries caught his eye, just outside an areaway entrance. An untouched loaf of bread in wax paper had rolled out. He didn't stop to examine it; on the contrary his brisk pace changed to a jog trot. Further along was a second bag of groceries. This one had rolled toward the street and spilled out over the curb. The jog trot became a headlong run, the unfastened gray coat ballooning out behind him like a parachute. The street ahead was empty.

To be accurate, not strictly empty, but there was no little housewife on it. And that was all that Gray Hat was interested in. Down at the corner, crashed open against a fire hydrant, was the third and last brown paper bag. A pair of bright tin cans had rolled out of it; two boys were bearing down on it from across the way, frantically urged on by a plump maternal figure in an open upper story window.

As Gray Hat, by one of those coincidences that were now becoming a little overworked, reached the corner, Pigskin Gloves was coming at a full run toward him, having rounded the block from the other side. They both turned and followed a single direction.

They went one more block east, then one south. It was incredible how the girl had managed to get so far so quickly. Just beyond the next corner the demure little housewife, packageless now, and hatless, was careening along at a frantic, lurching speed, hugging her arms to her body as most women do when they run. That she could get anywhere at all on such spindly heels, much less as far and as fast as she had showed to what limits the human mechanism can force itself.

Halfway down, a doorway seemed suddenly to engulf her, and she was gone. The white and violet crepe ribbons fastened there fluttered with her passing. Long after she was gone, the glass street door was still slowly jolting back into place on reluctant hinges.

Just too late to catch sight of her, Pigskin Gloves and Gray Hat turned into the block, raced to the next corner. But they didn't turn it. An elderly man, standing there, approached at their command and said something to them. He made an abortive gesture with his arm, as though to point, and one of them slapped it down. Once again, as they had before, they separated. Gray Hat stayed where he was, pulling his hat brim further down over his eyes. Pigskin Gloves hurried off toward a very little thing, an almost inconspicuous little thing that he had spotted a second before. A blue and white enamel disk affixed to the baseboard of a store window that said *Public Telephone.*

Twilight was deepening into night; the street lights suddenly came on in long serried rows as far as the eye could reach. . . .

On the second floor of the hallway the demure-faced girl was leaning breathlessly against a door, limp as a rag doll, not making any sound, her face pressed flat against the wood to still the gasping of her breath. Her hands roamed up and down it on each side of her, not knocking but pushing against it, incoherently seeking admittance. She turned just once to look fearfully at the stairs, then pressed despairingly flat against the door again. It opened without a sound; she vanished like a shadow; the door closed again.

On the other side of it, in the orange dimness of a single bulb from far down the long hall, she spoke. A steamy whisper, with no larynx sound at all. "Feds, Champ! Whiskers' boys, Champ! Right on top of me, almost, before I knew it!" She passed the flat of her hand across her brow, staggered a little from so much running.

The man in the blue shirt finished putting away the blue-black automatic and interlacing the door-seam with chains, as though he hadn't heard her. Then they moved down the long hallway together, away from the door. In the room at the end he flexed his arm just once, and she was down

suddenly on one supporting arm.

"And you came back here! Right straight back, like in a paper chase!" He reached up and turned the bulb out, went over to the blank wall opposite, and from there diagonally up to the windows. Spider-webby net curtains criss-crossed the silvery arc-light glow coming in from the street. He didn't touch them, didn't even let his breath disturb them, as he pushed his face close up against them. Champ Lane, in the dim light, looked a good deal like a kid. His hard, cunning face was obscured; his body in silhouette was small, almost stunted; its movements wiry and tense.

"I made it, Champ, I lost them." Her voice sounded muffled somewhere in the darkened room behind him. "I had to get in out of the open, I had to pull a hole over my head, and I didn't know which way to turn. If I'd stayed out I'd have been picked up sure as —"

"Why didn't you pull the river over you, then?" he said bitterly, eyes glinting through two intersections in the closely webbed net.

She picked herself up, swung open a closet door, stepped behind it — outside the closet but away from the windows. Sandpaper hissed once, there was a momentary match-glow, then darkness again. She came out from behind the door with her hand turned down and under over a winking red spark. "I lost all the grub too. I don't know what we're going to do, I can't show my face in those same stores again. My seal coat's hot, too, and it's the only thing I've got to go out in —"

The red spark moved restlessly back and forth in the velvety darkness of the room. In the silence as she stopped whispering, a muffled wail, an eerie piping sound, came thinly through the ceiling over them.

She shivered. "They still got that stiff up there with them?" she said querulously, tilting her head back. "Why don't they take it out? It drives you wacky listening to them."

The man at the window, Champion Lane, wanted by almost the whole nation these last few weeks, hadn't stirred, hadn't taken his eyes from the two net pinholes that served each pupil as a frame. He hadn't seemed to breathe all this time. He spoke again at last.

"You lost 'em!" was all he said, in a clipped, choked voice.

Instantly, without a sound, she was at his shoulder, peering over it down into the street. The red spark in the hollow of her hand was hidden from the window by her palm. He didn't hit her any more, just dug abruptly back with his elbow. She went away, came back again without the glowing cigarette

Three men were gathered into a tight little knot on the opposite side of the street; they weren't looking over this way at all. They melted apart, each went up a different brownstone stoop. One wore a cravenette waterproof coat. One carried a violin case tucked high up under the pit of his arm. No doors opened to admit

them at the tops of those stoops, they just ebbed into the shadows. There were some uniformed policemen, too.

"Warm weather on its way," Champ said grimly.

She pulled at his sleeve. "Let's get out. Maybe we still can make it. This is an awful set-up to be caught in — a dead end without any turns!"

"It's too late, you fool, it's too late. We've got the whole District of Columbia on our hands."

A fellow and his girl were coming up the street arm in arm from the lower corner. A man suddenly accosted them from an areaway, dropped back again. The couple turned, went hastily back the way they had come, turning their heads repeatedly to look over their shoulders.

"Roping us off, eh?"

"The back yard, Champ. We can get out that way."

"If they're on this street, they're on the next one over." He turned briefly away, shrugged into a suit coat. Instantly the ghostly blue of his shirt darkened to invisible black. He took the gun out again from under it. "They're not getting me alive," he said quietly.

The futile bleating coming down through the ceiling sounded weirder than ever in the tense prickling stillness; it was like the monotonous fluting tune an Indian snake charmer plays, or the whistle of a peanut stand on a lonely street corner.

Champ Lane had always had a sense of humor; perverted, perhaps, but it was there. His eyes flicked upward. "Move over, whoever you are," he chuckled, "there's two more coming up!"

The girl in the room with him winced, drew in her breath sharply, as though something sharp had cut her.

Out in the street a taxi halted, was reversing with difficulty. A directing figure jumped off the running board as it started back the wrong way on a one-way street. Lights were going out by the roomful in the houses opposite. They became strangely blank, inscrutable. A woman came hurrying out of one of them guided by a policeman, a birdcage in her hand. He gave her a parting shove at the elbow and she went waddling down the street to safety.

"Any minute now," said Champ Lane, showing his teeth in what might have been a grin.

Suddenly the mourners' lament above broke off short, razor-clean. The waspish buzzing of a door-bell battery, clearly audible through the paper-thin floor, took its place. *Z-z-z-z*. Footsteps hurried to and fro across the planking up there, scuffled briefly as though someone were being forced to leave against his will.

Then, incredibly, it sounded right there in the same flat with them — louder, as angry as a stirred-up hornet's nest at the other end of the long hall.

"What do they expect me to do?" he said, "Walk down to the door with my hands up? Take it," he instructed her briefly, "or else they'll know for sure which flat —"

She moved down the hall on soundless feet. "Yes?" she breathed into the perforated disk on the wall.

"Everybody out! Everybody down to the street! That's a Department of Justice order!"

She came back. "They're clearing the house."

"Gas, that means," he said.

"Champ," she pleaded hoarsely, "don't just stay in here with your back to the wall and die! Don't count on your arsenal in the kitchen, you've got a whole Government against you! The minutes are going, once they've emptied the other flats it'll be too late —"

An incessant throbbing of feet was sounding from the galvanized iron framework of the staircase outside — all going one way — all going down. It was vibration rather than sound. The warning buzz kept sounding distantly as doors opened. Below, above, somewhere on the same floor. The thin, keening sound suddenly burst into full volume again, but it wasn't overhead any more, it was going down and around the stairwell, ebbing to the street below.

Champ surged forward swiftly.

He was at the window again. A bowed figure in widow's weeds, face veiled, was being hurried on reluctant feet across to the other side of the street, a policeman on one side of her, the building superintendent on the other, holding her up.

She, Champ's wife, must have been at the door without his knowing it; he would probably have shot her down if he had. She came running back. "The roof, Champ, the roof!"

"Whaddya think they are — hicks?" was all he said, not turning his head.

"Then do your dying out in the open hall at least, not sealed up in this sardine can! The stairs're still clear from this floor up. Let's give it a try, at least. We can always beat it down in again, if it's no go —" She was pulling at his left arm with both of hers.

"All right," he said suddenly, "get started, up there. I'm going to begin it from here. It's coming anyway — and I never yet fired second in my life. Here goes your friend with the raincoat."

She could just about make out the figure, across his shoulder and through the curtains and the window glass, up on top of a stoop there on the other side, signaling to someone unseen on this side.

He didn't touch the curtain or the pane. "Watch your eyes." She squinted them protectingly. It went off like a cannon, the flash lighting up both their faces, and bits of glass spattered all over them like raindrops. The curtain quivered violently; a singed hole was in it now. The figure on the stoop took a nose dive down the whole twenty brownstone steps, rolled all the way across the sidewalk into the gutter.

Instantly a whole unguessed insect world came to life. Swarms of yellow butterflies fluttered from every areaway, from every stoop, all up and down the street. Whole hivefuls of

angry bees seemed to loose themselves against both windows, and hop around inside the room like Mexican jumping-beans. In an instant there wasn't a shred of glass left in either frame. Champ jerked back, cursing, and threw himself flat on his belly pulling her down with him. The curtains were doing a buck-and-wing. Wisps of smoke came from the roof line across the way and floated off into the night sky. A searchlight beam suddenly shot down from somewhere, found the range of the windows, and bleached the room inside talcum-white.

They were both flat on their stomachs, wriggling snake-like for the safety of the hall, the girl in the lead. Champ swung bodily around his gun, like a rudder steering a floundering boat, ducked his chin to the carpet, and shot *up* the beam to a cornice across the street. Glass fluted plaintively, the white-hot whorl that centered the beam went yellow, then red, then out. The beam itself snuffed out, like an erased white line. They couldn't see anything themselves for a minute, much less the others over there around it.

He felt his way after her, hand on her uprighted heel; then they both reared behind the hall wall. "C'mon," he said, "we're good for ten minutes yet, after that. They probably think Frankie or somebody else is in here with me."

A window in the hallway looking out on a shaft that led to the back shivered to pieces just after they'd gone by, their flitting forms must have silhouetted against the light-toned wall behind them.

"Tomcats out on the back fence too," he gritted. He pitched his gun into the kitchen, grabbed up an unspiked one from a china cabinet where they were hanging from hooks like cups. The place was a regular munitions depot. At the door he took the lead, slithered out to the turn of the stairs, peered down to the floor below. She took the branch leading up.

"Champ, don't!" she breathed. "Isn't the rap tough enough as it is?"

His gun blasted just once, malevolently, and thick door-glass jumped apart somewhere below. A swarm of bees winged up to the second floor with a noise like a coffee grinder, and the smooth wall broke out with blackheads. But he was already on his way up to the third at her heels. "Tommy gun," he said. "All they need is tin hats and a flag!"

They shot out around the third landing, past a door with a wreath, and on up to the fourth. The house was all theirs. Below it sounded like a very enthusiastic Fourth of July. On the fourth floor somebody had lost a supper-table napkin in his hurry to get out, probably from under his chin. An overlooked radio was still jabbering away:

"And then little Peter Rabbit said to the Big Bad Wolf—"

Above the fourth the stairs shed their fake marble trim, took on a sharper incline. A roof door sealed them. "Get that hall light!" he ordered, hand on the latch. She high

jumped, and couldn't reach it.

"All right, skip it." He sighted on it almost casually and it popped into nothingness like a little balloon.

He motioned her down behind him, took off the latch, and began to ease the roof door out with shoulder pressure. Instantly, as though it were high noon out instead of well into the night, the gap was fuming with radiance like a seidlitz powder from some waiting beam, and the usual bees were singing all over the outside of the metal door. One of them, getting in, richocheted directly across the girl's feet on one of the lower steps, like some kind of a warm little bug. She shook it off with a kick.

"Musta mobilized the militia," he said with a flash of sardonic humor. They started down again, on the bias, hugging the inside wall away from the stair rail. Out in the street somewhere a futile bombardment — at nothing — was in full blast. They got down to the third again unopposed. Champ's wife had picked up the discarded napkin, perhaps with some unspoken wish that he'd surrender alive, and was holding it balled in her hand without his seeing it. They re-passed the door with the crêpe, hurriedly left on an inch-wide gap by its routed tenants.

He stopped, wavering by the stairs. Her hand pressed against his arm. "Oh." It was a small sound — a little, throaty gasp. "Oh — you're hurt — bleeding —"

"It's nothing," he said shortly. "It was that first blast — here, gimme that napkin." He grabbed it from her, wrapped it around his upper arm just below the biceps, held the ends for her to tie.

"I won't leave you, Champ. I won't. You're hurt."

"You'll do like I tell you. I'm all right. Stop snivelin' over me. It's just a little blood." He pushed her away from him, mounted the first steps, then stopped short. "You know what I'm going to do, don't you?" he said.

She looked frightened — in a new way. "I — I guess so, Champ," she said, and shivered.

His eyes were hard, commanding.

"Then here's what it's up to you to do —" He told her rapidly, in short, sharp phrases. "Don't worry," he said, finishing. "And as soon as you get a chance get in touch with Eddie. I'll leave a message, see? So just sit tight. Now go ahead —" He pushed her from him.

She crept fearfully down a flight further, to the second — alone. Upstairs in the depths of the building somewhere Champ was firing his gun again — into wood, at close range, it sounded like. It was drowned out in the repeated thud and boom of gas grenades coming in now through the windows of the second floor flat.

She came wavering down to the vestibule through the haze of the gas, her hand pressed to her stinging eyes. They led her out to the street, and the barrage against the windows died down shamefacedly. Up at either end were roped-off black masses that were spectators, here in the middle a big

bald patch of empty sidewalk and roadway, like a setting for a stage play.

She came out into the middle of this with a knot of men around her — so very fragile and girlish, she looked, to be the cause of so much racket and commotion. She mayn't have been crying, but the gas made it seem as if she was. "Where is he?" she was asked.

"He got out right at the start," she said simply. "He must have slipped right through your fingers along with the others. I couldn't do it, because you'd already seen me this afternoon —" And she gave them a rueful little smile.

They rushed the flat — and got a kitchenful of assorted weapons for their trouble.

"Rigged himself up and put one over on us, huh?" someone in command said wrathfully. "I told you to check those tenants carefully when you cleared the house!"

"We did, but the extras all accounted for themselves as guests from a party they were having on the top floor, and mourners from a wake on the third —"

"Sure! But you didn't check them *with* each other, you let them come out in any old order, and didn't keep any of them in custody after they did. This ain't the last you're going to hear about this, McDowell!"

The building was searched from top to bottom, but the girl seemed to have told the truth. Once again as so many times before, Champ Lane had eluded capture by a hair's breadth. They had the net to set all over again. At least this time they had his wife, whatever good that did them.

The other tenants were allowed to return to their homes, and she was taken to the local headquarters of the Bureau of Investigation for questioning. A questioning that continued relentlessly all the rest of the night and well into the morning of the next day. Without any other brutality, however, than its length.

The girl was able to satisfy them that she had not known who Champ was, or at least that he was a wanted criminal, when she had married him less than three weeks before. The similarity of names between her husband and the outlaw she had ascribed at the time to mere coincidence; Lane was not the most uncommon name there was, after all. Even the nickname Champ itself she had mistakenly thought had been given him in joking reference to the wanted man and not because he himself was the original. He had not, and they knew that as well as she, committed any overt act during those past three weeks, had been hiding out.

"But then if you didn't know, how is it you ran for your life from a couple of our agents this afternoon?"

She did know by then, she admitted; she had found out meantime — from the collection of weapons in the kitchen; his resemblance to pictures of the real Lane she had seen. She had intended leaving him at the first opportunity, but he had watched

her too closely until now. She had wanted to avoid capture this afternoon, however, for fear she would be forced to reveal his hiding place. He might think she had intentionally betrayed him, and then she would be in danger of her life night and day; he was the kind would have tracked her down remorselessly and paid her back.

It all sounded convincing as she told it. She was calm, and in her answers was the composure of one who has a clear conscience. She wasn't defiant or intractable, but submissive, resigned. Just a little lady who had let her heart lead her head into trouble, that was all; one who was no criminal herself. If they were aware of the one glaring discrepancy between her story and the facts — namely, the two shots, one from the window and one from the stairs, that had been fired *after* the building was emptied — they gave no sign. It was not to her interest to remind them of that. Even though the man in the waterproof coat had not been killed, she knew the penalty for taking up arms against a government agent. And if Champ had made good his escape, as she claimed, then it must have been she who had fired those shots.

But as the night wore out into wan daylight, and that in turn brightened into full morning, a change began to come over her. It may have been that the strain of the protracted questioning was beginning to tell on her. At any rate, her composure began to slip away from her little by little. At six-thirty she was fidgety, at seven-thirty noticeably nervous and strained, by eight-thirty harried, distracted. They even sent out for a cup of coffee for her, to see if that would brace her up a little, restore her some — but it seemed to have no effect.

As the city outside stirred, awoke to the new day, and went about its business, she began to verge almost on collapse. As butchers, barbers, bakers, elevator operators, bus conductors, street cleaners, bootblacks, newspaper vendors — and pallbearers — took up their daily tasks she commenced to beg them:

"Oh, please let me go! I can't stand any more of this! *Please* let me go! I haven't done anything! I tell you I don't know where he went!" Her distress became almost unendurable; she couldn't even sit still on her chair any longer; her fidgeting hands plucked her handkerchief into threads. It was obvious that unless they dismissed her soon they were going to have a first-class case of hysteria on their hands.

After holding what seemed to her like an endless conference in an adjoining room, they sent out word that she would be released on her own recognizance. She was, of course, to hold herself at their disposal for further questioning at any time. If she tried to leave town, she would be arrested.

It was now ten minutes past nine. She fled downstairs to the street like one possessed. She must have sensed that their object in suddenly letting her go was in the hope that she would

eventually lead them to Champ Lane.

So she was careful — very careful — even in her frantic haste. She dodged, apparently aimlessly, through the stream of pedestrians, darted into a large department store, dashed down into the basement and left the store by a side-street entrance. Then she plunged across the street and entered a small and grimy but quite respectable hotel.

She had to call Eddie — right away. If she used the pay booth in the lobby, someone might overhear her. She wasn't sure that she'd actually lost whoever might be trailing her. So she went into the ladies' washroom and used the telephone there.

In a minute, Eddie's low-pitched voice came to her over the wire. She identified herself. "What about — him, Eddie? Is he all right? Where is he?"

"Hold it, sister. I haven't heard a thing."

"But he said — Eddie, he said he'd call you." Her voice rose as panic stirred through her; her fingers squeezed around the mouthpiece of the phone until they ached.

"Look. Don't come over here. Call me later. I'll let you know if I hear anything . . ."

"But, Eddie, *something* must have —" The phone clicked in her ear, and to no one in particular she said, loudly, shrilly, "His arm — the bleeding — dear God, *no!*"

When she was on the street again, she was a woman gone mad. Her face was all pulled apart — the mouth wrenched open, eyes wide and staring. She forgot that someone might be following her, she forgot to be careful, she forgot everything but Champ — and his arm — and the blood — and where he was, lying unconscious, maybe dead, in that awful place. . . .

She waved to a taxi, jumped in with a swift, sprawling movement, and gave the driver the address of the house she'd left the night before.

The crêpe was still affixed to the front door, and but for the two yawning second-floor windows, and some strips of tape holding the glass in place in the street door, there was nothing to witness last night's battle. The superintendent was sweeping up glass shards from the side-walk as she got out of the cab and accosted him with a white, strained face.

"I came back to get my things," she said, staring at him with a peculiar fixed tensity.

He glowered at her over his shoulder. "The quicker the better!" He spat, virtuously if inaccurately. "Go on up, help yourself. Fine people to have living in a respectable house!"

She couldn't seem to tear herself away, though. She kept looking from him to the crêpe and from the crêpe to him. Her eyes strayed up the bullet-pitted façade of the building — stopped a little higher than the second floor, where the blinds were drawn down full length.

"What time," she asked as casually as she could, "are they having their funeral?"

"Yah, *you* should ask!" he growled

resentfully. "Fine funeral you and that loafer husband of yours give 'em!" And then as she hovered there in the middle of all his glass-sweepings, he went on, "It's all over with long ago. Eight o'clock sharp they come by and screw down the lid. Eight-thirty already they left the house! He's under the ground at Evergreen Cemetery by now, poor man, and may his soul rest in peace —"

Something that sounded like the twang of a snapping violin string fell on his ears, and when he looked, his carefully collected glass-sweepings were scattered all over the sidewalk again.

She got the door of the taxi open and fell in. She didn't climb in, she *fell* in on her face. The driver heard a choked sound that he translated as "Evergreen Cemetery," and acted upon it. Her legs were still sticking out through the open door as the cab veered off.

Down at the lower corner, by one of those coincidences that were happening again, there was another cab drawn up at the curb with three men in it. She had managed to get up on her knees by the time her machine flashed by. She screamed out at them through the open window, "For God's sake, follow me — if you're Feds!" Which was a strange invitation to come from Champ Lane's wife. Her outthrust arm, beckoning them on wind-mill-fashion, continued to wave frantically out the window for blocks down.

"Quit it, lady!" warned the driver at one point, when she had caught him by the shoulders with both hands to help him get some speed up. "Or I'll turn you over to a cop!"

One cop did overtake them shortly, on a motorcycle, but instead of stopping them, he shot ahead, holding the crosswise traffic in the side streets until they had gone by.

No vehicle had ever yet arrived outside a burial ground with such indecent haste as this one, squealing to a skidding stop and filling the peaceful air with a smell of burned-out bearings. But she was already tumbling through the dignified ornamental gateway, into the tranquil setting of well groomed shrubbery, neat white markers, and winding, sanded paths.

She drew up abruptly, cupped both hands despairingly to the sides of her head, as though not knowing which way to turn. A distant muffled explosion, like a percussion cap buried in the ground, solved her dilemma for her. She sped in that direction like an arrow out of a bow.

Halfway she met a crowd of people running toward her — in fact scattering in all directions from a single focal point. Frightened people, squalling, gibbering people, one or two of them even stumbling over the turf in their frantic, heedless haste to reach the gates. She battled her way through them until she reached the spot where the stampede had started. An equally frightened but more courageous sexton stood at bay on a little mound of freshly upturned earth, a prayer book

extended exorcisingly toward a coffin that was precariously balanced on the very lip of the grave. It was pounding as though it contained a dynamo. And as it pounded it rocked, almost seesawed, with a violent inner agitation. The sexton's white lips moved in hurried exhortation, but no sound passed them.

The widow stood, wavering, by him.

Just as she got there a second gun shot echoed hollowly inside the monstrous thing, and wisps of smoke filtered out of bullet holes that the coffin must have received the night before. Champ Lane's wife dropped down beside it, threw her arms over it in maddened, forestalling embrace, to keep it from going over. She was aware of three men running up after her from the direction of the entrance gates. She recognized one of the men who had questioned her.

"Help me," she sobbed. "You followed me because you wanted Champ Lane — he's in there — help me get him out —"

The man's face went hard and incredulous. "In there — how?"

"He was going to hide in there — until the raid was over. In — with the dead man. He was so small he could do it all right. He was going to get out as soon as you'd gone — but his arm — it must have bled — Champ must have passed out and now they . . . Oh, don't stand there — help me get him out. A crowbar, a chisel — anything —"

A distorted mask of gray-faced terror that bore a remote resemblance to the widely publicized features of gunman Champ Lane, gazed up into their faces a few minutes later with mute, dog-like gratitude. His sworn enemies, at that moment, must have seemed like angels to him. Angels with handcuffs.

He handed them the gun that he had emptied, in his mad terror, when he came alive and found himself lying, weak and dazed from loss of blood, in the coffin with the dead man's cold body. The way he gave up the gun was almost like a gesture of devotion.

"They didn't hear my first shot — or maybe they thought it was the hearse backfiring." He shivered. A hoarse rattle shook in his throat as he looked down at the disarranged corpse. "I was — under that — for hours — all night. . . ."

As they held him upright between them and as one of them reached out a hand with the open jaws of the manacles reaching for his wrists, the small, tough man who had been the terror of forty-eight states suddenly dropped to his knees. The detective jerked the handcuffs back before Champ Lane could press his mouth against them.

"Bring on Atlanta, Leavenworth — even Alcatraz," he whimpered. "Lead me to 'em. They're *all* right with me!"

The headline in the papers that evening was, in a way, Champ Lane's epitaph.

CORNERED DESPERADO
KISSES CAPTORS' HANDS

# *VILLAINY UNMASK'D*

*In September 1947 D. Appleton-Century published* VILLAINY DETECTED, *a simply gorgeous anthology of real-life crimes of a certain period in English history, edited by our foremost authority on 18th century crime-and-detection, Lillian de la Torre. Miss de la Torre, you will remember, had her first fiction published by EQMM — the brilliant series of historical detective stories later issued in book form as* DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR. *To give you just a hint of the flavor, atmosphere, and pungency of Miss de la Torre's anthology, let us quote the title and subtitle in full:* VILLAINY DETECTED: *Being a Collection of the most sensational True Crimes and the most notorious Real Criminals that blotted the name of Britain in the Years 1660 to 1800: By Various Hands: The Whole collected together and embellished with Observations historical, moral, and critical.*

*This festival of crime celebrates the Extraordinary and Daring Exploits of such picturesque scoundrels as Jack Sheppard, whom no jail could hold; Swift Nicks of the famous ride to York; James Maclaine, the sentimental Gentleman Highwayman; Lieutenant Richardson, the amorous pirate; thief-takers and thief-makers; horse-stealers, poachers, smugglers, housebreakers, foot-pads — rogues and renegades all, bloody malefactors, their villainy display'd, unmask'd, and detect'd by such illustrious oldstyle chroniclers of crime as Daniel DeFoe, Jonathan Swift, and Sir Walter Scott, and such equally renowned modern reporters of crime as Edmund Pearson, William Roughead, and Raymond Postgate. And as an extra dividend of sheer detectival delight Miss de la Torre includes in this rich and raffish tapestry of a book an original short story of her own, "The Disappearing Servant Wench," in which her real-life detector, Dr. Sam: Johnson, grapples with the Elizabeth Canning mystery, "turning upon it the full beam of his penetrating intellect."*

*If you are a collector or connoisseur of crime, Lillian de la Torre's anthology is a "must" volume for your shelves; if you are a plain fan or fancy aficionado of crime,* VILLAINY DETECTED *is equally a "must" on your reading list; if you care not a hoot for crime, fictional or real, and have not the remotest notion as to the difference between cly-fakers and Abram coves, beak-runners and hornies, wipe prigging and lully prigging — why, in that case, simply read the book for its scholarship, authenticity, humor, and superb entertainment.*

*One picture is worth a thousand words: one sample is worth a thousand*

*recommendations. If you are not familiar with the quality of Miss de la Torre's workmanship, read her newest story about Dr. Sam: Johnson — "The Black Stone of Dr. Dee."*

# THE BLACK STONE OF DR. DEE

*by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE*
*(as narrated by James Boswell, March 1771)*

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *It was Horace Walpole himself who posed this problem, in the letter with which the story opens. I give it as it came from the famous letter-writer's quill pen in the spring of 1771, with only a word or two interpolated by my typewriter.*

*Mr. Walpole's castle, his book, his unbalanced nephew, his Thespian tenant, and his ducal neighbours, are all drawn from the life; except that the real Duke of Argyle was staunchly loyal to the Hanoverian King, and his brother to him.*

*The Black Stone of Dr. Dee now reposes in the British Museum. If it should be subjected to those experiments in natural philosophy practised upon it by Dr. Sam: Johnson, I cannot guarantee what might be discovered.*

'Tis a strange kind of thief, my dear George," wrote Horace Walpole, on a day in March, 1771, "that goes to the devil's own trouble to break and enter, and then goes away with nothing for his trouble, not even a golden guinea out of a drawer full of them. But stay, you shall have the tale from the beginning.

" 'Twas Monday I had a courier from cousin Conway to tell me that my house in Arlington Street had been broken open in the night, and all my cabinets and trunks forced and plundered.

"I was a good quarter of an hour before I recollected that it was very becoming to have philosophy enough not to care about what one does care for, if you don't care there's no philosophy in bearing it. I despatched my upper servant, breakfasted, fed the bantams as usual, and made no more hurry to town than Cincinnatus would if he had lost a basket of turnips. I left in my drawers 270 l. of bank bills and three hundred guineas, not to mention all my gold and silver coins, some inestimable miniatures, a little plate, and a good deal of furniture, under no guard but that of two maidens.

"When I arrived, I found in three different chambers three cabinets, a large chest, and a glass case of china wide open, the locks not picked, but forced, and the doors of them broken to pieces. The miracle was, that I did not find the least thing missing!

"In the cabinet of modern medals, there were, and so there are still,

a series of English coins, with downright John Trot guineas, half-guineas, shillings, sixpences, and every kind of current money. Not a single piece was removed. Just so in the Greek and Roman cabinet; though in the latter were some drawers of papers, which they had tumbled and scattered about the floor. A great exchequer chest, that belonged to my father, the Prime Minister, was in the same room. Not being able to force the lock, the philosophers (for thieves that steal nothing deserve the title much more than Cincinnatus or I) had wrenched a great flapper of brass with such violence as to break it into seven pieces. The trunk contained a new set of chairs of French tapestry, two screens, rolls of prints, and a suit of silver stuff that I had made for the King's wedding. All was turned topsy-turvy, and nothing stolen.

"In short, they had broken out a panel in the door of the area, and unbarred and unbolted it, and gone out at the street-door, which they left wide open at five o'clock in the morning. A passenger had found it so, and alarmed the maids, one of whom ran naked into the street, and by her cries waked my Lord Romney, who lives opposite.

"All London has fallen to reasoning on this marvellous adventure, and not an argument presents itself that some other does not contradict. I insist that I have a *talisman*.

"You must know that last winter, being asked by Lord Vere to assist in settling Lady Betty Germaine's auction, I found in an old catalogue of her collection this article, '*The Black Stone into which Dr. Dee used to call his spirits.*' Dr. Dee, you must know, was a great conjuror in the days of Queen Elizabeth, and has written a folio of the dialogues he held with his imps. I asked eagerly for this stone; Lord Vere said he knew of no such thing but, if found, it should certainly be at my service. Alas, the stone was gone!

"This winter I was again employed by Lord Frederic Campbell to do him the same service about his late father's (the Duke of Argyle's) collection. Among other odd things he produced a round piece of shining black marble in a leathern case, as big as the crown of a hat, and asked me what that possibly could be?

"I screamed out, 'O Lord, I am the only man in England that can tell you! It is Dr. Dee's Black Stone!'

"It certainly is; Lady Betty had formerly given away or sold, time out of mind, for she was a thousand years old, that part of the collection which contained natural philosophy. So, or since, the Black Stone had wandered into an auction, for the lotted paper is still on it. The Duke of Argyle, who bought everything, bought it. Lord Frederic gave it to me; and if it was not this magical stone, which is only of high-polished coal, that preserved my chattels, in truth I cannot guess what did."

Thus, in gay mood, wrote Horace

Walpole to his nephew, Lord Orford; and 'twas Lord Orford who, taking a soberer view, brought the letter to Dr. Sam: Johnson. 'Twas his belief, that the thief who had missed his mark in Arlington Street, might try again, and succeed, at his uncle's Twickenham estate, the famous Gothick castle of Strawberry Hill.

Dr. Johnson, concurring in this view, found himself forthwith whisked off to Strawberry Hill; and to my delight, for I had never seen the place, Lord Orford accommodated me also with a seat in his chariot.

We found Strawberry Hill to be a little miniature imitation of the Gothick, with lath-and-plaster battlements and a smell of raw wood. Nevertheless, it had every Gothick appurtenance, a chapel a-building in the garden, a great garden-seat like a shell, an oratory with its niches, a hermitage under a bank. A little toy house across the mead housed Kitty Clive, late the darling of the stage.

The chatelain of Strawberry greeted us in the library, when I perceived to my disquiet not only that he had not desired our presence or our assistance, but also that it was far from welcome to him. Indeed he looked at me askance when Orford named me, and knapped his thin lips together with ostentatious and ludicrous determination, as who should say, "Not one word shall pass my lips until this man and his notebook are out of earshot!"

"What the devil do you mean, George," he muttered aside to Lord Orford, "by bringing *ursa major* —" by this disrespectful designation he intended Dr. Johnson — "to Strawberry?"

Dr. Johnson, by good fortune, was engrossed at the bookcases, oblivious of all else, but I watched the little passage enthralled. Mankind is my study.

Mr. Walpole is a point-device creature with a faded kind of fineness to his countenance, and large eyes full of sensibility. He frowned pettishly upon his nephew. Lord Orford is higher than his uncle, and broader, and smells of Newmarket. His scalded red countenance and his blank boiled eyes are susceptible of little change of expression, but a kind of grin broadened his loose mouth. He made no reply whatever, merely leered like a codfish, and after a moment our unwilling host shrugged, and dispatched a flunky to conduct us to our chambers.

"The Blue Bedchamber, George. The Red Bedchamber, Dr. Johnson. And for Mr. Boswell, as you affect the Gothick, you shall lie in the Round Tower."

I heard Orford laughing to himself as he retired to the Blue Bedchamber. He sounded rather as if he could not stop.

Leaving Dr. Johnson at the Red Bedchamber adjoining, I followed my guide the fifty-foot length of the Great Gallery. At the west end a noble Gothick doorway led by way of a passage into the newly-completed Round Tower, which on this floor

housed a handsome drawing-room. The flunky conducted me to the Round Bedchamber above, on the two-pair-of-stairs floor.

I took a romantick satisfaction in lodging in the Tower. The windows were mere slits set in deep embrasures. Opposite the bed hung a noble portrait of a gentleman in tilting-armour; he held his casque in his hand. Over the deep fireplace was Hogarth's portrait of Sarah Malcolm the Temple murderess, which he painted in Newgate the night before her execution. In her uneasy company I erased the stains of travel before descending.

I found a distinguished company gathering in the Round Tower drawing-room. Mr. Walpole named me to them rather as if I had been a slug upon his roses. To my intense satisfaction, I found myself greeting the noble company upon a footing of acquaintanceship and mutual respect. They were Mr. Walpole's neighbour, the Duke of Argyle, his brother Lord Frederic Campbell, and Lord Frederic's lady, Lady Mary.

I stared covertly upon Lady Mary's sweet face. She was the relict of the notorious Lawrence, Earl Ferrers, who for her sake murdered his steward, and was hanged for it. Suffering had stamped its mark upon her, but she held her head proudly.

To my mingled relief and chagrin, the Duchess was not one of us. She was the most famous beauty of the age. She had come to London a raw Irish girl, so beautiful she could not walk in St. James's Park without a mob attending her; she had married the Duke of Hamilton at midnight with a ring from the bed-curtains; and when she tried to obtain for their son the Douglas patrimony, among the attorneys who defeated her was your humble servant, James Boswell — but that is all another story. Now she was by a second marriage the Duchess of Argyle — and what would she say to James Boswell?

"My wife will follow," the Duke told Mr. Walpole, "in the carriage. The boy is ailing, and engages her attention."

"I fear you will never raise him," said Lady Mary gently.

"Nay, ma'am, he blooms in Argyle; 'tis but the air of London sends him into a decline."

"Pray, Mr. Walpole," Lord Frederic diverted the conversation, "has Dr. Johnson seen the treasures of Strawberry?"

"No, sir," replied our host, "he is newly arrived this past hour."

"May not he see them now," begged Lord Frederic, "and we will all assist in the perambulation, and thus expend our time until our table at cards is complete?"

I thought the Duke looked mighty *bored*, as the new saying is; but Dr. Johnson bowed polite acquiescence, and Mr. Walpole seized upon the proposal with *enthusiasm*.

A great fire burned in the gallery as we admired the paintings with which the walls were hung, and the antique marbles that lined the hall.

"Make way," cried a deep rich voice with a chuckle in it, "for still another of Horrie's antiques!"

Into the gallery like a City Company's state barge surged Kitty Clive, the beloved actress, now a hearty ample woman of some sixty years.

Orford, up to this time sunk in the sullens, brightened at sight of her.

"Damme," he shouted, "filly or mare, 'tis all one to me! Have at thee, Kitty!"

He rumpled her, and had a box o' the ear for his pains.

"God bless you, Horrie," cried Clive, spying my philosophick friend, "God bless you for bringing us Dr. Johnson. Sure I love to sit next to Dr. Johnson; he always *entertains* me."

So saying, she greeted the philosopher with a hearty buss, which Dr. Johnson, who esteemed himself for his gallant attentions to the ladies, returned with interest.

I was assessing Mistress Clive's ample frame, her broad red nose shining like the sun in her broad red face, her brocade gown as red, when turning to me she greeted me with a great smacking kiss. She smelled of otto and sillabubs.

In the hubbub of greeting the Clive, who must perforce buss every man present, the Duchess of Argyle slipped quietly into the gallery. She wore pale grey, her colour was high, she greeted no one.

"The boy?" asked the Duke quietly.

The little mouse feet of age were clearly visible at the Duchess's eyes.

"He mends," she said, "he has purged, and he mends."

From the gallery we passed into the Tribune, which lay by the Round Tower. As the gentlemen stood back to bow the ladies through the door, Lady Mary, who stood nighest, made as if to enter. The Duchess touched her sleeve. Lady Mary stood still the length of a heart-beat. Then the colour stained her throat, and she drew back with downcast eyes to give her sister-in-law precedence. A little sigh escaped her lips. Behind the Duchess Kitty Clive flounced through with her blunt nose at an even sharper angle than the beautiful Duchess's chiselled one, burlesque in every waggle of her draperies. Dr. Johnson permitted himself a faint smile, Walpole looked pinched, and Orford guffawed; but the Campbells ignored the little scene.

The Tribune was a curious *barroco* room, shaped like a square, with four bays. A star of yellow glass centered the ceiling. Here were housed many of our host's choicest objects of curiosity. We gazed upon the dagger of Henry VIII, the silver-studded comb of Mary Queen of Scots, and the red hat of Cardinal Wolsey. In a glazed china cabinet we came upon the Black Stone of Dr. Dee. Everyone, Campbells included, crowded about to stare at it. Mr. Walpole was exalted as a showman.

" 'Tis my newest treasure," said he, "the generous gift of the Duke of Argyle by his brother, Lord Frederic —" the brothers acknowledged his bow — "You must know, Dr.

Johnson, that Dee was an alchemist, and made gold for the King of Bohemia; and into this gazing-glass he was wont to call his spirits."

On the side of the leather case a slip of paper was untidily affixed. Mr. Walpole untrussed the points and displayed to our curious eyes a polished black sphere, which rolled and came to rest on the china cabinet shelf.

"Pray, Mr. Walpole," said Dr. Johnson, "will not you place this object in a place of safety?"

"Sir," said Walpole, "Strawberry Hill *is* a place of safety. We are not plagued, as Fleet Street, by light-fingered gentry."

"Or," said I, "Arlington Street."

I had for reply a freezing stare, as Walpole replaced the stone and conducted the party to the library.

We were forced to admire this spacious chamber. A large window looked east, topped with stained glass, with a rose window at each side. The room was lined with books, arranged in Gothick arches of pierced work. To them my learned friend devoted his attention, blinking at the titles in the candle-light.

I picked up from a bureau a book lying by itself, richly bound in morocco and stamped with the Walpole arms.

"Well, Mr. Boswell," came the thin voice of our host at my elbow, "what say you to my little Gothick romance?"

"Why, sir," I replied, "nothing, for I have never read it."

Walpole smiled sourly.

"This, Mr. Boswell, is an ignorance not invincible. You shall have the reading of this very copy."

"Do," says Clive, "for you've never read its like. It consists of ghosts and enchantments; pictures walk out of their frames; armour is heard to clank, and helmets drop from the moon. Horrie says, it came to him in a dream, and sure I fancy 'twas a dream when he had some feverish disposition on him."

I accepted of the volume eagerly. With such a prospect in store, I regretted having pledged myself to take a hand at loo; I was in haste to be at it. Dr. Johnson excused himself. He never plays at cards, preferring to supply the vacuity of life with conversation; which failing, he betook himself to the book-cases.

We sat down, therefore, seven at the table, to our game. I was out more money than I liked, and feeling as *bored* as the Duke by the curiosities, when our game was cut short by a distressing incident. Lord Orford was in ill luck. He sat mum-chance, losing steadily, taking his breath noisily through his teeth as he saw his guineas swept away. Luck was all with Lord Frederic.

"Pam be civil," said he, leading the ace of trumps.

Lord Orford held Pam, the all-conquering knave of clubs, and was thus debarred by the custom of the game from taking the trick with it. He scowled with fury; a moment later he took a distressing revenge.

With a sudden roar he leaned forward and seemed to draw an ace from Lord Frederic's sleeve. Lord Frederic leaped to his feet, his bluff countenance purple with fury.

"What kind of jugglery is this, my Lord?" he demanded angrily. "I should call you out for this."

"Pray, sir," said Walpole hastily, "be so candid as to overlook my nephew, you know his weakness."

Still roaring with laughter, Lord Orford was hustled away, and in perturbed silence the party broke up. The carriage rolled off with the ducal party, Lord Frederic 'squired the Clive in her homeward walk across the moonlit mead. Dr. Johnson was already retired to the Red Bedchamber with Barrow's quarto of Archimedes. Walpole mounted to his two-pair-of-stairs bedroom, and I was left alone by the fire in the great gallery to read

## The Castle of Otranto

Having once opened it, I was powerless to lay it down. Long after all were wrapped in slumber, I sat in the shadowy gallery and read by the light of a single candle.

Through the stained glass window-arch the full moon spilled blood upon the floor, while a shaft of cold green assailed but could not conquer the shadows of the passage into the Round Tower. I liked the shadows little, and less as I read Mr. Walpole's tale. 'Tis of just such a castle, most dismally haunted, at once by the vices of its chatelain and the avenging spirits of his ancestors. 'Twas from the wicked lust of Manfred that the Lady Isabella fled. I read entranced:

"Where conceal herself? How avoid pursuit?

"As these thoughts passed rapidly through her mind, she recollected a subterraneous passage which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas. Could she reach the altar before she was overtaken, she knew even Manfred's violence would not dare profane the sacredness of the place. She seized a lamp that burned at the foot of the staircase, and hurried towards the secret passage."

Brave, intrepid soul!

"The lower part of the castle was hollowed into several intricate cloisters; and it was not easy for one under so much anxiety to find the door that opened into the cavern. An awful silence reigned throughout those subterraneous regions —"

A silence as thick reigned in the shadowy gallery. I permitted myself an uneasy glance about me, before I read on:

"— except now and then some blasts of wind that shook the doors she had passed —"

Was that the wind in the battlements of the Round Tower?

"— and which, grating on the rusty hinges, were re-echoed through that long labyrinth of darkness."

I could have sworn that somewhere a hinge creaked. I reproved myself for phantasy, and read on:

"She trod as softly as impatience would give her leave, yet frequently

stopped and listened to hear if she was followed. In one of those moments she thought she heard a step —"

Was it a step that I heard? I shook off the fancy, and took up the tale:

"Her blood curdled. She was on point of flight, when a door was opened gently —"

Was not that faint sound, the opening of the door to the Round Tower? I forced myself to read on:

"— but ere her lamp, which she held up, could discover who opened it, the person retired precipitately on seeing the light."

The impression was too strong for me. I rose and advanced my candle to the Round Tower passage. The weak yellow rays assailed the darkness and barely revealed —

A shadowy Presence. It stood motionless in the pale green moonlight and gazed towards me. It was gowned from crown to heel in an antique gown, the cowl drawn forward and shadowing the face, from which sightless eyes seemed to burn.

For a moment I stood as if turned to stone. Then the Presence melted into the darkness of the Round Tower, and the heavy door swung shut. It wanted no more to impel me to activity. The great key was in the lock. I leaped forward and turned it. The midnight intruder was a prisoner.

I found my learned friend abed in his chamber, reading his tome of Archimedes by candle-light, poking his head so close to the candle as to scorch the front of his nocturnal headkerchief.

"Well done, Bozzy," he cried approvingly when he had heard my tale. "Time was, when you would have conceived no other remedy, but to repair to the oratory and ejaculate Ave Marys against the powers of darkness. You progress, sir, you progress. Let us at once go look upon this apparition, and so prove it to be flesh and blood. 'Tis to be hoped," he added thoughtfully, thrusting his feet into his vast buckled shoes, "that your prisoner is not our host, night-rambling in one of his Gothick freaks."

Though forcibly struck by this possibility, I nevertheless gripped the poker as we passed along the gallery, and held it at the ready when Dr. Johnson swung back the massive door of the Round Tower drawing room.

The chamber was empty.

Dr. Johnson tried the windows in the bay. They were all made fast.

The Presence had not been flesh and blood after all.

My hair stirred at the thought. For Dr. Johnson, 'twas his irascibility that stirred.

"Sir," he said scathingly, "I find you do *not* improve, but the contrary. 'Tis said, Mr. Walpole's book has set Misses in boarding schools to screaming in the night. Sure you lie under its spell. Did not armour clank, and chains rattle?"

"No, sir," I replied, "but I heard the wind in the battlements, and a step in the Round Tower, and the opening of the door."

"Why, then," continued my friend

severely, "perhaps your apparition stepped from yonder portrait" (pointing) "and has gone again home into its frame."

I yielded to his mood.

"It may be so," I granted him, "for I own, that I have been kept from mounting to my chamber above, by the fancy that the portrait that hangs in it, he in black armour, might step from the frame to trouble my rest."

"Sir, clear your mind of phantasy," roared my *common-sensical* friend. "My mind misgives me for Mr. Walpole's Black Stone. It lies exposed to every chance in yonder open cabinet."

"We must," said I, "remove it to a place of safety."

"My chamber is too easy of access. Pray, Mr. Boswell, keep it by you this night in your embattled Round Tower."

It seemed an idle precaution, against a visitant that could pass through walls, but I acquiesced. I fetched the stone in its case, and carried it with me up the narrow stair into my bedchamber high in the Round Tower.

The portrait in black armour viewed my proceedings. The eyes of the face, and the eye-holes of the casque, seemed to follow my movements as I laid the case on an antique chest opposite the bed. I turned the key in the door, divested myself hastily, and blew out the candle.

The full moon streamed through the narrow slitted casement, and fell upon the chest. I took a fancy to expose the magick stone itself to the moonlight. It shone with an awful, dark, steady gleam. Even after I had drawn the bed-curtains, through the slit I could still perceive the magick stone shining in the moonlight. It seemed to me that then, if ever, the spirits must enter into it. Mingled cloudily with these musings was the thought of the man in black armour descending from his frame to bend over me. 'Twas my last thought as I drifted into uneasy sleep.

The moon was still in the south window when I opened my eyes again. Motionless in its bright ray stood — *a figure in armour!* I strove to shake off the phantasy, and looked again.

'Twas no phantasy. The figure was solid. It stood in the bright moonbeam and cast a shadow across the chest. The casque was not in its hand, but on its head. The visor was closed, concealing who knows what? Between the palms of the gauntleted hands lay the Black Stone of Dr. Dee.

I swallowed, and spoke. My voice came out in a croak:

"In the name of —" I uttered.

With a violent start the apparition whirled. The sphere flew from its hands, and landed safely among the bed-curtains. With measured tread the armoured thing passed from the room. I heard the key turn in the lock, the door creak open, and a heavy step descending the stair.

With damp palms I huddled my night gown about me, seized the Black Stone, and fairly fled to the Red Room.

"Pho, pho, Bozzy," said Johnson angrily. "You dreamt it. 'Tis the natural result of Mr. Walpole's Gothick castle, and his Gothick romance, and his magick stone. Let us hear no more on't."

Nevertheless, he afforded me the half of his bed, and there I passed the night, with the Black Stone thrust up into the tester.

When I awoke, the sun was high. I found the company dispersed. Horace Walpole was feeding his bantams. Lord Orford was not to be seen. Dr. Johnson was in the wash-house engaged in experiments in natural philosophy.

The object of his study was the Black Stone of Dr. Dee. When I came into the dark, damp-smelling wash-house from the spring sunshine, he was engaged in duplicating the magick stone from a piece of cannel coal, laboriously chipping and grinding away the surface, and every so often laving the rough object in a bucket full of water. I could not see why he persisted in saving the sooty water that overflowed, but save it he did, storing it up in a graduated phial, and only decanting it when a new lustration occasioned a fresh supply.

Ultimately his handiwork satisfied him, unsymmetrical and rugged as it was. His next care was to weigh the polished stone against the rough one. His work was still unfinished, for the rough out-weighed the smooth by two to one. Nevertheless, he now declared himself fully satisfied, and restored the magick stone to its case and the case to its cabinet in the Tribune, discoursing the while of substances heavy and light.

Chemistry is not my study. I was full of determination to consult him upon the nature of the apparition which the full moon and the magick stone of Dr. Dee had conjured into the Round Tower bedchamber, but sought in vain to stem the eloquence of his learning.

Dinner was a sturdy buttock of beef, of which Dr. Johnson ate ravenously, declining to say a word. Walpole picked at a cold bird. Orford's boiled countenance grinned steadily as he depleted a loaded dish.

After dinner we parted, our host to the offices, Orford upon some errand of his own, my friend and I to stroll the meads.

Our way led past the hermitage. This time we glimpsed another of the Gothick appointments of Strawberry — the hermit. He was a sturdy strong-built man, having a long white beard and a hardy blue eye. His dun-coloured gown was kilted up, revealing that he was clothed in skins; though he had so little sense of the part that he was hired to play, that he was wearing buckled shoes. He had come to the opening of the hermitage to gaze across the mead; when glimpsing us, he with great haste slipped back into the obscurity of his den.

Upon this Dr. Johnson recited the following burlesque ballad of his own making:

Hermit hoar, in solemn cell,
Wearing out life's evening grey,
Strike thy bosom, sage, and tell
What is bliss, and which the way.

Thus I spoke, and speaking sigh'd,
Scarce repress'd the starting tear,
When the hoary sage reply'd,
Come, my lad, and drink some beer.

These lines, he maintained, though written in mockery of Dr. Percy the ballad antiquarian, well suited the ridiculous Gothick fashion of the time, when every estate had its *grotto* and its *oratory*, its *hermitage*, and in it its *hermit;* being otherwise an honest rustick fee'd to sit within and clank his beads.

The sun was declining as we approached the Round Tower. The ruddy rays slanted across the mead and illuminated, a long way off, the sturdy figure of Mistress Kitty, issuing from her door, with her rustick petticoats girded about her, and in her hand a milking-pail. 'Twas a little landskip in enamel, and put my friend in high good humour.

Nevertheless, we had no sooner entered the door than he fell foul of our host about the hermit:

"Are not there in the world enough of the unfortunate, who want a dinner, and know not where they shall lay their heads at night, but Mr. Walpole must fee some idle lubber to sit about in his garden, because, forsooth, in times past the land teemed with idle lubbers?" he demanded hotly.

"What idle lubber?" asked Walpole blankly.

"The hermit," replied Dr. Johnson sternly, "he in skins, who decorates your hermitage yonder."

"Hagley has a hermit," I put in nervously. "A hermit is the refinement of the Gothick."

"A hermit is the refinement of flummery," said my friend angrily, turning on me.

"I am sorry that Strawberry does not please you," said Mr. Walpole coldly. "The chaise will be at your disposal in the morning."

I was aghast. We were dismissed, and we had failed of our errand. Dr. Johnson merely bowed.

"And," added Walpole, preparing to leave the apartment, "permit me to state, I do *not* employ a hermit."

"Not?" cried Johnson in excitement.

"No, sir. My hermitage is untenanted."

"My apologies, sir," cried Dr. Johnson, "and I shall be ready to ride in the morning."

Supper was a stiff and uncomfortable collation. Dr. Johnson cut his tea ration to a mere five cups, and withdrew early. Soon I was constrained to follow him.

He was not in the library nor the Round Tower, the wash-house nor the Red Bedchamber. At last I found him in the Tribune with a bodkin in his hand. The Black Stone lay before him. He stared upon it and said nothing.

"Pray, Dr. Johnson, give over your

care in this matter. We are dismissed, and must depart in the morning."

"Why, then we will depart in the morning. But tonight we shall resolve this puzzle."

"Pray, sir, how is this to be done?"

"I have put my endeavours, sir, upon the stone, which is the end and object of these manoeuvres. I can give but little better account of it —" (replacing it in the cabinet) "Tonight we shall approach the matter at its point of departure — the hermitage."

'Twas Dr. Johnson's plan, I soon learned, that we should give our attention to the proceedings of this hermit that was no hermit, by watching before his cell and following him whither he went.

"Thus, sir, we may see how he gains access to the house, how he goes on there, and what his object is."

Retiring early, accordingly, upon plea of our impending departure on the morrow, we donned greatcoats and prepared for our vigil. On point of departure, I observed Dr. Johnson standing before a handsome rosewood nest of drawers, swaying himself in meditation, and pulling and pushing the upper drawer out and in.

"Shall we go, sir?"

"Go? Oh, ay, let us go."

We armed ourselves with rough staves from the wash-house, and took up our post concealed in the scallop-shell settle.

In the trees above our heads an owl mourned softly. On the two-pair-of-stairs floor Mr. Walpole's candle burned in his bed-chamber window. The night was soft and smelled of spring. We sat a long time in the balmy darkness.

Once the owl was startled into flight. 'Twas the hermit come out to gaze towards the house. He returned to his cell in a little space. Time passed with leaden foot.

The moon rose behind the house, and began to swing out and up in the southern sky. Mr. Walpole's light went out. Once more the hermit came to his door and gazed towards the now darkened castle. Once more he swept aside the skins and reentered his hermitage.

Still we sat in the shadow of the shell. Again time passed. Suddenly Dr. Johnson gripped my elbow. A light flickered in the windows of the Tribune.

"We have watched the wrong man," I whispered aghast. "The hermit sits in his hermitage while another steals Mr. Walpole's Black Stone."

"Say rather, while we watched the front door, the false hermit has made off by the back."

"The hermitage has no back, save under the bank."

"Then he has made his way to the house, *under the bank*," replied my friend. "Come, Bozzy, this is a thing susceptible of demonstration."

He rose, and boldly sweeping aside the skins, he entered the hermitage. The hermit was from home.

The hermitage, however, was not untenanted. Established on the pallet, as if she had been there a long time, sat Kitty Clive. At our entrance she

leaped to her feet.

"Back!" she cried. "Back, on your life! There is death in this place! Yonder poor man hath been carried to his village sick to death of the small pox. Pray, pray, shun the infection!"

I drew back in alarm, but Dr. Johnson entered unmoved.

"Prettily played, ma'am," says he. "Drury Lane never saw better. I beg, however, you'll hold your peace. I am resolved to have a word with this pox'd hermit."

" 'Tis but a quiz," says the Clive, "there's no harm in it."

"Then, ma'am," says Dr. Johnson, "we'll quiz the quizzer; so pray, ma'am, hold your tongue."

Kitty was perforce silent, and again we took up a vigil. The moon silently shone in at the opening. By its light I studied the appointments of the hermitage, the one low door, the walls hung with skins, a carved wood virgin in her niche. The Clive stared before her, and bit her finger-ends. Dr. Johnson sat by her side in meditation.

Soon, however, a step was heard. In another moment, the skins on the backward wall parted, and the hermit stepped through the opening. In one hand he held a wax taper; in the other, the Black Stone in its case.

When he saw us, he took one backward step before Dr. Johnson seized his wrist in a grip of iron.

"I yield at discretion," said the hermit with a shrug, and set down his candle.

Surely I had heard that voice?

Dr. Johnson stopped not to parley. With a sudden mighty tug he tore away the long white beard and exposed the face beneath.

Lord Frederic Campbell!

Dr. Johnson took the case from his hand and extracted the polished black sphere.

"Pray, Lord Frederic," he enquired, "what is the secret of this stone, that you give it away without a thought, and within a season, like the base Indian, you must have it back?"

"Nay, Dr. Johnson," replied the hermit, "Kitty will bear me out, 'tis but a frolick."

Never have I seen a countenance so little frolicsome.

"Ay," put in the Clive, "a quiz upon Orford. He opened it to me last night in our homeward stroll."

"Ay, so?" replied my learned friend. "Nevertheless, Lord Frederic, something is concealed in the conjurer's stone. Let us have it out."

"How know you that?" I enquired.

"Nay, Bozzy," replied my learned friend, "to what end were my experimentations of the morning? Have you never heard the tale of Archimedes and Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse?"

"No, sir," replied I, ready to be enlightened.

"Sir, 'tis of a goldsmith, who had of the tyrant a certain weight of gold of which to fashion a crown. Now Hiero suspected the man for a cheat. Accordingly when the crown came home, he asked Archimedes, whether it were all gold, or dilute

with base metal? Archimedes made shift to measure its gross content of metal, by immersing it in water and measuring the overflow. In the same manner he measured out an equal content of pure gold; which weighing against the crown, the crown was demonstrated to weigh less. Now as every substance has its weight, and gold the heaviest, the cheat was discovered. Just so, the Black Stone weighed less than an equal volume of coal; as it could not be adulterated, 'twas proved to be hollow."

"Though it be hollow, how are you to open it without instruments?"

Johnson set the sphere upon the floor; it rolled and came to rest.

"Instruments have failed. 'Tis plain, this sphere has not been halved and hollowed. Has it been bored? If so, it shews us as it lies, in which direction the bore runs."

Johnson touched it delicately with his strong, shapely fingers.

"You may feel, though you cannot see, the intersecting circle of the bore. At raising that circle I have failed, and upon my failure was baffled. But no problem is forever impervious to reflection. Can not we depress it instead?"

So saying, as the strange company watched fascinated by the light of the moon in the doorway, my friend gripped the sphere in his fingers, and exerted his giant's strength in the steady pressure of his thumbs upon the end of the bore. Slowly the opposite end began to be extruded, a cylinder revealed to be nearly two inches in depth. Then it came with a rush. 'Twas hollowed like a little drawer. In it lay a single paper, rolled into a cylinder.

My near-sighted friend unfurled the paper and held it to his eyes, almost brushing it with his eyelashes. I advanced the taper. By its light I could see that what had been concealed in the speculum was a letter, writ in a foreign hand upon a single sheet of paper. I stared at the royal seal and the royal signature: *Charles Edward Stuart.*

"So," says Dr. Johnson, "this is what is in it. Treason is in it."

He mowed and muttered over the phrases:

"To general John Campbell:"

"To the Duke of Argyle!" I cried in horror.

Lord Frederic sank on the hermit's pallet with a gesture of resignation.

" 'Tis over. I have ruined my brother. His attainder is sure. I dare ask no mercy."

I took the letter into my hand and scanned the fulsome phrases: ". . . your influence with the army on our behalf . . . will send you what moneys you need . . ."

"Nay, Frederic," said Kitty Clive stoutly, "pluck up heart, man, this letter is nothing. The '45 is a quarter-century gone."

"Alack, Kitty," replied Lord Frederic in dejection, " 'tis no matter of the '45. 'Twas writ just before he became Duke."

"Pho, a forgery," said Kitty scornfully.

"'Tis the Pretender's own hand."

"Then," said the Clive, "we must —"

She broke off with a scream. Never have I seen such a look of horror on a human countenance. Her eyes seemed to start from her head, her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, as she pointed a trembling finger toward the opening of the secret passage, and strove to speak a warning. I turned my head with a thrill of awful foreboding.

"We must burn it," said the Clive calmly; and as I realized that the gloom was but empty, I felt her twitch the paper from my hand.

My chagrin at being thus tricked before my venerable friend was doubled as I heard him speak.

"Ay, let us burn it," said he calmly. "Pray, Bozzy, the candle."

Dubiously I yielded it. Dr. Johnson advanced it towards the letter; but before paper and flame met, Lord Frederic reached a hasty hand.

"Nay, Kitty, bid me take it to my brother, for I have sworn to lay it in his hand; and the house of Argyle will reward you well."

The Clive reached him the paper, but Dr. Johnson came between.

"Pray, Kitty," cried he sternly, "do you hold this letter safe for the nonce, while we scrutinize this fellow's proceedings. What do you say to a thief who parades about in masquerade, and leaves his booty behind instead of bearing it away to a place of safety? A thief who courts attention instead of shunning it? What do you say to the strange debility of the Duke's heir, which only assails him in London? What do you say to the proceedings of the next heir, who so far from making the letter secure in secret, and so protecting his brother from attainder, plays the fool with it until it comes to light, and will not suffer us to burn it?"

During this recital, Lord Frederic's frame seemed to shrink. Kitty Clive slowly rose and drew away from him. Without a word she yielded up the letter to Dr. Johnson.

"In Arlington Street," pursued Dr. Johnson, contempt in his eye, "the noble house-breaker lost his labour; save that by turning out the papers he made sure, what his brother's unbroken friendship with Walpole must have told him, that the speculum remained unopened. In his own person he learned where it was deposited at Strawberry, and returned a-mumming by Mr. Walpole's new-built secret passage —"

"To think," cried the Clive, "that 'twas I that revealed it to him, and provided gear for his masquerade, and victualled him in the hermitage, in the belief that 'twas but a bit of play-acting with a laugh to follow. I should have been better advised; for Lord Orford is notoriously mad, and who puts a quiz upon a madman?"

"The secret passage was built with the Round Tower, and the hermitage at the same time, to mask its egress? The entrances lie behind the great portraits in the rooms of the Round

Tower?"

"That is so, but pray, how did you know?"

"I said it in jest, the apparition was gone back into the portrait; and began to perceive how it might be true in earnest. From the portrait, then, Lord Frederic in his hermit's gear entered the Round Tower, meaning to fetch the stone from the Tribune hard by. Retreating before us onto the secret stair, he learned where we proposed to sequester the speculum, at the same time gaining from our talk a spectacular notion for his next appearance. From your theatre-chest you, ma'am, fitted him out to affright Mr. Boswell; on which occasion he took care, to awake Mr. Boswell, to leave his booty behind, and to depart by the door, lest he betray the secret of the passage. Pray, Lord Frederic, satisfy my curiosity: why did not you shatter the stone then and there, and thus betray all at a stroke?"

"I flung it with violence, but it resisted," said the detected scheamer surlily.

"Nay, when you came by it to-night, why did not you set it open and so leave it in the Tribune for Mr. Walpole to find?"

"When my brother found that I had given the thing away," muttered Lord Frederic, "he told me how he had saved the letter against King Charles's return, and bade me for the safety of our house recover it; but he would not tell me the secret of the opening."

"Ho, ho," cried Dr. Johnson, "thy brother knows thee well, I perceive."

"I beg," said the false hermit sullenly, "that my brother may not hear of this. 'Tis ill enough between us already."

"Ay, sir," said Dr. Johnson thoughtfully, "I have seen how your lady suffers, to have another, not near so well-born, take precedence of her as Duchess of Argyle. 'Tis a bird of ill omen, and so Lord Ferrers found her."

"Pray, sir," I struck in, scanning the thing from a lawyer's view, "how could you hope that upon attainder of the traitor the estates could be yours, and not the King's?"

Lord Frederic grinned sourly.

"'Twas worth the risk. I have friends in the right places."

"Well, well," said Dr. Johnson, "a word to the wise and I have done. These proceedings shall be our secret, as long as the Duke of Argyle guards his new-found loyalty, and *as long as the Duke's son has his health in London as in Argyle.*"

"Sir!" cried Lord Frederic, stung. "Do you say that Lady Mary —"

"I say nothing, sir. The boy's indisposition may have given hope for this contrivance; it may be part of it. I say only, if you tender your brother's friendship, tender also his son's life."

Lord Frederic's haughty stare was a failure; his eyes fell, and he bowed his head.

"I perceive," said Dr. Johnson, "that we understand one another."

*Just to remind you: In the January 1947 issue of EQMM we brought you the first adventure of Romney Pringle ever published in the United States. It derived from the rarest book of detective-crime short stories issued in the Twentieth Century — a fabulous volume published in 1902 of which only four copies are known to exist (although it is now probable that a fifth copy has been discovered in South Africa). The author's identity is only half-known: Clifford Ashdown was a pseudonym used jointly by R. Austin Freeman, creator of Dr. Thorndyke, and a medical confrère; there is some hope, we learn, that P. M. Stone of Waltham, Massachusetts, has succeeded in unmasking Dr. Freeman's collaborator. As for the character of Romney Pringle himself, you will recall that he is a "gentleman crook" who hides behind the respectable front of "literary agent." A suave and charming scoundrel, addicted to an artificial port-wine mark on his right cheek, Mr. Pringle found fortune, if not fame, at his very beck and call and eventually retired to a life of ease and comfort at Sandwich where, of course, he wrote his memoirs — of which "The Foreign Office Despatch" is the second to appear in America.*

# THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE:

## The Foreign Office Despatch

*by CLIFFORD ASHDOWN*

"*RIEN ne va plus* — the ball rolls!"

The silence was only broken by the rattle of the ivory ball over the diamond-shaped studs around the circumference of the disc. Every now and then there was a sharp click, as it struck a partition between two numbers and was viciously jerked on to the studs again.

Round and round the ball went. It was only for a minute, but to the men gathered by the green cloth it seemed a century. Suddenly the noise ceased. The disc continued to revolve, but the ball lay snug in one of the little pens.

The *tailleur* placed his finger on the capstan and stopped the disc.

"Twelve — *rouge* — *manque* — *pair*," he intoned monotonously. Then he raked the stakes off the spaces painted on the green cloth. The table had won for the eighth time in succession, with payment to hardly a single player. A kind of suppressed groan ran round the board, and the fleeced ones crowded to the bar at the end of the room for consolation.

The life at the marble caravanserais which largely do duty now for clubs was repellent to Mr. Romney Pringle

and, doubtless on Pope's principle that "the proper study of mankind is MAN," the "Chrysanthemum Club" had many attractions for him. As to the club itself, while election was a process rather more exacting than a mere scrutiny by the hall-porter, the "Chrysanthemum" was not too exclusive; and, although situated in a fashionable street off Piccadilly, the subscription was a nominal one.

As Romney Pringle inhaled his cigarette and watched the last disastrous success of the table, a young man got up from the board and flung himself abruptly into a low chair opposite. Presently a waiter placed on the marble table at his elbow a bottle of Moet and Chandon, to which he applied himself assiduously. There was nothing in his appearance to differentiate him from any of the thousands of well-dressed and well-groomed men who frequent Clubland, but somehow or other, as they sat opposite one another, his eye continually caught that of Pringle, who at length rose and crossed the room. The club was not so large that a member need consider himself insulted did a stranger address him without a previous introduction, and the other displayed no emotion when Pringle sat down beside him and entered into conversation.

"The table seems to be having all the luck tonight," he remarked.

"That's true," agreed the youth frankly. "I never heard of such luck."

"Been playing long?" inquired Pringle sympathetically.

"I'm not a member, you know. I was introduced as a visitor for the first time tonight." Then, growing confidential as the wine circulated in his brain, he continued, "I cashed a check for eighty pounds when I began to play, and I staked ten every time."

"So you lost it all?"

"Lost it all," the youth echoed gloomily.

"But why not go on? Professor Bond calculates that the chances in favor of the Bank are only thirty-seven to thirty-five."

"Fact is, my last sovereign went there," he tapped the bottle. "Think I'd better go now." And he rose somewhat unsteadily. His libations to Fortune had evidently commenced very early in the evening.

"Try your luck again," persuaded Pringle. "Allow me the pleasure of helping you to get your revenge," and he produced a handful of gold from his pocket.

"You're really very good, but —"

"Not at all! The luck's sure to turn by this time," urged the tempter.

"Well, I'll take eight pounds, and thanks awfully, Mr —— Really I don't know your name; mine's Redmile."

"Mine is James," said Pringle. "Now in and win!"

Once more Redmile took his seat at the green board and watched the play eagerly. The table was no longer winning, and the interest in the game had revived. After a few turns he ventured a sovereign on the *pair* or even numbers. "Twenty-six" was called, and he was richer by as much more.

Still cautious, he placed three sovereigns below the first column of figures. "Nineteen" was the winning number, and six more sovereigns were added to his three.

"I congratulate you!" whispered Pringle behind him. "Didn't I say the luck would change?"

"A good guess," laughed Redmile. "Only let me win enough to redeem that check, and I shall be contented."

"Try the twelves," Pringle suggested.

Redmile arranged five sovereigns on the space allotted to the first twelve numbers.

"Thirty-one!" the *tailleur* called. Pringle shrugged his shoulders as the money was raked into the bank.

Without looking round, but breathing heavily, Redmile placed a sovereign on *rouge*, another on *impair*, and after a second's hesitation dropped two more on twenty-one. Even as he withdrew his hand the *tailleur* uttered his parrot-cry "*Rien ne va plus*," and, spinning the disc, reversed the ball against it. "Twenty-one — *rouge* — *passe* — *impair*," he droned, as the ball rested.

Redmile had won seventy-two pounds at one stroke! He rose from the table and vigorously shook hands with Pringle.

"I've got eighty-two pounds altogether with me, and I must get that check back from the manager," he said, "Do you mind coming round to my rooms? Only as far as Dover Street, and I'll give you a check for what you so kindly lent me."

"With pleasure," said Pringle, as Redmile, now flushed with success in addition to the wine, darted off to redeem his check.

"I've had as much as is good for me or we'd have had another bottle to celebrate the occasion," he remarked as they strolled down Piccadilly.

"Rather more," thought Pringle, adding politely, "I should not have noticed it."

"Perhaps not; but I must have a clear head tomorrow. I'm in the F.O., you know, and we're very busy just now."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Pringle, much interested. "You must have had a harassing time lately — over this Congo affair, for instance?"

"Yes, harassing isn't the word to describe it. Come in!"

He drew out his latchkey, and after some ineffectual efforts succeeded in opening the door. Then he insisted on writing the check in spite of all Pringle's protestations and, opening a box of cigars, put whisky and soda on the table. The fresh air had completed the work of the alcohol. He was evidently becoming very drunk, and laughed insanely when, missing the tumbler, he directed the cascade from a syphon over the table-cloth.

"We'll just have a nightcap before you go," he hiccoughed. "Yes, as you were saying, we've had a deuce of a time lately. I'm one of Lord Tranmere's secretaries, and the berth's not all beer and sk — skittles? Why, you mightn't think it, but I have to examine every blessed dispatch and tele-

gram that passes between London and Paris every day, Sundays and all; and that means some work just now, I can tell you! Yesterday was no d-day of rest for me."

He unlocked a despatch-box and held up an official envelope for Pringle to see. The direction was printed in bold letters:

*On Her Britannic Majesty's Service*
HIS EXCELLENCY THE RIGHT HONBLE.
THE VISCOUNT STRATHCLYDE, G.C.B.,
HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY,
Etc. Etc. Etc.
PARIS
*Foreign Office*

"This is the finish to the whole business," he said. "Rather short and sweet. I only finished dr-drafting it this evening. It will be franked by the Secretary of State in the morning, and I think by this time to-to-morrow the F.O. officials will sleep sounder in both capitals."

"Will they, indeed!" exclaimed Pringle. "I am delighted to find that diplomacy is not a lost art in England. But, talking of that, I suppose you know the story of the Queen's Messenger and that affair of the Emperor of Austria's razors?"

Redmile had never heard of it, and settled himself comfortably to listen. But as the combined result of his potations and the lateness of the hour, his head began to nod, and long before Pringle arrived at the climax of the story a loud snore proclaimed that his audience was asleep.

After waiting a little while to make sure of his host's unconsciousness, Pringle cautiously reached towards the despatch-box which still lay open on the table, and possessed himself of an addressed envelope and several sheets of foolscap embossed with the Foreign Office stamp. He then turned his attention to the waste-paper basket, and after a search, as noiseless as possible, among its rustling contents, found a torn envelope bearing a nearly perfect Foreign Office seal in wax. Placing all the stationery carefully in his pocket, he gave vent to a loud sneeze.

Redmile woke up with a start, and Pringle, as if finishing the story, remarked calmly, "So that's how the affair ended."

"Dear me! I'm awfully sorry," apologized Redmile thickly. "I'm afraid I've been asleep. It must have been that whisky that did it!"

"More likely the prosiness of my story," Pringle suggested with a smile. "But, anyhow, I must be moving."

"Come and look me up any time you're passing," said the other sleepily.

When he reached Furnival's Inn Pringle did not trouble to go to bed. He had a hard night's work before him and the dawn found him still busily engaged.

Drawing up the blinds he admitted the morning light. The venetian mirror which hung above the mantel had seldom reflected such a scene of confusion as the usually neat room presented. Pringle's hat crowned one of

the two choice pieces of delft which flanked the brass lantern-clock, while his overcoat sprawled limply across the reading-easel. On a table in one corner stood a glass vessel containing a chemical solution. In this, well coated with black-lead, was immersed the seal abstracted from the waste-paper basket, which, with a plate of copper, also hanging in the solution, was connected with the wires of a "Daniell's" chemical battery; in the course of the night the potent electricity had covered the wax with a deposit of copper sufficiently thick to form a perfect reverse *intaglio* of the seal. A centre-table was littered with pieces of paper, scrawled over with what appeared to be the attempts of a beginner in the art of writing. A closer inspection would have revealed a series of more or less successful reproductions of Redmile's handwriting — his check for eight pounds being pinned to a drawing-board and serving Pringle as a copy. With frequent reference to a Blue-book which lay open before him, Pringle penned a communication in a couple of short paragraphs, which he carefully copied onto one of the sheets of foolscap. Then, folding it into the envelope, he sealed it with a neat impression from the copper electrotype.

One thing only remained to complete the official appearance of the package; that was the "frank." Turning to the dado of dwarf bookcases which ran round the room, Pringle took down an album containing the portraits and autographs of celebrities of the day, and looked up that of the Foreign Secretary. Lord Transmere's signature was a bold and legible one, and with the skill of an expert copyist he soon had a *facsimile* of it written in the lower left-hand corner of the envelope.

Eight o'clock was striking just as he had finished. He rose and stretched himself languidly, when his eye fell on the check. Unpinning it from the board, he attached a "y" to the written word "eight," and deftly inserted a cipher after the somewhat unsteady figure which sprawled in the corner, thus converting it into a check for eighty pounds.

His task was now done, and after swallowing a cup of chocolate brewed over a spirit-lamp, he made a hurried but careful toilet. Endowed by Nature with a fresh complexion which did much to conceal the ravages of a sleepless night, he presented his usual youthful appearance on leaving the Inn, and having chartered a passing cab, was swallowed up in the sea of traffic already beginning to surge down Holborn.

Work, as a general rule, begins later at the Foreign Office than elsewhere, but although it was only a little past nine when Pringle dismissed his cab in Downing Street and entered the portico of Lord Palmerston's architectural freak, several cabs and a miniature brougham were already waiting in the quadrangle. He inquired at the door for Redmile, and was directed up the magnificent stair-

case to a waiting-room on the first floor.

"I will not detain Mr. Redmile long if he is at all busy," he remarked to the messenger who took his name.

"Mr. Redmile is always busy, sir," was the man's reply.

Pringle sat down and devoted himself to a study of *The Times*, and it was fully a quarter of an hour before the messenger returned and led him along a dismal and vault-like corridor to an apartment overlooking the Horse Guards' Parade.

The room was empty, but he had scarcely had time to seat himself when a side-door, through which he caught a glimpse of a vast and lofty room beyond, suddenly opened, and Redmile entered with a packet in his hand.

"Good-morning, er — Mr. James," he said rather stiffly, and remained standing.

"I must apologize for intruding upon you when you are so busy," Pringle commenced.

Redmile said nothing, but glanced at the paper he held, which Pringle at once recognized as the momentous despatch which the other in his vinous indiscretion had shown him the previous evening.

"I should not have troubled you so early," continued Pringle, "but on looking at your check when I got home I found that instead of repaying me my small loan you had drawn it for a much larger sum." And he handed the altered check to Redmile, who started when he saw the amount. He stared at it a second or two before he spoke, and then it was in a much more cordial tone.

"Pray sit down, Mr. James. Excuse my not having offered you a chair. I am really greatly obliged to you. As a man of honor, which I see you are, may I ask you to do what I shall regard as an even greater service — that is, to forget that you saw me at that infernal club? I had only been there once before with Lord Netherfield" — he named a well-known man-about-town — "and I should not have gone there again had I not dined rather too freely with an old friend last night. I remember very little of what occurred, and I need not tell you how fatal the events of last night would be to my official position if they became known."

"You may rely on me implicitly, Mr. Redmile. I do not play myself, and indeed I only regard the 'Chrysanthemum' as an interesting place to pass an idle hour. One can study there emotions more realistic than any which are travestied on the stage."

The whole time he was speaking Pringle's eyes never left the packet which Redmile had placed on the table. It was duly sealed and franked by the Secretary of State, the latter operation having evidently just been concluded when Redmile brought it into the room; and Pringle, mentally comparing it with the one reposing in his coat pocket, decided that they bore a sufficient family likeness to render them practically indistinguishable. Suddenly starting up and turning to the window, he exclaimed, as

he pointed to something outside, "Extraordinary!"

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Redmile, going up to the window and looking over the Park.

"Excuse me, but that man walking along there is the very image of Karazoff, the accomplice of Grenevitsky, who assassinated the Czar of Russia in '81."

"Is he, indeed?" said Redmile, gazing with much interest at an innocent-looking pedestrian who was approaching from the direction of the Mall.

"I never saw a more astounding likeness. You may remember that Grenevitsky shared the same fate as the Czar by the explosion of the bomb, but Karazoff, who was standing a little farther back, was unhurt, and was at once arrested."

"Did you see the assassination, then?"

"No; but I was in St. Petersburg afterwards, and saw Karazoff and the other accomplices hanged. I shall never forget his face as long as I live — he went to his death with the air of a martyr. How it snowed, too, that day!"

"Marvellous fanaticism," murmured Redmile, as the Nihilist's double, who was in point of fact a Congregationalist minister, ascended the steps leading to Downing Street. He continued to stare out of the window until the imperative whirr of an electric bell made him turn with a start.

"I must really ask you to excuse me," he said. "I have a most important despatch to send off to Paris, and there isn't a moment to lose. I'll send you another check as soon as I have some time to spare. Will you give me your address?"

"Don't let such a small matter as that trouble you. I will look in at your chambers again one evening — if I may."

"Pray do! Excuse me, but the Queen's messenger is waiting. I haven't a moment — good-morning — good-morning!"

Descending the grand staircase, Pringle hurried into Parliament Street and, hailing a cab, drove back to his chambers. To resume the artificial port-wine mark was but the work of a moment after which he strolled leisurely into the City.

Making the circuit of the Bank, he turned into Throgmorton Street and entered a large doorway whose passage-walls were plastered with names from floor to ceiling. Opening a door on the ground floor, "Is Mr. Hedsor in?" he inquired.

"Just gone over to the House," replied a smart clerk.

"Would you kindly let him know Mr. Pringle would like to speak to him."

It was a band-boxed gentleman in morning costume, wearing a tall hat of effulgent glossiness, who entered the office soon after.

"How do you do, Mr. Pringle? How's literature?" was his greeting.

"Very quiet just now."

"Same here!"

"Nothing doing?"

"Ab — so-*lute* — ly nothing!"

"Really?" And Pringle, with a smile, glanced round the office. A clerk was sitting ankle-deep in a pile of wrappers and envelopes, which gradually submerged his legs as he attacked a heap of letters and circulars; beside him another incessantly tapped correspondence out of a typewriter; while a third divided his attention between responses to the calls of a telephone and the sundering of a tape disgorged in endless snaky coils from the unresting little machine in one corner.

"Fact!" asseverated the broker, leading the way to a little den separated from the office by a glazed window-frame partition. "Truth is, Paris has got the blues, and ditch-water's sparkling compared to the present state of things."

"What about Consols today?"

"Consols? Not much in my line, you know."

"But I suppose you're open to do business?"

"Oh, of course it can be done. Depends what you want to do, though."

"Will you sell for me?"

"How much?" inquired the broker, producing a little book.

"What do you say to fifty thousand?"

The other looked dubiously at him, and sucked the top of his pencil. "There's always a large bear account open — I shall want good cover," he remarked after a pause.

"Will you take one per cent?"

"Why, yes, I'll take that. From anyone else I should ask two — indeed, I don't like it much at any price. They're high enough, goodness knows, now; but who's to say they won't go higher?"

"What are they at?"

Mr. Hedsor went into the outer office and consulted the board on which the tapes were impaled. "A hundred and ten and an eighth," said he, returning. "Lord! what a price!"

"Well, I think I'll trust my luck," Pringle remarked quietly.

"You need something better to trust to than luck in these hard times."

"Did you ever hear of a company called the 'Lobatsi Consolidated'?"

"Yes, you were lucky there, I own, for a mere bit of stagging."

"And wasn't there another called the 'Bokfontein Development'?"

"By Jove! I never thought you'd get out of that as well as you did."

"And the 'Topsipitsi Deep Level'?"

"Oh, hang it all! Your proper place is inside the House. I'd forgotten the 'Topsipitsi.' Come out and have a drink."

The world was rather less tranquil when Mr. Hedsor awoke the next morning. Indeed, it was many years since the newspapers had offered the public such a sensational bill-of-fare as their posters promised. In the journals themselves the news was displayed in startling headlines, *The Times* so far forgetting its dignity as to double-lead its leader on the momentous news.

Towards one A.M. the previous night there had come over the wires

from the matter-of-fact Reuter the following piece of news, which dislocated the "make-up" of the papers, reducing the sub-editors to a condition of frenzy:

> "Paris. — In accordance, it is understood, with instructions from London, Lord Strathclyde leaves for Calais tomorrow, diplomatic relations having been abruptly broken off between the two countries."

Further particulars from "our own" correspondents confirmed the news, adding that crowds were parading the streets of Paris, singing patriotic songs, and smashing the windows of every shop which bore an English name. Troops were being held in readiness in case of emergencies with which the police would be unable to cope, as it was feared the opponents of the settled order of things would foment disturbances, which in the electric condition of the public mind might have serious results.

The news, although startling, was not altogether unexpected. For some time past the relations between France and England had been in the condition euphemistically described by diplomatists as "strained." Events in Africa had constituted a chronic source of friction, and the annexation of the Congo Free State by the French, who claimed rights of preemption, had brought matters to a crisis. Nevertheless, it seemed as if the resources of diplomacy would heal the breach, and the public, lulled to a sense of tranquillity, were simply paralyzed by the morning's news, which burst on the nation like a thunderclap.

Some of the papers accused the Government of precipitancy, alleging that England was quite unprepared for war with such a Power as France, others preferred to look upon the war as having been inevitable, and only regretted that a more favorable opportunity had not been selected to commence hostilities; but they were unanimous in the opinion that we were about to enter upon a life-and-death struggle, which it would be impossible to confine to the two Powers chiefly concerned.

In every place where men congregated there was the wildest commotion. At the London railway stations, in the trains and omnibuses hastening to disgorge their daily suburban load, the tidings dwarfed every other topic.

Naturally it was at the Stock Exchange that the greatest excitement prevailed, and "Gorgonzola Hall" was in a delirious ferment. There had been a feeling of uneasiness for some days past, and even the most intensely aureate of gilt-edged securities had shown jelly-like movements. But on this eventful morning the bears carried all before them, and five minutes after the springing of the rattle which announces the commencement of business, prices had begun to crumble away like snow beneath the sun.

As the day wore on, and the news spread, the crowd outside the Exchange became a surging mob, which was swollen every second by the cabs depositing perspiring clients in search

of absent brokers. Those privileged to pass the janitors had literally to fight their way in. One of the glass panels in the Shorter's Court doorway was shivered early in the day, and its fellow had to be boarded over to protect it from a similar fate. Round in Capel Court half a dozen policemen had been posted as a breakwater, against which the uninitiated broke in impotent waves. And ever, as the glass doors swung to and fro, a dull, drumming, persistent roar, like the whirring of distant factory looms, reverberated down the passages, and mingled with the noise of the traffic on the clattering asphalt roadway.

About noon the tall slim figure of Romney Pringle joined the crowd around the Capel Court entrance, and after an arduous struggle succeeded in getting within hailing distance of the blue-coated porter, who as a rule reposes majestically in the leather chair by the door. The present was no time for repose, however, and in response to a fervent appeal from Pringle he condescended to transmit his inquiry for Mr. Hedsor through a speaking-tube to the arcana of the House. Pringle had a weary wait of over half an hour before the broker appeared, and even then, so dense was the pressure of the crowd, mostly passing inward, that after a few ineffectual struggles Mr. Hedsor, whose stature was not of the bulkiest, was reduced to a desperate squirm at short intervals, with the sole purpose of retaining his position quite apart from any idea of making progress. How long this captivity might have lasted, or whether it might not have terminated in the incontinent collapse of the broker is uncertain, had not the janitor at length caught sight of him and clearing a passage through the mob with an authoritative "By your leave," extracted him by the remnants of his coat collar.

"Whatever *do* you want?" gasped the palpitating broker, as he pettishly endeavored to adjust his tattered garments. "I'm frightfully busy." And, mopping his brow, he edged towards a clear space at the side, left by the eddying crowd.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, but I came to ask your advice as to what I had better do," apologized Pringle, as he dusted him down.

"Advice!" repeated the broker. "Why, I tell you, you ought to be one of us! You've got the luck of Old Nick himself! Who on earth would have thought this was going to happen? And I don't believe it would either, if you hadn't taken it into your head to do a bear."

"You see I have faith in my luck, as I told you yesterday. But what are Consols standing at now?"

"*Standing* do you call it? They're falling — *falling*, man!" The broker grinned sardonically; he was too breathless to laugh.

"Well, what have they fallen to?"

"Why, they were ninety-seven ten minutes ago, and the Lord only knows when they'll touch bottom! They were eighty-five in the Crimea, and this little show'll be worse than half a

dozen Crimeas before it's done with."

"I suppose I ought to buy, then?"

"Oh, the innocence of the man! As if you didn't know the game to play! Lucky dog that you are." Mr. Hedsor sighed enviously and began to work a little sum in his notebook. "Look here: I sold fifty thou' for you yesterday at a hundred and nine three-eighths. If you buy another fifty at ninety-seven — or suppose we say ninety-six or thereabouts, you'll make thirteen per cent. more or less. Now I can't come out here again. You must just go round to the office and wait, and I'll telephone through to you as soon as the job's done. You can amuse yourself by figuring out how much you've made in the last twenty-four hours. Oh, you lucky dog!"

"Delighted, I'm sure," smiled Pringle sweetly. "And in that case you can hold over my check till the settlement."

"Right you are, my boy! And, look here, next time you've got a good thing you might give me the tip, and let's get in on the ground floor."

Pringle shook his head in deprecation as the broker, with a knowing wink, dived once more into the crowd, and was borne inwards with the stream.

Coasting along the outskirts of the turmoil, Pringle got safely down Throgmorton Street, only taking ten minutes over a journey which under ordinary circumstances he could have accomplished in as many seconds, and was about to enter the office when a tremendous hubbub arose, distinctly audible above the all-pervading uproar. From the height of the three or four steps up to the doorway he commanded a view of the scene. Looking back, he saw a newsboy crying the evening paper, surrounded by a yelling mob, which struggled and fought madly for the sheets. Presently a small group detached itself from the rest and frantically rushed towards the entrance to the Exchange in the wake of a hatless individual, who had seized a contents-bill which he waved triumphantly above his head. As it floated like a banner in the van of the little army, Pringle with some little difficulty spelled out:

BRITISH AMBASSADOR
HOAXED
FORGED PARIS DESPATCH
SCENE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

He turned abruptly and entered the office, and even as he shut the door behind him the telephone gong whirred. He sprang to the receiver, and before the clerk could reach it twirled the bell-handle.

"Are you there?"

"Yes."

"Is it Mr. Barker?"

"No; Pringle."

"Oh, all serene! Fifty thou' at ninety-six and a half."

"Thank you. How much do you make it?"

"I said about thirteen per cent., didn't I? Roughly, it's six thousand five hundred that you've made. I say, were you born with a silver spoon in your mouth? It's settlement day next week and I'll send you the full account

then. Ta, ta!"

Out in Throgmorton Street Pringle managed to secure a paper and this was what he read:

## THE THREATENED WAR AVERTED

### STATEMENT BY THE FOREIGN UNDER-SECRETARY. EXTRAORDINARY STORY. IS IT A HOAX?

When the House of Commons assembled today at noon there was an unusual attendance of members, and hardly a seat on the floor of the chamber was vacant, except on the Treasury Bench, whose sole tenant was the Foreign Under-Secretary. Immediately after prayers Mr. Grammaty rose and said:

"Sir, I have to crave the indulgence of the House for the purpose of making a statement on behalf of the Government in view of the very serious news published in the morning papers. The Government has never had any intention of breaking off diplomatic relations with France, and Lord Strathclyde, while doing so in all good faith, appears to have acted on misleading and unauthorized instructions. I can assure the House that the matter will form the subject of the most searching investigation, and in the meantime Lord Strathclyde has been requested to offer the amplest apologies to the French Government. I am happy to inform the House that the relations of this country with France have never been more friendly than they are at the present moment."

This statement was received with profound silence, only broken by the cheers which arose on all sides at the conclusion. Immediately Mr. Grammaty resumed his seat the House rapidly emptied, and the lobby was thronged with members eagerly discussing the situation.

We understand that Lord Tranmere was in attendance at the Foreign Office at an unprecedented hour, and that a brisk exchange of telegrams between London and the Paris Embassy has been in progress all morning.

It is stated that our relations with France have within the last few days assumed a most amicable complexion, and no one was more surprised at the morning's news than the officials at the Foreign Office. Although the utmost reticence is being observed by the Department in question, we are in a position to state that the despatch in accordance with which Lord Strathclyde acted was nothing less than a clever forgery, which was mysteriously substituted for a genuine one of quite a different complexion. How or by what means the exchange was effected, and how the spurious document was allowed to reach the Paris Embassy undetected, appears to be an unsolved mystery pending the result of the investigation promised by the Government.

Pringle folded the paper and glanced at the scene around him. The individual so hotly denounced was not likely to stand in the pillory — the Chrysanthemum Club's cellar had insured that!

He walked on past the entrance to the Exchange. The murmur of the crowd which filled every approach was answered by a roar from the Temple of Mammon, deeper and more thunderous than any that had hitherto escaped the swing-doors, now wedged wide open by the surging mass.

The pendulum had swung back. The bulls were triumphantly rushing prices up again.

# THE CASE OF THE COCKFOSTERS EMERALDS

*by ARNOLD BENNETT*

Lord Trent has several times remarked to me that I am a philosopher. And I am one. I have guided my life by four rules: To keep my place, to make others keep theirs, to save half my income, and to beware of women. The strict observance of these rules has made me (in my station) a successful and respected man. Once, and only once, I was lax in my observance, and that single laxity resulted in a most curious and annoying adventure, which I will relate.

It was the fourth rule that I transgressed. I did not beware of a woman. The woman was Miss Susan Berry, lady's maid to the Marchioness of Cockfosters.

The Cockfosters family is a very old one. To my mind its traditions are superior to anything in the peerage of Great Britain; but then I may be prejudiced. I was brought up in the Cockfosters household, first at Cockfosters Castle in Devon, and afterwards at the well-known town house at the southeast corner of Eaton Square.

My father was valet to the old Marquis for thirty years; my mother rose from the position of fifth housemaid to be housekeeper at the Castle. Without ever having been definitely assigned to the situation, I became, as it were by gradual attachment, valet to Lord Trent — eldest son of the Marquis, and as gay and good-natured a gentleman as ever drank brandy-and-soda before breakfast.

When Lord Trent married Miss Edna Stuyvesant, the American heiress, and with some of her money bought and furnished in a superb manner a mansion near the northwest corner of Eaton Square, I quite naturally followed him across the Square, and soon found myself, after his lordship and my lady, the most considerable personage at No. 441. Even the butler had to mind his "p's" and "q's" with me.

Perhaps it was this pre-eminence of mine which led to my being selected for a duty which I never cared for and which ultimately I asked his lordship to allow me to relinquish — of course he did so. That duty related to the celebrated Cockfosters emeralds. Lady Trent had money (over a million sterling, as his lordship himself told me), but money could not buy the Cockfosters emeralds, and having seen these, she desired nothing less fine. With her ladyship, to desire was to obtain. I have always admired her for that trait in her character. Being an American, she had faults, but she knew her own mind, which is a great

*Originally titled "The Police Station"*

thing; and I must admit that, on the whole, she carried herself well and committed few blunders. She must have been accustomed to good servants.

In the matter of the emeralds, I certainly took her side. Strictly speaking, they belonged to the old Marchioness, but the Marchioness never went into society; she was always engaged with temperance propaganda, and that sort of thing, and consequently never wore the emeralds. There was no valid reason, therefore, why Lady Trent should not have the gratification of wearing them. But the Marchioness, I say it with respect, was a woman of peculiar and decided views. She had, in fact, fads; and one of her fads was the emeralds. She could not bear to part with them. She said she was afraid something might happen to the precious heirlooms.

A prolonged war ensued between the Marchioness and my lady, and ultimately a compromise was effected. My lady won permission to wear the emeralds whenever she chose, but they were always to be brought to her and taken back again by Susan Berry, in whom the Marchioness had more confidence than in anyone else in the world. Consequently, whenever my lady required the emeralds, word was sent across the Square in the afternoon; Susan Berry brought them over, and Susan Berry removed them at night when my lady returned from her ball or reception.

The arrangement was highly inconvenient for Susan Berry, for sometimes it would be very late when my lady came home; but the Marchioness insisted, and since Susan Berry was one of those persons who seem to take a positive joy in martyrizing themselves, she had none of my pity. The nuisance was that someone from our house had to accompany her across the Square. Eaton Square is very large (probably the largest in London, but I may be mistaken on such a trivial point); its main avenue is shut in by trees; and at 2 A.M. it is distinctly not the place for an unprotected female in charge of valuable property. Now the Marchioness had been good enough to suggest that she would prefer me to escort her maid on this brief nocturnal journey. I accepted the responsibility, but I did not hide my dislike for it. Knowing something of Miss Berry's disposition, I knew that our household would inevitably begin, sooner or later, to couple our names together, and I was not deceived.

Such was the situation when one night — it was a Whit-Monday, I remember, and about a quarter past one — Lord and Lady Trent returned from an entertainment at a well-known mansion near St. James's Palace. I got his lordship some whisky in the library, and he then told me that I might go to bed, as he should not retire for an hour or so. I withdrew to the little office off the hall and engaged in conversation with the second footman, who was on duty. Presently his lordship came

down into the hall and began to pace about — it was a strange habit of his — smoking a cigarette. He caught sight of me.

"Saunders," he said, "I told you you could go to bed."

"Yes, my lord."

"Why don't you go?"

"Your lordship forgets the emeralds."

"Ah yes, of course." He laughed. I motioned to the footman to clear out.

"You don't seem to care for that job, Saunders," his lordship resumed, quizzing me. "Surely Berry is a charming companion. In your place I should regard it as excellent fun. But I have often told you that you have no sense of humor."

"Not all men laugh at the same jokes, my lord," I observed.

As a matter of fact, in earlier and wilder days, his lordship had sometimes thrown a book or a boot at me for smiling too openly in the wrong place.

The conversation might have continued further, for his lordship would often talk with me, but at that moment Susan Berry appeared with the bag containing the case in which were the emeralds. Lady Trent's own maid was with her, and the two stood talking for an instant at the foot of the stairs, while Lady Trent's maid locked the bag and handed the key to Berry. Heaven knows how long that simple business would have occupied had not the voice of my lady resounded from the first floor somewhat excitedly calling for her maid, who vanished with a hurried good-night. His lordship had already departed from the hall.

"May I relieve you of the bag, Miss Berry?" I asked.

"Thank you, Mr. Saunders," she replied, "but the Marchioness prefers that I myself should carry it."

That little dialogue passed between us every time the emeralds had to be returned.

We started on our short walk, Miss Berry and I, proceeding towards the main avenue which runs through the centre of the Square east and west. It was a beautiful moonlight night. Talking of moonlight nights, I may as well make my confession at once. The fact is that Miss Berry had indeed a certain influence over me. In her presence I was always conscious of feeling a pleasurable elation — an excitement, a perturbation, which another man might have guessed to be the beginning of love.

I, however, knew that it was not love. It was merely a fancy. It only affected me when I was in her company. When she was absent I could regard her in my mind's eye as she actually was — namely, a somewhat designing young woman, with dark eyes and too much will of her own. Nevertheless, she had, as I say, a certain influence over me, and I have already remarked that it was a moonlight night.

Need I say more? In spite of what I had implied to Lord Trent, I did enjoy the walk with Susan Berry. Susan Berry took care that I should.

She extended herself to fascinate me; turning her brunette face up to mine with an air of deference and flashing upon me the glance of those dark lustrous eyes.

She started by sympathizing with me in the matter of the butler. This was, I now recognize, very clever of her, for the butler has always been a sore point with me. I began to think (be good enough to remember the moonlight and the trees) that life with Susan Berry might have its advantages.

Then she turned to the topic of her invalid sister, Jane Mary, who was lame and lived in lodgings near Sloane Street, and kept herself, with a little aid from Susan, by manufacturing artificial flowers. For a month past Miss Berry had referred regularly to this sister, who appeared to be the apple of her eye. I had no objection to the topic, though it did not specially interest me; but on the previous evening Miss Berry had told me, with a peculiar emphasis, that her poor dear sister often expressed a longing to see the famous Cockfosters emeralds, and that she resided quite close too. I did not like that.

Tonight Miss Berry made a proposition which alarmed me. "Mr. Saunders," she said insinuatingly, "you are so good-natured that I have almost a mind to ask you a favor. Would you object to walking round with me to my sister's — it is only a few minutes away — so that I could just give her a peep at these emeralds? She is dying to see them, and I'm sure the Marchioness wouldn't object. We should not be a quarter of an hour away."

My discretion was aroused. I ought to have given a decided negative at once; but somehow I couldn't, while Susan was looking at me.

"But surely your sister will be in bed," I suggested.

"Oh no!" with a sigh. "She has to work very late — very late indeed. And besides, if she is, I could take them up to her room. It would do her good to see them, and she has few pleasures."

"The Marchioness might not like it," I said, driven back to the second line of fortification. "You know your mistress is very particular about these emeralds."

"The Marchioness need never know," Susan Berry whispered, putting her face close up to mine. "No one need know, except just us two."

The accent which she put on those three words "just us two" was extremely tender.

I hesitated. We were already at the end of the Square and should have turned down to the left towards Cockfosters House.

"Come along," she entreated, placing her hand on my shoulder.

"Well, you know —" I muttered, but I went along with her towards Sloane Street. We passed Eaton Place.

"Really, Miss Berry —" I began again, collecting my courage.

Then there was a step behind us, and another hand was placed on my shoulder. I turned round sharply. It was a policeman.

"Your name is Charles Saunders," he said to me; "and yours Susan Berry," to my companion.

"True," I replied, for both of us.

"I have a warrant for your arrest."

"Our arrest!"

"Yes, on a charge of attempting to steal some emeralds, the property of the Marquis of Cockfosters."

"Impossible!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he sneered, "that's what they all say."

"But the emeralds are here in this bag."

"I know they are," he said. "I've just copped you in time. But you've been suspected for days."

"The thing is ridiculous," I said, striving to keep calm. "We are taking the emeralds back to Lady Cockfosters and —"

Then I stopped. If we were merely taking the emeralds back to Lady Cockfosters — that is, from one house in Eaton Square to another house in Eaton Square — what were we doing *out* of the Square?

I glanced at Susan Berry. She was as white as a sheet. The solution of the puzzle occurred to me at once. Susan's sister was an ingenious fiction. Susan was a jewel thief, working with a gang of jewel thieves, and her request that I would accompany her to this mythical sister was part of a plan for stealing the emeralds.

"At whose instance has the warrant been issued?" I asked.

"The Marquis of Cockfosters."

My suspicions were only too well confirmed. I did not speak a word to Susan Berry. I could not. I merely looked at her.

"You'll come quietly to the station?" the policeman said.

"Certainly," I replied. "As for us, the matter can soon be cleared up. I am Lord Trent's valet, No. 441 Eaton Square, and he must be sent for."

"Oh, must he?" the constable jeered. "Come on. Perhaps you'd prefer a cab."

A four-wheeler was passing. I myself hailed the sleepy cabman, and we all three got in. The policeman prudently took the bag from Susan's nerveless hands. None of us spoke. I was too depressed, Susan was probably too ashamed, and the constable was no doubt too bored.

After a brief drive we drew up. Another policeman opened the door of the cab, and over the open portal of the building in front of us I saw the familiar blue lamp, with the legend "Metropolitan Police" in white letters. The two policemen carefully watched us as we alighted, and escorted us up the steps into the station. Happily, there was no one about; my humiliation was abject enough without that.

Charles Saunders a prisoner in a police station! I could scarcely credit my senses. One becomes used to a police station — in the newspapers; but to be inside one — that is different, widely different.

The two policemen took us into a bare room, innocent of any furniture save a wooden bench, a desk, a chair, some printed notices of rewards of-

fered, and an array of handcuffs and revolvers on the mantelpiece. In the chair, with a big book in front of him on the desk, sat the inspector in charge. He was in his shirt-sleeves.

"A hot night," he said, smiling, to the policeman.

I silently agreed.

It appeared that we were expected. They took our full names, our addresses and occupations, and then the inspector read the warrant to us. Of course, it didn't explain things in the least. I began to speak.

"Let me warn you," said the inspector, "that anything you say now may be used against you at your trial."

My trial!

"Can I write a note to Lord Trent?" I asked, nettled.

"Yes, if you will pay for a cab to take it."

I threw down half a crown, and scribbled a line to my master, begging him to come at once.

"The constable must search you," the inspector said, when the first policeman had disappeared with the note.

"I will save him the trouble," I said proudly, and I emptied my pockets of a gold watch and chain, a handkerchief, two sovereigns, a sixpence, two halfpennies, a bunch of keys, my master's linen book, and a new necktie which I had bought that very evening; of which articles the inspector made an inventory.

"Which is the key to the bag?" asked the inspector. The bag was on the desk in front of him and he had been trying to open it.

"I know nothing of that," I said.

"Now you, Susan Berry, give up the key," the inspector said sternly, turning to her.

For answer Susan burst into sobs, and flung herself against my breast. The situation was excessively embarrassing for me. Heaven knows I had sufficient reason to hate the woman, but though a thief, she was in distress, and I must own that I felt for her.

The constable stepped towards Susan.

"Surely," I said, "you have a female searcher?"

"A female searcher! Ah yes!" smiled the inspector, suddenly suave. "Is she here, constable?"

"Not now, sir; she's gone."

"That must wait, then. Take them to the cells."

"Sorry, sir, all the cells are full. Bank Holiday drunks."

The inspector thought a moment.

"Lock 'em up in the back room," he said. "That'll do for the present. Perhaps the male prisoner may be getting an answer to his note soon. After that they'll have to go to Vine Street or Marlborough."

The constable touched his helmet and marched us out. In another moment we were ensconced in a small room, absolutely bare of any furniture, except a short wooden bench. The constable was locking the door when Susan Berry screamed out: "You aren't going to lock us up here together in the dark?"

"Why, what do you want? Didn't

you hear the cells are full?"

I was profoundly thankful they were full. I did not fancy a night in a cell.

"I want a candle," she said fiercely.

He brought one, or rather half of one, stuck in a bottle, and placed it on the mantelpiece. Then he left us.

Again I say the situation was excessively embarrassing. For myself, I said nothing. Susan Berry dropped on the bench, and hiding her face in her hands, gave way to tears without any manner of restraint. I pitied her a little, but that influence which previously she had exercised over me was gone. "Oh, Mr. Saunders," she sobbed, "what shall we do?" And as she spoke she suddenly looked up at me with a glance of feminine appeal. I withstood it.

"Miss Berry," I said severely, "I wonder that you can look me in the face. I trusted you as a woman, and you have outraged that trust. I never dreamed that you were — that you were an adventuress. It was certainly a clever plot, and but for the smartness of the police I should, in my innocence, have fallen a victim to your designs. For myself, I am grateful to the police. I can understand and excuse their mistake in regarding me as your accomplice. That will soon be set right, for Lord Trent will be here. In the meantime, of course, I have been put to considerable humiliation. Nevertheless, even this is better than having followed you to your 'sister's.' In your 'sister's' lodging I might have been knocked senseless, or even murdered. Moreover, the emeralds are safe."

She put on an innocent expression, playing the injured maiden.

"Mr. Saunders, you surely do not imagine —"

"Miss Berry, no protestations, I beg. Let me say now that I have always detected in your character something underhand, something crafty."

"I swear —" she began again.

"Don't trouble," I interrupted her icily, "for I shall not believe you. This night will certainly be a warning to me."

With that I leaned my back against the mantelpiece and abandoned myself to gloomy thought. It was a moment for me of self-abasement. I searched my heart, and I sorrowfully admitted that my predicament was primarily due to disobeying that golden rule — beware of women. I saw now that it was only my absurd fancy for this wicked creature which had led me to accept the office of guarding those emeralds during their night-passage across Eaton Square. I ought to have refused in the first place, for the job was entirely outside my functions; strictly, the butler should have done it.

And this woman in front of me — this Susan Berry, in whom the old Marchioness had such unbounded trust! So she belonged to the fraternity of jewel thieves — a genus of which I had often read, but which I had never before met. What audacity such people must need in order to execute their schemes!

But then the game was high. The Cockfosters emeralds were worth, at a moderate estimate, twelve thousand pounds. There are emeralds and emeralds, the value depends on the color; these were the finest Colombian stones, of a marvellous tint, and many of them were absolutely without a flaw. There were five stones of seven carats each, and these alone must have been worth at least six thousand pounds. Yes, it would have been a great haul, a colossal haul.

Time passed, the candle was burning low, and there was no sign of Lord Trent. I went to the door and knocked, first gently, then more loudly, but I could get no answer. Then I walked about the room, keeping an eye on Susan Berry, who had, I freely admit, the decency to avoid my gaze. I was beginning to get extremely tired. I wished to sit down, but there was only one bench; Susan Berry was already upon it and, as I said before, it was a very short bench. At last I could hold out no longer. Taking my courage in both hands, I sat down boldly on one end of the bench. It was a relief to me. Miss Berry sighed. There were not six inches between us.

The candle was low in the socket, we both watched it. Without a second's warning the flame leaped up and then expired. We were in the dark. Miss Berry screamed, and afterwards I heard her crying. I myself made no sign. Fortunately the dawn broke almost immediately.

By this time I was getting seriously annoyed with Lord Trent. I had served him faithfully, and yet at the moment of my genuine need he had not come to my succor. I went again to the door and knocked with my knuckles. No answer. Then I kicked it. No answer. Then I seized the handle and violently shook it. To my astonishment the door opened. The policeman had forgotten to lock it.

I crept out into the passage, softly closing the door behind me. It was now quite light. The door leading to the street was open, and I could see neither constables nor inspector. I went into the charge room; it was empty. Then I proceeded into the street. On the pavement a piece of paper was lying. I picked it up; it was the note which I had written to Lord Trent.

A workman happened to be loitering along a road which crossed this street at right angles. I called out and ran to him.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "why all the officers have left the police station?"

"Look 'ere, matey," he says, "you get on 'ome; you've been making a night of it, that's wot you 'ave."

"But, seriously," I said.

Then I saw a policeman at a distant corner. The workman whistled, and the policeman was obliging enough to come to us.

" 'Ere's a cove wants to know why all the police 'as left the police station," the workman said.

"What police station?" the constable said sharply.

"Why, this one down here in this side street," I said, pointing to the building. As I looked at it I saw that the lamp which I observed on the previous night no longer hung over the doorway.

The constable laughed good-humoredly.

"Get away home," he said.

I began to tell him my story.

"Get away home," he repeated — gruffly this time, "or I'll run you in."

"All right," I said huffily, and I made as if to walk down the other road. The constable and the workman grinned to each other and departed. As soon as they were out of sight, I returned to my police station.

It was not a police station! It was merely a rather large and plain-fronted empty house, which had been transformed into a police station, for one night only, by means of a lamp, a desk, two benches, a few handcuffs, and some unparalleled cheek. Jewel thieves they were, but Susan Berry was not among them. After all, Susan Berry probably had an invalid sister named Jane Mary.

The first policeman, the cabman, the second policeman, the inspector — these were the jewel thieves, and Susan Berry and I (and of course the Marchioness) had been the victims of as audacious and brilliant a robbery as was ever planned. We had been robbed openly, quietly, deliberately, with the aid of a sham police station. Our movements must have been watched for weeks. I gave my meed of admiration to the imagination, the skill, and the *sang-froid* which must have gone to the carrying out of this coup.

Going back into the room where Susan Berry and I had spent the night hours, I found that wronged woman sweetly asleep on the bench, with her back against the wall. I dared not wake her. And so I left her for the present to enjoy some much-needed repose. I directed my steps in search of Eaton Square, having closed the front door of my police station.

At length I found my whereabouts, and I arrived at No. 441 at five o'clock precisely. The morning was lovely. After some trouble I roused a housemaid, who let me in. She seemed surprised, but I ignored her. I went straight upstairs and knocked at my master's door. To wake him had always been a difficult matter, and this morning the task seemed more difficult than ever. At last he replied sleepily to my summons.

"It is I — Saunders — your lordship."

"Go to the devil, then."

"I must see your lordship instantly. Very seriously."

"Eh, what? I'll come in a minute," and I heard him stirring, and the voice of Lady Trent.

How should I break the news to him? What would the Marchioness say when she knew? Twelve thousand pounds' worth of jewels is no trifle. Not to mention my gold watch, my two sovereigns, my sixpence, and my two halfpennies. And also the half-crown which I had given to have the

message dispatched to his lordship. It was the half-crown that specially rankled.

Lord Trent appeared at the door of his room, arrayed in his crimson dressing-gown.

"Well, Saunders, what in the name of—"

"My lord," I stammered, and then I told him the whole story.

He smiled, he laughed, he roared.

"I daresay it sounds very funny, my lord," I said, "but it wasn't funny at the time, and Lady Cockfosters won't think it very funny."

"Oh, won't she! She will. No one will enjoy it more. She might have taken it seriously if the emeralds had been in the bag, but they weren't."

"Not in the bag, my lord!"

"No, Lady Trent's maid ran off with the bag, thinking that your mistress had put the jewels in it. But she had not. Lady Trent came to the top of the stairs to call her back, as soon as she found the bag gone, but you and Berry were out of the house. So the emeralds stayed here for one night. They are on Lady Trent's dressing-table at the present moment. Go and get a stiff whisky, Saunders. You need it. And then may I suggest that you should return for the sleeping Berry? By the way, the least you can do is to marry her, Saunders."

"Never, my lord!" I said with decision. "I have meddled sufficiently with women."

# THE CLARION CALL

*by O. HENRY*

HALF OF this story can be found in the records of the Police Department; the other half belongs behind the business counter of a newspaper office.

One afternoon two weeks after Millionaire Norcross was found in his apartment murdered by a burglar, the murderer, while strolling serenely down Broadway, ran plump against Detective Barney Woods.

"Is that you, Johnny Kernan?" asked Woods, who had been near-sighted in public for five years.

"No less," cried Kernan, heartily. "If it isn't Barney Woods, late and early of old Saint Jo! You'll have to show me! What are you doing East? Do the green-goods circulars get out that far?"

"I've been in New York some years," said Woods. "I'm on the city detective force."

"Well, well!" said Kernan, breathing smiling joy and patting the detective's arm.

"Come into Muller's," said Woods, "and let's hunt a quiet table. I'd like to talk to you awhile."

It lacked a few minutes to the hour of four. The tides of trade were not yet loosed, and they found a quiet corner of the café. Kernan, well dressed, slightly swaggering, self-confident, seated himself opposite the little detective, with his pale, sandy mustache, squinting eyes, and ready-made cheviot suit.

"What business are you in now?" asked Woods. "You know you left Saint Jo a year before I did."

"I'm selling shares in a copper mine," said Kernan. "I may establish an office here. Well, well! and so old Barney is a New York detective. You always had a turn that way. You were on the police in Saint Jo after I left there, weren't you?"

"Six months," said Woods. "And now there's one more question, Johnny. I've followed your record pretty close ever since you did that hotel job in Saratoga, and I never knew you to use your gun before. Why did you kill Norcross?"

Kernan stared for a few moments with concentrated attention at the slice of lemon in his high-ball; and then he looked at the detective with a sudden crooked, brilliant smile.

"How did you guess it, Barney?" he asked, admiringly. "I swear I thought the job was as clean and as smooth as a peeled onion.

Woods laid upon the table a small gold pencil intended for a watch-charm.

"It's the one I gave you the last Christmas we were in Saint Jo. I've got your shaving mug yet. I found

this under a corner of the rug in Norcross's room. I warn you to be careful what you say. I've got it put on to you, Johnny. We were old friends once, but I must do my duty. You'll have to go to the chair for Norcross."

Kernan laughed.

"My luck stays with me," said he. "Who'd have thought old Barney was on my trail!" He slipped one hand inside his coat. In an instant Woods had a revolver against his side.

"Put it away," said Kernan, wrinkling his nose. "I'm only investigating. Aha! It takes nine tailors to make a man, but one can do a man up. There's a hole in that vest pocket. I took that pencil off my chain and slipped it in there in case of a scrap. Put up your gun, Barney, and I'll tell you why I had to shoot Norcross. The old fool started down the hall after me, popping at the buttons on the back of my coat with a peevish little .22 and I had to stop him. The old lady was a darling. She just lay in bed and saw her $12,000 diamond necklace go without a chirp, while she begged like a panhandler to have back a little thin gold ring with a garnet worth about $3. I guess she married old Norcross for his money, all right. Don't they hang on to the little trinkets from the Man Who Lost Out, though? There were six rings, two brooches and a chatelaine watch. Fifteen thousand would cover the lot."

"I warned you not to talk," said Woods.

"Oh, that's all right," said Kernan. "The stuff is in my suit case at the hotel. And now I'll tell you why I'm talking. Because it's safe. I'm talking to a man I know. You owe me a thousand dollars, Barney Woods, and even if you wanted to arrest me your hand wouldn't make the move."

"I haven't forgotten," said Woods. "You counted out twenty fifties without a word. I'll pay it back some day. That thousand saved me and — well, they were piling my furniture out on the sidewalk when I got back to the house."

"And so," continued Kernan, "you being Barney Woods, born as true as steel, and bound to play a white man's game, can't lift a finger to arrest the man you're indebted to. Oh, I have to study men as well as Yale locks and window fastenings in my business. Now, keep quiet while I ring for the waiter. I've had a thirst for a year or two that worries me a little. If I'm ever caught the lucky sleuth will have to divide honors with the old boy Booze. But I never drink during business hours. After a job I can crook elbows with my old friend Barney with a clear conscience. What are you taking?"

The waiter came with the little decanters and the siphon and left them alone again.

"You've called the turn," said Woods, as he rolled the little gold pencil about with a thoughtful forefinger. "I've got to pass you up. I can't lay a hand on you. If I'd a-paid that money back — but I didn't, and

that settles it. It's a bad break I'm making, Johnny, but I can't dodge it. You helped me once, and it calls for the same."

"I knew it," said Kernan, raising his glass, with a flushed smile of self-appreciation. "I can judge men. Here's to Barney, for — 'he's a jolly good fellow.' "

"I don't believe," went on Woods quietly, as if he were thinking aloud, "that if accounts had been square between you and me, all the money in all the banks in New York could have bought you out of my hands tonight."

"I know it couldn't," said Kernan. "That's why I knew I was safe with you."

"Most people," continued the detective, "look sideways at my business. They don't class it among the fine arts and the professions. But I've always taken a kind of fool pride in it. And here is where I go 'busted.' I guess I'm a man first and a detective afterward. I've got to let you go, and then I've got to resign from the force. I guess I can drive an express wagon. Your thousand dollars is further off than ever, Johnny."

"Oh, you're welcome to it," said Kernan, with a lordly air. "I'd be willing to call the debt off, but I know you wouldn't have it. It was a lucky day for me when you borrowed it. And now, let's drop the subject. I'm off to the West on a morning train. I know a place out there where I can negotiate the Norcross sparks. Drink up, Barney, and forget your troubles. We'll have a jolly time while the police are knocking their heads together over the case. I've got one of my Sahara thirsts on to-night. But I'm in the hands — the unofficial hands — of my old friend Barney, and I won't even dream of a cop."

And then, as Kernan's ready finger kept the button and the waiter working, his weak point — a tremendous vanity and arrogant egotism, began to show itself. He recounted story after story of his successful plunderings, ingenious plots and infamous transgressions until Woods, with all his familiarity with evil-doers, felt growing within him a cold abhorrence toward the utterly vicious man who had once been his benefactor.

"I'm disposed of, of course," said Woods, at length. "But I advise you to keep under cover for a spell. The newspapers may take up this Norcross affair. There has been an epidemic of burglaries and manslaughter in town this summer."

The word sent Kernan into a high glow of sullen and vindictive rage.

"To h — l with the newspapers," he growled. "What do they spell but brag and blow and boodle in box-car letters? Suppose they do take up a case — what does it amount to? The police are easy enough to fool; but what do the newspapers do? They send a lot of pin-head reporters around to the scene; and they make for the nearest saloon and have beer while they take photos of the bartender's oldest daughter in evening

dress to print as the fiancée of the young man in the tenth story, who thought he heard a noise below on the night of the murder. That's about as near as the newspapers ever come to running down Mr. Burglar."

"Well, I don't know," said Woods, reflecting. "Some of the papers have done good work in that line. There's the *Morning Mars*, for instance. It warmed up two or three trails, and got the man after the police had let 'em get cold."

"I'll show you," said Kernan, rising, and expanding his chest. "I'll show you what I think of newspapers in general, and your *Morning Mars* in particular."

Three feet from their table was the telephone booth. Kernan went inside and sat at the instrument, leaving the door open. He found a number in the book, took down the receiver and made his demand upon Central. Woods sat still, looking at the sneering, cold, vigilant face waiting close to the transmitter, and listened to the words that came from the thin, truculent lips curved into a contemptuous smile.

"That the *Morning Mars*? . . . I want to speak to the managing editor. . . . Why, tell him it's someone who wants to talk to him about the Norcross murder.

"You the editor? . . . All right. . . . I am the man who killed old Norcross. . . . Wait! Hold the wire; I'm not the usual crank . . . Oh, there isn't the slightest danger. I've just been discussing it with a detective friend of mine. I killed the old man at 2.30 A.M. two weeks ago tomorrow. . . . Have a drink with you? Now, hadn't you better leave that kind of talk to your funny man? Can't you tell whether a man's guying you or whether you're being offered the biggest scoop your dull dishrag of a paper ever had? . . . Well, that's so; it's a bobtail scoop — but you can hardly expect me to 'phone in my name and address. . . . Why! Oh, because I heard you make a specialty of solving mysterious crimes that stump the police. . . . No, that's not all. I want to tell you that your rotten, lying penny sheet is of no more use in tracking an intelligent murderer or highway man than a blind poodle would be. . . . What? . . . Oh, no, this isn't a rival newspaper office; you're getting it straight. I did the Norcross job, and I've got the jewels in my suit case at — 'the name of the hotel could not be learned' — you recognize that phrase, don't you? I thought so. You've used it often enough. Kind of rattles you, doesn't it, to have the mysterious villain call up your great, big, all-powerful organ of right and justice and good government and tell you what a helpless old gas-bag you are? . . . Cut that out; you're not that big a fool — no, you don't think I'm a fraud. I can tell it by your voice. . . . Now, listen, and I'll give you a pointer that will prove it to you. Of course you've had this murder case worked over by your staff of bright young blockheads. Half of

the second button on old Mrs. Norcross's nightgown is broken off. I saw it when I took the garnet ring off her finger. I thought it was a ruby. . . . Stop that! It won't work."

Kernan turned to Woods with a diabolic smile.

"I've got him going. He believes me now. He didn't quite cover the transmitter with his hand when he told somebody to call up Central on another 'phone and get our number. I'll give him just one more dig and then we'll make a 'get-away.'

"Hello! . . . Yes. I'm here yet. You didn't think I'd run from such a little subsidized, turncoat rag of a newspaper, did you? . . . Have me inside of forty-eight hours? Say, will you quit being funny? Now, you let grown men alone and attend to your business of hunting up divorce cases and street-car accidents and printing the filth and scandal that you make your living by. Good-by, old boy — sorry I haven't time to call on you. I'd feel perfectly safe in your sanctum asinorum. Tra-la!"

"He's as mad as a cat that's lost a mouse," said Kernan, hanging up the receiver and coming out. "And now, Barney, my boy, we'll go to a show and enjoy ourselves until a reasonable bedtime. Four hours' sleep for me, and then the west-bound."

The two dined in a Broadway restaurant. Kernan was pleased with himself. He spent money like a prince of fiction. And then a weird and gorgeous musical comedy engaged their attention. Afterward there was a late supper in a grill-room, with champagne, and Kernan at the height of his complacency.

Half-past three in the morning found them in a corner of an all-night café, Kernan still boasting in a vapid and rambling way, Woods thinking moodily over the end that had come to his usefulness as an upholder of the law.

But, as he pondered, his eye brightened with a speculative light.

"I wonder if it's possible," he said to himself, "I won-der if it's pos-si-ble!"

And then outside the café the comparative stillness of the early morning was punctured by faint, uncertain cries that seemed mere fireflies of sound, some growing louder, some fainter, waxing and waning amid the rumble of milk wagons and infrequent cars. Shrill cries they were when near — well-known cries that conveyed many meanings to the ears of those of the slumbering millions of the great city who waked to hear them. Cries that bore upon their significant, small volume the weight of a world's woe and laughter and delight and stress. To some, cowering beneath the protection of a night's ephemeral cover, they brought news of the hideous, bright day; to others, wrapped in happy sleep, they announced a morning that would dawn blacker than sable night. To many of the rich they brought a besom to sweep away what had been theirs while the stars shone; to the poor they brought — another day.

All over the city the cries were starting up, keen and sonorous, heralding the chances that the slipping of one cogwheel in the machinery of time had made; apportioning to the sleepers while they lay at the mercy of fate, the vengeance, profit, grief, reward and doom that the new figure in the calendar had brought them. Shrill and yet plaintive were the cries, as if the young voices grieved that so much evil and so little good was in their irresponsible hands. Thus echoed in the streets of the helpless city the transmission of the latest decrees of the gods, the cries of the newsboys — the Clarion Call of the Press.

Woods flipped a dime to the waiter, and said:

"Get me a *Morning Mars.*"

When the paper came he glanced at its first page, and then tore a leaf out of his memorandum book and began to write on it with the little gold pencil.

"What's the news?" yawned Kernan.

Woods flipped over to him the piece of writing:

The New York *Morning Mars:*

Please pay to the order of John Kernan the one thousand dollars reward coming to me for his arrest and conviction.

BARNARD WOODS.

"I kind of thought they would do that," said Woods, "when you were jollying 'em so hard. Now, Johnny, you'll come to the police station with me."

"O"

## NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will contain the following stories, among others:

DEATH RIDES A BOXCAR — a complete novelette, by *Erle Stanley Gardner*

THE DOG IN THE ORCHARD by *Mary Roberts Rinehart*

PIECES OF SILVER by *Brett Halliday*

MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE by *Michael Arlen*

THE BAD LUCK MURDERS by *Craig Rice*

and the annual round-up of books for 1947 by Howard Haycraft, plus stories by Roy Vickers, Stuart Palmer, Courtney Ryley Cooper and Vincent Cornier.

# LIGHT IN THE WINDOW

*by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN*

She was tall and blonde, and against another background — that of a glittering night club, for instance — you might have said that she was beautiful. But the patch of sunlight that filtered in over the roofs of adjoining tenements was not merciful. It showed that she was no longer young, and that she was hard.

The heavy-set man in the faded red club chair stretched his legs comfortably, and in doing so, flipped back his coat so that she could see the police badge on his vest. His words were friendly enough, but his manner was unyielding. He said, again, "It doesn't matter to me if you play or not, Rita. But what's the percentage in not stringin' along with me?"

She said sharply: "I'm not ratting on Eddie — and that's final."

"But you know where he is."

"That's your idea."

"Sure, it's my idea. You were his gal friend, weren't you?"

"Suppose I was, that don't prove anything."

"I never said it did. I'm only asking where it gets you. I'm asking why you stick to a guy you'll never see again. Eddie's got a murder rap hanging over him. He may tie up with some dame somewhere, sometime — but it'll never be you. You're out of the picture from now on — because you'll be watched, which makes you bad medicine for him. Besides, it don't seem reasonable you'd still be crazy about a guy that bumped somebody off — for dough."

"He said he didn't do it."

Steve Mason said flatly, "He did it, all right. I saw the shooting myself. That's why I'm so anxious to pick him up."

She said, "I don't wonder. You drift along in time to see a man murdered and a satchel of money grabbed. But the guy gets away. Smart dick you are."

Steve nodded placidly. "Have your fun, Rita. I've learned to take it. The boys been ribbing me plenty down at headquarters. The chief has been giving me hell. I've got everything it takes to convict Eddie — except Eddie. I want that lad — plenty. I'd be sitting pretty if I could nab him. Which is half the reason I'm talking turkey to you. The other half is the dough. I could use five thousand dollars. And from what I see here" — his hard eyes swept the room — "you could use the same amount."

She seated herself and leaned forward. The gray-green eyes were hard and calculating. She said, "I ain't having any — but I'm curious. What's your idea?"

"You can get in touch with him . . . no, never mind denying it. Call it a guess if you want, but let it ride

that way for a minute. So you do. You tell him you got to see him; you tell him it's safe. He comes to see you and I pick him up."

"And then?"

"My own testimony would convict him. I seen him do that shooting. And the chances are a hundred to one he'd have the gun on him."

She gave a short, derisive laugh. "How'd you figure that one out?"

"Easy. Eddie'd come to see you, but he'd come heeled. And I'm playing the hunch that he's still got the gun he used on that messenger. If I'm wrong, we've still got him hooked. If I'm right, a ballistics test will clinch it. I get the ten thousand reward and give you half."

She said, "I'd feel pretty lousy doing something like that."

His eyes bored into her. "If I was you — I'd do it." He rose and shrugged into his coat. "I'll be drifting, Rita. If five thousand cold cash don't mean anything to you . . ."

"But it does!" she broke out suddenly. "I've scrimped and suffered and half-starved for so long. Damn it, you've got no right putting me on the spot this way. You got the cards all stacked against me."

"Uh-huh," he agreed mildly. "I'm trying to deal myself the winning hand. Only I'm cutting you in. So for the last time: Is it Yes or No?"

She walked to the window and looked down on the shabby vista of family washing, garbage barrels, unkempt housewives, and ill-clad, noisy children. She hated the whole thing. No decent clothes. None of the things a girl wants — especially a girl who was created to look pretty and to have fun. Suddenly she said:

"I'm playing it your way. What do I do now?"

Steve Mason was too smart to show his elation. His voice remained calm and unemotional. He said: "Get in touch with Eddie. Tell him you got to see him — here."

With Eddie's arms around her, this way, she could look straight into his eyes. Just the same height, they were, which made him kind of short for a man. Short and slender. You couldn't feel his arms around you and see those eyes of his and believe he'd ever killed anybody. You couldn't believe anything about Eddie that wasn't all right.

Steve Mason knew what she was thinking. He knew women could go blah all of a sudden: change their minds and do crazy things. So he stepped out of the kitchenette and grabbed Eddie. He said, "Jig's up, kid — so take it easy."

Eddie backed away. He put his hands up defensively, and Steve Mason acted. He said, "No, you don't . . ." and he swung. His fist caught Eddie high on the forehead and Eddie went down. Hard.

Steve was on top of him, there on the floor. Eddie couldn't do anything about it, but he tried. They wrestled around, and Rita screamed, and then something clicked and when Steve got up, there were cuffs on Eddie.

"Get tough with me," grunted Steve. "I'll show you. . . ."

There was a banging on the door and Rita opened it. Three men barged in, and Steve said, "Hello, boys. What gives?"

The other three plainclothesmen looked at him and said that was just exactly what they wanted to know.

"This is Eddie Gregor," Steve explained. "He's the guy I saw bump off that messenger a couple months back."

Detective-Sergeant Wallen said yes, he guessed it was — and all the time Eddie was trembling and Rita was standing there tense and rigid.

Wallen said, "You sure this is the guy, Steve?"

"Positive. I saw him do the shooting and run away. I been laying for him." He even smiled a little. "Why don't you search him?"

They searched him. Wallen himself found the gun. He held it in the palm of his hand and showed it to the others.

"That'll be the clincher," exulted Steve Mason. "I'm betting that's the gun that killed the messenger."

Wallen nodded. "I think you got something there, Steve." He shook his head slowly. "There's only one hitch. We got this gun off Eddie, *but it don't belong there.*"

"How about talking some sense," suggested Steve.

"All right. Try to answer this one. Me and the boys brought Eddie right to this door. We frisked him. He didn't have any gun on him. Now we find one. What does that mean to you?"

Steve Mason felt cold inside. He said, in a voice that was not too assured, "What is this: a gag?"

"No-o. I wouldn't call it that. But since we're all sure that a test will prove that this gun killed the messenger, we got to ask where it came from. Eddie didn't have it when he came in here and —"

Rita said, "That's why Mason slugged Eddie and jumped him. He planted the gun when they were wrestling around on the floor."

"Nice figuring," said Detective-Sergeant Wallen. "In fact, you've played a neat game all 'round, Rita. We know that Steve saw the shooting because he said he did. That plants him at the scene. Now we've tied him up with the gun — and cleared Eddie at the same time. . . . And you and Eddie — you've got a neat slice of coin coming."

They took the cuffs off Eddie and he put his arms around Rita. Sergeant Wallen said: "Look, Rita — you played it straight across the board and you won. But what made you so sure Steve Mason would try to plant the gun on Eddie?"

Her eyes flicked to Steve Mason. "He just the same as told me so," she explained, "when he wanted to bet that Eddie would have the gun with him. I've had a tough time, Sergeant, but right along I've managed to think straight when it concerned Eddie. The trouble with Steve is that he knows a lot of things . . . but he's awful dumb about a woman in love."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Lemuel De Bra's experience with San Francisco's old Chinatown began nearly forty years ago. At that time Mr. De Bra was with the Internal Revenue Service and when the law was passed forbidding the importation of smoking opium, Mr. De Bra and his colleagues of the Service had to visit every opium den in every Chinese quarter in California. It wasn't long before Mr. De Bra found himself greatly interested in the contrast between the older generation of Chinese and the younger generation that had taken up American ways. So he began writing about them. . . . The closest translation of the name Lemuel De Bra into Chinese is Day Pot Lay which means, by extraordinary coincidence, "pen writing very sharply." . . . Mr. De Bra now lives in Florida, but he emphasizes in his letter to your Editor that he is not a Floridian writing about places and people thousands of miles away. He is a native San Franciscan, and his heart is still there in old Chinatown with its strange noises, strange smells, strange mixture of ugliness and Oriental beauty, and over all the fog racing in from the Pacific. . . . Lemuel De Bra has been called the American Thomas Burke, and Mr. De Bra's only volume of short stories has been called, with equal truth, the American* LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS. *We hope to bring you a series of Mr. De Bra's excellent tales of Chinatown, and as the first in the series we now offer "A Life — A Bowl of Rice," a beautifully compact and understanding tale of Fa'ng the hatchetman, the professional killer who was too honest to steal. Mr. De Bra's story has that memorable quality which is found only in writing that lives long after the author first put the words on paper.*

# A LIFE—A BOWL OF RICE

*by LEMUEL DE BRA*

Bow Sam stood in the doorway by his sugar-cane stand and watched with narrowed eyes an old man who shuffled uncertainly down the alley toward him.

"*Hoo la ma!*" cried Bow Sam in surprised Cantonese as the old man drew near. "Hello, there! I scarcely knew you, venerable Fa'ng!"

Fa'ng, the hatchetman, straightened his bent shoulders and looked up. There was a gleam in his deep bronze eyes that was hardly in keeping with his withered frame.

"*Hoo la ma*, Bow Sam," he said, his voice strangely deep and vibrant.

"You have grown very thin," remarked Bow Sam with friendly interest.

"*Hi low;* that is true. But why carry around flesh that is not food?"

The sugar-cane vendor eyed the

other shrewdly. What was the gossip he had heard concerning Fa'ng, the famous old hatchetman? Was it not that the old man was always hungry? Yes, that was it! Fa'ng, whose long knife and swift arm had been the most feared thing in all Chinatown, was starving — too proud to beg, too honest to steal.

"You have eaten well, venerable Fa'ng?" The inquiry was in a casual tone, respectful.

"*Aih*, I have eaten well," replied the old hatchetman, averting his face.

"How unfortunate for me! I have not yet eaten my rice; for when one must dine alone, one goes slowly to table. Is it not written that a bowl of rice shared is doubly enjoyed? Would you not at least have a cup of tea while I eat my mean fare?"

"I shall be honoured to sip tea with you, estimable Bow Sam," replied the hatchetman with poorly disguised eagerness.

"Then condescend to enter my poor house! Ah, one does not often have the pleasure of your company in these days!"

Bow Sam preceded his guest to the wretched hovel that was the sugar-cane vendor's only home. There he quickly removed all trace of the bowl of rice he had eaten but a moment before.

"Will you take this poor stool, venerable Fa'ng?" said Bow, setting out the only stool he possessed, and placing it so that the hatchetman's back would be to the stove.

Wearily, Fa'ng sat down. Bow put out two small cups, each worn and badly chipped, and filled them with hot tea. Then, while the hatchetman sipped his tea, Bow uncovered the rice kettle. There was but one bowl of rice left. Bow Sam had intended to keep it for his evening meal; for until he sold some sugar-cane, he had no way of obtaining more food.

Behind Fa'ng's back, Bow took two rice bowls and set them on the stove. One bowl he heaped full for the hatchetman. In the other he put an upturned tea bowl and sprinkled over it his last few grains of rice.

"Let us give thanks to the gods of the kitchen that we have food and teeth and appetite," chuckled Bow Sam, seating himself on a sugar-cane box opposite Fa'ng.

"Well spoken," returned the old hatchetman quickly, filling his mouth with the nourishing rice. "*Aih!* there is much in life to make one content."

With his chop-sticks Bow Sam deftly took up a few grains of rice, taking care lest he uncover the up-turned tea bowl.

"I am very grateful," said Bow, "that I have a few teeth left, that I quite often have enough rice, and that I sometimes have meat as often as once a month; but to hear you — a proud old hatchetman — express such sentiments on an empty stomach fills me with admiration."

"It is a virtue to be content with one's lot," remarked Fa'ng quietly.

"*Hi low!* That is true! But the younger generation are always fretting because they think they have not

enough; while, as anyone knows, they have much more than we who first came to this land of the white foreign devil."

"They are young," spoke Fa'ng, nodding his head slowly. "For us the days have fled, the years have not tarried. And we have learned that if one has but a bowl of rice for food and a bent arm for pillow, one can be content."

"*Haie!* How can you speak so softly of the younger generation when it is they who have robbed you of your livelihood? I know the gossip. You, the most famous killer in Chinatown, find yourself cast out like a worn-out broom by these young upstarts who have no respect for their elders. Is it not true?"

With his left hand, the old hatchet-man made an eloquent gesture, peculiarly Chinese, much as one quickly throws open a fan.

"Of what value are words, my friend? They cannot change that which is changeless. A word cannot temper the wind, nor a phrase procure food for a hungry stomach."

"Nevertheless, I do not like such things," persisted Bow Sam. "I love the old ways. You were an honourable and fearless killer. When you were hired to slay one's enemy you went boldly to your victim and told him your business. Then, swiftly, even before the doomed one could open his lips, you struck — cleaned your blade and walked your way.

"The modern killers!" Bow Sam spewed the words out as one does sour rice. "They are too cowardly to use the knife. They hide on roofs, fire on their victims, then throw away their guns and flee like thieves. *Aih*, what have we come to in these days!

"It was but yesterday after mid-day rice that I had speech with Gar Ling, a gunman of the Sin Wah *tong*. He stopped to buy sugar-cane, and I told him that had I the money I would hire him. There is one of the younger generation, the pock-marked son of Quong, the dealer in jade, who has greatly wronged me and my honourable family name, and my distinguished ancestors. As you very well know, one cannot soil one's own hands with the blood of vengeance. Moreover, I have no weapon, not even a dull cleaver.

"I was telling all this to Gar Ling," went on Bow, straining the last drop of tea into Fa'ng's bowl, "and he told me he would settle my quarrel, but it would cost one thousand dollars. When I told him I had not even a thousand copper *cash*, he became angry and abusive. As he walked his way, quickly, like a foreign devil, he spat in my direction and called me an unspeakable name."

"*Ts, ts!* You should have wrung his neck. Repeat to me his unspeakable words."

"He said," cried Bow Sam, his face twisted in fury, "that I am *the son of a turtle!*"

"*Aih-yah!* How insulting! As anyone knows, in all our language there is no epithet more vile!"

"That is true. But what is even worse, I did not remember until after he had gone, that he had not paid me for the piece of sugar-cane. Such is the way of the younger generation; and we, who have been long in the land, can do nothing."

"Yet it is by such things that one learns the lesson of enduring tranquillity," remarked Fa'ng, smacking his lips and moving back from the table.

For about the time, then, that it takes one to make nine bows before the household gods, neither man made speech.

Then Fa'ng arose.

"An excellent bowl of rice, my good friend."

"*Aih*, it shames me to have to give you such mean fare."

"And the tea was most fragrant."

"Ts, it was only the cheapest *Black Dragon*."

The two old men went to the door.

"*Ts 'ing la!*" said the hatchetman. "Good-by."

"*Ho hang la!*" said the sugar-cane vendor. "I hope you have a safe walk."

Fa'ng, the hatchetman, made his way down the alley to the rear entrance of a pawnshop. There he spoke a few words with the proprietor.

"I know you are honest, old man," said the pawnbroker. "But instead of bringing it back, I hope, for your own sake, you will be able to pay what you owe me."

Then from a safe he took a knife with long, slender blade and a handle of ebony in which had been carved an unbelievable number of notches. Fa'ng took the knife, handling it as one does an object of precious memories, concealed it beneath his tattered blouse, and went his way.

Near the entrance of a gambling house in Canton Alley the old hatchetman met the pock-marked son of Quong, the dealer in jade.

"For the wrong you have done Bow Sam, his family name, and his distinguished ancestors," said Fa'ng quietly; and before the other could open his lips the long blade was through his heart.

In front of a cigar store in Shanghai Place, Fa'ng found Gar Ling, the gunman. "I have business of moment with you, Gar Ling," said the hatchetman. "Come."

Gar Ling hesitated. He stood in great fear of the old killer, yet he dared not show that fear before his young friends. So with his left hand he gave a peculiar signal. A boy standing near with a basket of *lichee* on his arm turned quickly and followed the two men down the alley. Drawing near his employer, the boy held up the basket as though soliciting the gunman to buy. Gar's hand darted swiftly into the basket, beneath the *lichee*, and came out with a heavy automatic pistol which he quickly concealed beneath his blouse.

The old hatchetman knew all the tricks of the young gunmen, but he pretended he had not seen. As they turned a dark corner, he paused.

"For the insulting words you spoke

to Bow Sam," he said calmly, and the long blade glided between the gunman's ribs.

As Fa'ng drew the steel away, Gar Ling staggered, fired once, then collapsed.

Bow Sam stood in the doorway by his sugar-cane stand and watched with narrowed eyes an old man who shuffled uncertainly down the alley.

"*Hoo la ma!*" he cried, as the old man drew near. "I did not expect to see you again so soon."

The old hatchetman did not raise his head nor reply. Staggering, he crossed the threshold and fell on his face on the littered floor.

With a throaty cry Bow Sam slammed the door shut. He bent over Fa'ng.

"This knife," said the hatchetman; "take it — to Wong the pawnbroker. Tell him — all. Worth — more — than I owe."

"But what's ——"

"For the wrong that the pock-marked one did you, for the insult Gar Ling spoke to you, I slew them," said Fa'ng, with sudden strength. "My debt is paid. *Tsau kom lok.*"

"*Haie!* You did that! Why did you do that? I could never pay you! And look! *Aih-yah*, ho, how piteous! You are dying!"

With awkward fingers, the vendor of sugar-cane tried to staunch the flow of blood where Gar Ling's bullet had struck with deadly effect.

"Pay me?" breathed Fa'ng the hatchetman. "Did you — not — feed me? Can one — put a value — on food — when the stomach — is empty? *Aih*, what matters it? A life," — his eyelids fluttered and closed — "a life — a bowl of rice. . . ."

# THE LADY WHO LAUGHED

*By ROY VICKERS*

If you are under thirty, the name of Lucien Spengrave probably suggests nothing but one of those "famous crimes" which are periodically retold. Actually, Spengrave himself was famous; his crime only so by virtue of the roundabout way in which it was uncovered by Scotland Yard.

You may have heard that he was a successful comedian. He was a unique comedian. He played only one role — that of a circus clown. But he had never played it in a circus. For the last ten years of his life he played it in his own West End theatre — in which the cheap seats were half and the expensive seats double the prevailing prices.

His jokes and stage business — as eminent historians of the theatre and the circus have pointed out — were literally hundreds of years old. For instance, that almost incredibly crude act in which the clown helps the Ringmaster's attendants roll up a carpet, trips, and gets himself rolled up in the carpet. They say that, in a real circus, young children will still laugh at it. Spengrave played that act to the most sophisticated audiences in the world. From all classes he drew belly-laughs and tears — from that same carpet that can be traced back to Eleventh Century Bohemia.

The clue to the mystery — as opposed to evidence of the murder — lay in the personality of the man who could evolve such a technique. When June, Spengrave's wife, disappeared so dramatically and was later found dead, the armchair detective might well have beaten the practical man by betting blindly on Spengrave's genius in manipulating the deadly obvious.

She disappeared during a cocktail party on the lawn of their riverside house at Binbury on the last Thursday of August, 1936. Spengrave never played during August, though he had to practice in his gymnasium five days a week, muscular control being as essential to him as to a pianist.

There were some twenty guests, all being June's friends. She had complained that he was never "matey" with her friends — he was, indeed, rather ponderous in private life and a poor mixer; so he said he would give the guests a light version of the lecture he periodically delivered to Universities — the lecture that had brought him three honorary degrees.

The guests felt themselves highly privileged. From the gymnasium, whose double doors gave on to the garden, six of the male guests brought the classic carpet; others, the tray with the goblet screwed down and the masks for the two-headed dog. There was brisk competition for the honor of being selected as stooges to roll the

carpet for Spengrave's demonstration.

"The Clown is traditionally a subhuman, struggling to reach the level of humanity. The Clown never consciously plays the fool. He is desperately anxious to help the normal men roll the carpet in the normal way. Observe my shoulders as I approach the men at the carpet."

Thus he dissected the carpet act. The two-headed dog act followed. The garden sloped down to the river in three little leveled lawns. June led her guests to the second lawn, clear of the carpet.

For some six minutes he traced the act from its origin at the court of King Henry VIII, then turned to the tray and goblet.

"In this act we see anxiety expressed exclusively with the feet. I shall need more space for this. The upper lawn is wide enough, I think. Oh, the carpet is in the way!"

"Shall we roll it up again and put it back in the gym, Mr. Spengrave?"

The speaker was Fred Periss, a youngish, handsome man. Spengrave turned and looked at him as if the offer were surprising. Then:

"Yes, please," said Spengrave.

There was a scramble to deal with the carpet, in which some of the girls joined. It would be something to talk about afterwards — that they had once helped the great Spengrave with the very carpet that was used on the stage.

When they had all come back from the gymnasium, Spengrave resumed his lecture.

"The Clown is proud because he has been entrusted with the dignified duty of carrying wine to the Lady. To reduce this to its basic values, I shall want June to stooge for me, if she will." He called: "June, dear!"

To keep the great man waiting — even if it was his wife who was doing it — was an outrage.

"June!" they shouted. "June, where are you? June!"

The time when they were calling her was reconstructed and checked as being about six-fifty. At six-thirty she had been well in evidence, fussing a little over her duties as hostess.

Her disappearance spoiled the lecture. The party began to break up. The honored stooges returned the tray and goblet and the masks for the two-headed dog act to the gymnasium. By seven-fifteen the last guest had gone.

At eight Spengrave toyed with a lonely dinner. At eight-thirty he rang the Reading police. The Inspector came at once with a sergeant. The routine investigation revealed that there were no signs whatever of Mrs. Spengrave having prepared for her departure. The possibility of her having thrown herself into the river, unobserved, was explored and dismissed.

An hour later, because Spengrave was so distinguished, the Chief Constable appeared in person.

"There's one question I must ask in your own interest, Mr. Spengrave —"

"Has my wife bolted with a lover?" cut in Spengrave. "No. If there had

been a lover in the offing, she would thoroughly have enjoyed telling me." The Chief was sufficiently convinced. His eye strayed to a large photograph of a woman with a strange, cold beauty.

"Is that Mrs. Spengrave?" As her husband nodded, "I have never had the pleasure of meeting her. But I've seen her somewhere."

"Perhaps in one of the many pictures of her in the Academy years ago. She used to be an artist's model. Also, she appeared in one of my Acts for four years — before we were married."

"That's where I saw her! In *The Lady Who Wouldn't Laugh*."

"Correct! She ought to be easy to find."

"If nothing happens by mid-day tomorrow we'll fix a broadcast appeal," said the Chief, and departed.

Close upon midnight on Friday the police rang. There had been an answer from Edinburgh, of a loss-of-memory case, which bore some slight resemblance to the description of Mrs. Spengrave."

"I'll go by plane early tomorrow," said Spengrave.

Before leaving, after a very early breakfast, he told his housekeeper: "The men should be here this morning from the theatre to overhaul my things and take some of them back. If they aren't here by eleven, 'phone the theatre and tell the manager I want to know why. When they come, make things easy for them, will you, and give them all they want."

All that the men wanted was the loan of a vacuum cleaner. And when they unrolled the classic carpet, they found the dead body of June Spengrave.

Lucien Spengrave had begun as an artist. At the Slade School, where he learned his technique, he kept his individuality in check. When he began painting he attracted a great deal of attention but very few checks.

As a person he enjoyed a kind of oblique popularity. "Funny thing, but I can't help rather liking Spengrave." His life was blameless, yet men tended to apologize for liking him. There was the hint of a reason in the background, unexpressed because no one knew how to express it.

There was nothing odd about him physically except that, if you were to see him for the first time sitting down, you might think that he was a large, tall man, whereas he just escaped being short. That was because he had a large, long, lean face, suggesting a scholarly monk; the mouth was long and thin-lipped, but in the eyes — wide and unusually blue — the prevailing expression was that of gentleness.

When Kenfield became a Minister, he commissioned Spengrave to paint him, but refused to accept the portrait on the ground that it was not like him. Carron James, whose plays were about to earn him a knighthood, gave Spengrave a hundred guineas for the portrait.

"I'm buying it, Spengrave, because it's an excellent bit o' work. Also be-

cause I have always hated Kenfield. Gosh, he must have felt that portrait like a whip across the face! It enables me to see him as a poor, ineffectual devil like myself. And I don't hate him any more. D'you see what I mean?"

"No," said Spengrave. "But your check is a godsend."

"Is it? It oughtn't to be, to a man of your talent." Carron James couldn't help rather liking the fellow. "If you're hard up, why not try a sideline in caricature? I'll give you an introduction if you like."

With a topical caricature of the Prime Minister under his arm, Spengrave kept an appointment with the editor of a leading Opposition paper. The editor looked at the caricature. He chuckled but the chuckle died in his throat.

"I like that! But I can't publish it. If you care to sell it to me personally I'll give you a tenner for it."

"You can have it for nothing," said Spengrave, "if you will tell me why you won't publish it, though you obviously like it."

"Your picture is true. But it tells an unbearable truth. It's — cruel! It even pulls *me* into a kind of nervous sympathy with *him*."

"Thank you," said Spengrave. "The drawing is yours."

Spengrave walked back to his studio, wishing he could have accepted the tenner without wounding his self-respect. Things were getting very low. In three months he would be starting the round of the pawnshops. He looked at himself in one of the long mirrors.

"You thought you were being topical and damned witty. And you were only being cruel and killing your market. *Clown!*"

He snatched the brush and palette and began to paint a portrait of himself — became absorbed, barely conscious that the clown-theme was predominating until, four hours later, he had finished.

He stood back, looking at his self-portrait.

"The best thing I've done!" He giggled weakly and the tears ran down his cheeks. "But it tells an unbearable truth. It's cruel!"

He began to pace the studio, uncertainly, like a drunkard.

"Carron James said much the same thing. That means I must have a streak of cruelty in me without knowing it. But the others know it. However civil people are, they never accept me as one of themselves.

"I want to be like other men. I want to eat and drink without thought and be clean and have proper clothes. I want a woman to love me terrifically and be glad to have children with me. *I want to be like other men!*"

Melancholia drove him to self-pity, but intelligence warned him that if he wanted something he must fight for it. He returned to the portrait.

"If I turn the cruelty on to myself, the others will be — 'pulled into a kind of nervous sympathy' with me. That's what he said. And then I can make them laugh or cry."

Thus he found the formula which carried him to stardom in three months and kept him there for the rest of his life.

For five years he was the star turn in the music halls, touring all the capitals that could fill a large house at good prices. Always he played the circus clown in difficulties. He used the fact that a whitefaced clown is not particularly funny to a modern audience — he exposed the clown's unfunniness with a stark brutality that shocked his audience into sympathy with the clown — a twist in the story brought release and the belly-laugh. That put the audience in his pocket. He could play on all the basic emotions. The idiot face of the clown could flash into a disconcerting sensitiveness that gave a new tang to poltroonery.

With the coming of the talkies and the decay of the music hall, he took a theatre for himself, filling it with straight musical and dramatic acts of a high class.

He met June in the course of a visit to one of his artist friends. She was tall and blonde with regular features and regular lines, handsome rather than beautiful. Her curves were artistically correct rather than voluptuous. His glance was wholly professional.

"Let me know when you've finished with that girl," he said in an undertone.

"I've finished now, if you've got work for her — I owe her for three sittings. June, come and meet Mr. Spengrave."

Like many an artist's model, June was respectable to the point of prudery, educated in genteel snobbery but hardly anything else. She was conscientious and unmercenary at this stage of her life, and would work loyally for anyone who would affect to treat her as a lady. Her lucky physicality gave her the appearance of a solemn young queen disguised as a housemaid.

On Spengrave's stage she was required to behave exactly as she behaved in a studio — sit stock still, not utter a word and look handsomely expressionless — The Lady Who Wouldn't Laugh.

On the first night she virtually killed the act. For when the twist came in the story, bringing the release, June laughed too.

"*Don't laugh, you dreadful little fool!*" he whispered with such venom that she had no difficulty in obeying. He more or less gagged his way out of the debacle, but the act was not a success that night.

Afterwards, she came tearfully to his dressing-room.

"I'm very sorry indeed, Mr. Spengrave. No wonder you were so angry! But it was suddenly all so funny!"

"My fault for not rehearsing you enough. Be here tomorrow at ten, and we'll go over it again."

He was not quite sure of her after the morning rehearsal. He gave her lunch in his suite at the top of the theatre, and afterwards asked her if she felt confident.

"I'm still worried about that bit

where you fall in the carpet the second time — the funny time, Mr. Spengrave!"

"Hm! I know you're trying hard. Perhaps too hard. Sit in that armchair and relax all you can. Now, don't make any effort. Just let your will gently slide into your mind and tell it you mustn't laugh. Repeat this after me. . . . The carpet isn't funny. . . . The goblet and tray isn't funny. . . . Nothing that he does is funny. . . . I will never laugh again."

He left her, went to his bedroom to rest. A couple of hours later when he returned to the living-room she was still there.

"Ooh! I must have had a nap!" she added: "It's all right now, Mr. Spengrave. I'll never laugh again."

The Lady Who Wouldn't Laugh became one of the most popular acts. It stayed in the bill for four years — and was only taken off when June contracted pneumonia. He could fairly easily have replaced her, but she had been loyal and efficient and regular, and he felt that as a decent employer he owed her some consideration.

As a decent employer, he went to see her at the nursing home when she was convalescent, bringing her the usual gift of grapes. In four years, with other members of the company, she had toured Europe and America with him; yet he had had hardly any personal conversation with her, knew nothing about her.

He exerted himself to draw her out, discovered that, when she forgot to be genteel, she was a simple, likeable person. He suspected that she had few friends and at his next visit asked her whether this were true.

"Oh, I don't know, Mr. Spengrave! I get on well enough with most people, though I do keep myself to myself. Of course, there are always men of the wrong sort, but they don't appeal to me. I'll own up I've got the idea that ordinary people think me a bit queer. It makes you feel lonely, sometimes, if you know what I mean."

Spengrave knew what she meant — knew it a hundred times better than she did. In those hours of self-revelation when he had painted his own portrait, he had found a formula for commercial success; but he had found nothing else.

At his next call at the nursing home he asked her to marry him.

"Ooh! Mr. Spengrave!" She was staggered. "Well, of course I will, if you're sure you want to!"

After a while she said: "It'll take a bit of getting used to. You see, I've always thought of you as not being like other men."

He caught his breath as if she had stabbed him.

"Ever since you were so kind to me that first time when I let you down by laughing, I've put you in a class apart. I thought you superior to all the men and women I've ever met. And I still think it. So, naturally, it makes me a bit shy of you."

"Oh, my darling!" He kissed her with love and overwhelming grati-

tude. "And I am shy of you, June — because you think that of me. We'll help each other."

So they did, for three years — with very different effects on their very different natures. June, who had been a conscientious stooge, became a conscientious wife, striving solemnly to serve him and to please him. She discovered that he liked her to look always as nice as possible, so she studied dress. When he did not require her presence she regarded her time as her own, and developed along her own lines. In a sense she loved him — did not suspect that, in no sense, was she in love with him.

In an undreamed affluence, dormant traits in her character became active. She began to preen herself as the wife of a wealthy celebrity, cultivated by High-ups, who were seeking neither money nor publicity nor introductions. Such people were outside her orbit, but at the local river-sailing club and the tennis club she was somebody.

She gathered a large circle of friends. Although she patronized them a little, they liked her. That she never laughed at their quips they took as her reminder that she was the wife of the world's greatest clown. One youngish man, Fred Periss, tall and dark, handsome as a stage Guardsman, was particularly attracted to her.

Spengrave for his part was aware of partial failure, for which he blamed himself with secret humiliation. In the essentials of their life together she obeyed him punctiliously as she had formerly obeyed a call to rehearsal. But there was a barrier he had never passed. She never actually called him "Mr. Spengrave," but he could not rid himself of the fear that she might absent-mindedly do so. Like a damp cloud the conviction settled on him that he was not regarded by his wife as other men were regarded by their wives.

He had not the leisure to go visiting with her. His appearances at her parties were perfunctory. He was glad for her sake that she had made so many friends, though he found them noisy and dull-witted.

One afternoon in the first week in August, when he was dozing in the drawing-room, he was startled by an unfamiliar sound. He sat bolt upright, fully awake. The sound came again, from the garden.

It was the sound of June laughing.

In his spine was an eerie tingling as a thought formed itself against his will.

"I've never heard her laugh — since that night she killed the act."

He ran into the garden, could not see her. He turned the corner by the laurel bushes and saw her in the arms of Fred Periss. She was not struggling.

"*Fred!* Oh, why did you have to do that!" she cried in distress.

"Why pretend? You didn't hate it, darling, did you!"

"That makes it all the worse. I shall have to tell Lucien now. It wasn't worth troubling him before."

Spengrave slipped back to his chair in the drawing-room and picked up a

book. Within a few minutes she came. She had smoothed her hair and shaken out her frock, where Periss had rumpled it.

"Lucien, Fred Periss kissed me just now. Not a party kiss — the real sort, I think it was. I expect it was partly my fault."

"We needn't lose our heads. Better ask him in here."

"He's gone. Are you angry with me?"

Spengrave was thinking. He himself could crush her up and kiss her. But he could not draw from her that lovely rippling laugh — full of fun and games. Other men, of course, could make their wives laugh like that.

"I'm not angry with you, June. It isn't the sort of thing one can be angry about. Are you in love with him?"

She meditated her answer, tried honestly to clear her thought, and failed.

"Ooh! I don't understand love."

She meant it, but it was obviously untrue. She would very soon discover that she did understand love. Perhaps, thought Spengrave, there was still time for him.

"Then let's forget it, dear."

"I'm so glad you aren't angry, Lucien. And I think I can forget it all right. I'll try hard to think of other things."

"Try thinking of me!" he said, rising nimbly from his chair.

Again came the delicious rippling sound that was her rediscovered laughter. Vibrant with happiness he put his arms round her. "You laugh because at last you're happy?" he asked.

"I laughed because you looked so funny, jumping out of that chair — like a jack-in-the-box."

It spoiled the kiss, ruined his moment. He was not disconsolate. There were kisses to come — "the real sort," if he could thrust himself into her imagination.

She said she would like to go on the river before dinner. He brought the punt alongside, called to her when he was ready, steadied the boat with one foot on the landing stage. He watched her approaching, watched her with reawakened desire — and again she laughed.

"Standing like that with that funny look on your face, you reminded me of something," she explained. "Can't think what it was."

"Somebody's pet poodle begging for its dinner?" he suggested.

"No, it wasn't that." She had taken his question seriously. "I wish I could remember."

In himself was a deep inner disturbance which he shrank from defining. Presently she was babbling about giving a cocktail party.

"When will it be, dear?"

"On the last Thursday of the month. It would be so nice if you could spare an hour or so. They would appreciate it so!"

He would give her anything, do anything for her, if only she would regard him as other men were regarded by their wives. And perhaps she would.

"Darling, I'll be there the whole time and I'll do everything I can to make your party a riproaring success." When she had finished exclaiming, he went on: "I always feel I'm a bit of a wet blanket at parties. I just haven't got the trick of sitting around and swapping backchat, and that sort of thing. How would they like it if I were to give them the lecture I gave at Oxford last year? We could get the props out on the lawn."

They would adore it, she assured him. She knew that, though much of it might be above their heads, they would be flattered by his condescension.

Over dinner she was companionable, more light hearted, more spirited than he had ever known her to be. She was expanding, he thought, opening like a rose in the sunshine of their new understanding. He held fast to that conception throughout the evening.

That night she laughed — she said — at his dressing gown. It was an ordinary silk dressing gown, by no means new, which she had often seen before. Uncertain of himself and her, he sat on the edge of her bed and talked of anything that came into his head — became aware that she was unconscious of any strain.

"There's plenty of time before the party, June. Would you like us to go away for a fortnight somewhere? We might pop over to Switzerland."

"Well, if it's for me I'm in no hurry to go away." She added: "I love it here."

"So do I!" He touched her hand, gripped it. "It's our home, yours and mine. Not a bad old place, is it? And it would be just fine if we happened to have a family. Wouldn't it, June?"

She did not answer. Her face was hard and drawn, and he feared lest she had read into his words a reproach that she had not yet borne him a child.

"June, darling!" He bent over her, touched her hair with his lips. "I only meant —"

From the back of her nostrils came the absurd noise made by a schoolboy trying not to laugh in class.

As he sprang away, she burst into open laughter. He stood at a distance from the bed, staring down at her. When she looked up at him, the laughter started afresh. He waited, standing very still, until she stopped from exhaustion.

"Perhaps you will tell me why you laugh at me, though I think I know."

"I couldn't help it!" she gasped. "You, perched on the side of the bed with that dressing gown, saying — all that! — you were so *funny!*" She spluttered with the aftermath of laughter.

He strode in silence to the door.

"Oh, Lucien, it's not fair to be offended and angry with me! You *are* funny — or you wouldn't be you — especially when you're saying something serious. You can't expect me to behave as if you were like other men."

"Yes. I thought that was why," he said, and left her room.

Her reasoning was slovenly, for she had forgotten that she had not

thought him funny in his personal life until today. The man who intended to be her lover had already awakened her to full womanhood — had enabled her to see that she was in very truth married to a clown.

He went downstairs to his study, which adjoined the gymnasium, poured himself a stiff brandy. Presently, rummaging in a cabinet, he took out the portrait of himself which he had painted long ago in his Bloomsbury studio.

"The best thing I've done!" The words echoed down the years. "And it tells an unbearable truth. It's cruel!"

But its cruelty was not as unbearable as the cruelty of that laughter which was as a flaming sword holding him from his human heritage — a mirror into which he must gaze and see himself "not like other men."

He turned again to the self-portrait, remembered his despair.

"Last time, I cashed on in my own misery. Can I do it a second time? Work. Thank heavens she didn't want to go for that holiday! I can work instead of thinking."

With nervous eagerness he grabbed a pencil and a folder. He flopped into his armchair and began to work up some notes he had made for a new scene — a change ring on the classic carpet act, introducing a girl stooge.

He drove up to London next day, put in a couple of hours desk work at the theatre, which he was re-opening in the second week in September. There was a letter from the mother of June's successor saying the girl had had measles, but expected to be well enough to rehearse in a fortnight.

A week later, June, passing by the open garden doors of the gymnasium, saw him leaning ill-temperedly against the wall.

"Do you want anything, Lucien?"

"Mabel is sick. I wanted to rehearse myself rather than her. Hangs me up."

"Well, what's wrong with me?" She came in from the garden. "What's the job?"

"Nothing you'd fancy, my dear. The girl gets rolled in the carpet instead of the clown."

"All right. Only, it'll ruin this dress." She slipped it off.

"The carpet will scratch your shoulders. Here!" He helped her into a dressing-gown — it happened to be the green silk dressing-gown.

"I shall split the seams," she warned. "I'm bigger than you."

The words made him feel as if he were a dwarf, which added a spur to rehearsal.

"When I unroll you, sit up and stare at me; hold the stare while I do my business. You'll want two coils of the carpet, or else you'll show. Better do it yourself, or I may hurt you. Lie down, your middle as near dead centre as you can. You can pull one coil over you. Then use all your weight to complete another coil."

For two hours she helped him uncomplainingly, while the idea came to her that it would be rather a lark if he would consent to doing the act at her

party, with herself as the stooge. She was a little anxious lest that lecture on the theory of the clown, which appealed to the dons of Oxford, might be above the heads of her friends. She at any rate, would give them a good laugh when she popped out of the carpet. She knew that the carpet was used in the lecture.

When she asked him, he showed no enthusiasm. But she pointed out how easily she could steal away while he was holding their attention.

"What about your frock, though? You'll be varnished up for the party, won't you?"

"I was thinking — I could nip up to my room and slip on the frock I used in the act. No one has worn it since I dropped out. It's still in the property wardrobe — if you'll bring it down for me tomorrow. It's velvet corduroy, and the carpet won't do it any harm — being red, it'll make a fine splash of color."

"I might keep you there two or three minutes. You could breathe all right, couldn't you?"

"Yes — it's a bit stuffy. And when I called out to you when you kept me waiting just now, you couldn't hear me. Anyway, I shan't mind."

"Hm! I must be careful not to suffocate Mabel. She'll have to lie in it for upwards of ten minutes."

When he was at the theatre the following morning, there was no dresser present. He himself collected the key from the caretaker, found the number of the list, and took the velvet corduroy frock from one of the fireproof cupboards and put it in June's suitcase.

"She has the mind of a child," he reflected as he drove home. Her child-mind labeled him a very clever man, strong, kind, good, rich, influential. But her adult woman's instinct thought him funny.

With the impetus given by the stage hands, the corpse of June Spengrave rolled clear of the carpet. When they had recovered from the momentary shock, the men correctly shut the gymnasium and mounted guard, while one rang the police.

The Inspector was shortly followed by the Chief Constable. He caused a telephone message, sympathetically worded, to be sent to the airfield at Edinburgh. By the time Spengrave arrived, after stopping at the mortuary in Reading to identify the body, the Chief had possessed himself of the main facts. It was assumed that June had died of asphyxia, though the later medical report established that the immediate cause of death was shock.

Spengrave's account of the incidents of the party did not differ in any essential detail from that already obtained from some of the guests.

"When you asked the men of the party to roll up the carpet and take it back to the gym, Mr. Spengrave, I gather that they all went at the job, and some of the women joined in. D'you think it possible that poor Mrs. Spengrave may have joined in the scramble, that she may have fallen down and been rolled up without any-

body noticing — in fact, just as the thing happens in the circus?"

"You ask if I think it possible. Theoretically, anything is possible. I think it very grossly improbable. There were at least six men rolling. If she fell flat on the carpet, the faces of at least three of them would have been within a few feet of her. They must have seen her."

"Then she must have been inside the first coil or two of the carpet when the men started to roll it?"

"Obviously!" agreed Spengrave.

"The doctor is already able to say that there are no signs of violence on the body. No one knocked her out and partly rolled her in the carpet. Therefore — a hostess suddenly slips away from her guests, rolls herself in the carpet — so that her guests may unconsciously assist her to commit suicide?"

Spengrave looked tired and indifferent, as if all this were none of his business.

"She was not happy with me, as I hinted to you yesterday. But she was not melancholic. The last person to think of suicide."

Spengrave, thought the Chief, was no humbug. He was not pretending to be grief-stricken. But he was being very wooden, showed no desire to help.

"Against the theory of her having rolled herself up," continued the Chief, "is the fact that she had had some stage experience under yourself. She was familiar with that carpet, knew how heavy it was, must have known she was doing a very dangerous thing."

Spengrave snapped his fingers excitedly.

"That's a glimmer in the dark!" he exclaimed. "She was familiar with that carpet, you said. Hold that thought, while I add something. That carpet was rolled up the wrong way — namely from right to left, standing with your back to the river. I noticed it, but did not want to ask the guests to unroll it and start again. Now are you guessing what I've guessed?"

This was what the Chief had been waiting for.

"She assumed it would be rolled up from the other end," said the Chief, "and that therefore *she* would be *unrolled*." As Spengrave nodded encouragingly: "But why — when there was no need to be there at all?"

"To give her guests a laugh — and to guy my lecture. She had," he added, "the mind of a child."

Thus Spengrave, for all his subtlety, had suggested a cause of death other than murder — always an unwise course when there is any chance of murder being suspected.

At the inquest Spengrave gave substantially the same answers as he had given to the Chief. The Chief Constable did not waste time studying him while he was giving evidence. Actors never betray themselves with involuntary movements of body, hands, or face. The jury returned a verdict of death by misadventure. The Chief, without any publicity, consulted Scotland Yard.

Chief Inspector Karslake was very dubious.

"If it's murder at all, where is the overt act?" he asked. "The guests did the actual killing. And Spengrave didn't even incite them to it."

"If you were to induce a drunkard to lie down on a railway track and then watched him being killed, I could hang you, Mr. Karslake, without proving that you had incited the engine driver," said the Chief Constable.

"But the lady wasn't drunk," objected Karslake. "And Spengrave didn't —"

"Yes, he did. Look here!" The Chief spread out a chart of the garden, with all distances noted in feet and inches. "The woman was last seen at six thirty-five, when Spengrave finished his demonstration with the carpet. Between six forty and about six forty-seven, the guests were all — *here* — their eyes glued to Spengrave, who was lecturing about the double-headed dog." He carried his pencil upwards and to the right. "Spengrave alone can see the carpet — he has a clear view. He would have seen his wife — must have seen her — go to that carpet."

"You've certainly got something there," admitted Karslake.

"Spengrave told them he doubted whether he had enough room on the lower lawn for the tray-and-goblet business. One of the men — Periss — asked him if they should roll up the carpet at once and take it back to the gym. Spengrave said, 'Yes, please.' That's incitement." The Chief went on: "As Spengrave is standing pat, it won't matter if he knows we're on his track. He thinks that, whatever we suspect, we can't get any evidence."

"So do I!" said Karslake gloomily. "But we'll try."

Karslake tried so hard that he came within an ace of committing homicide himself. He had his junior rolled in Spengrave's carpet, observed that at the fourth coiling the weight of the carpet bore down the fringes so that air was excluded. The unfortunate junior had observed the same phenomenon some minutes before Karslake.

"That Chief Constable was simply passing the buck!" said Karslake after a month of fruitless investigation. "How can we prove that Spengrave induced her to get into the carpet, and that he wasn't looking at his notes or something when she did it? I'm sick of the sight of those dossiers. Shove 'em along to the Department of Dead Ends and forget 'em!"

Spengrave sold his house by the river, warehoused his expensive furniture, and resumed residence in the suite at the top of the theatre. The act of the girl in the carpet was never put on.

The Department of Dead Ends, by its nature, could not function until a new light was thrown on a case by some tangential occurrence, some chance echo, even if it were only a chance remark. When this happened and a prosecution followed, Chief Inspector Karslake always called it Detective Inspector Rason's "luck."

"I've got a niece too," protested Karslake. "And I hope I'm at least as good an uncle as you are. But my niece has never yet happened to babble out the dope on a case that's been dead meat for over a year. So I will say it's luck."

This, in a police car shortly before mid-day in October 1937 — some fourteen months after the death of June Spengrave. They labored the matter of Rason's niece because they were both secretly ill at ease. For they were on their way to Spengrave's theatre, to ask him some questions they were confident he could not answer — which is a strange state of mind for a detective. But Spengrave was a distinguished man, whom nearly everybody could not help liking.

"She didn't give me any dope — she gave me backchat," retorted Rason. "I told her she didn't need a new frock because she had a lovely one already. And she said if she went to a garden party in August in her corduroy velvet, people would be laughing over it when she was an old woman. I happened to remember the words 'corduroy velvet' in the dossier — and a garden party too! I've put in more than two months' work on that bit o' corduroy velvet, and you call it luck — *sir!*"

"You don't have to 'sir' me till we get back," chuckled Karslake. "This is your case, my boy, and welcome!"

The car stopped at the theatre. Rason thrust his card through the window of the box office. In due course an attendant presented himself.

"Mr. Spengrave is sorry he will have to keep you waiting for a few minutes. Will you follow me, please?"

They were led through unsuspected corridors to the back of the stage and thence, up a single flight of stairs, to Spengrave's dressing-room. It was a very large room with more than the usual number of mirrors. Above the mirrors was a frieze, depicting the Clown throughout the ages. In one wide corner was a writing table. There were two divans. The detectives took one each.

"Haven't had much to do with the stage!" remarked Karslake. "What's the good of putting all those telephones over the wash basin? — to say nothing of there being a bath-room behind this curtain."

"They use the dressing-room as an office and a parlor as well." Rason's eye traveled along the frieze, to the court jester, to the hunchback pelted by the mediaeval audience, to the buffoon-god of Greek comedy, to the Sacaea of ancient Babylon where the King of the Revels, still wearing his mock crown, is sacrificed to the goddess Ishtar.

"Good Lord, they've all got Spengrave's face!" ejaculated Rason. He caught Karslake's eye and added defiantly: "I'm going to put the cards on the table with this bloke."

For some minutes they sat in silence. Then the door opened. Both men gasped. Both were momentarily as confused as schoolboys.

"I'm sorry I had to keep you waiting, gentlemen."

Spengrave was in make-up. They stared at the gray-white, idiot face of the Clown, the splash of carmine, harsh and hideous at close quarters, the bald wig, the conical cap.

"Perhaps we — perhaps you would rather we waited while you change, Mr. Spengrave?" faltered Rason.

"Quite unnecessary! You don't imagine that I'm going to make jokes and fall over carpets." The voice coming out of that preposterous face was both irritable and authoritative. "I've just been having stills taken of a new act. Sit down, please. What can I do for you?"

"We've come on a very serious matter, Mr. Spengrave. We have to put to you certain questions arising out of your wife's death. If you refuse to answer, or if your answers are unsatisfactory, we shall have to ask you to come along with us."

As Spengrave swung a swivel chair from his dressing-table the mirrors caught him in cross-reflection, so that Rason was compelled to contemplate the Clown face multiplied to infinity, staring into his.

"Go ahead, Inspector."

"Can you describe the dress your wife was wearing at that party?"

"No. I've no eye for women's dress and no memory."

"That's unusual in one of your profession, especially as you yourself were once a pictorial artist." Rason was opening an attaché case. He took out a mill board, on which was a painting of a woman's dress of green crepe.

"Is this the dress she was wearing?"

"It may have been," he said. "I think it is."

"Quite right. It is. Five of the women who were your guests that day have identified it." Rason added: "I obtained a judge's order to examine your furniture at the repository. *That dress was in the wardrobe of the deceased!* By the way, both the men and women guests remarked that they had not been allowed to see the poor lady after death."

"That was nothing to do with me — the local police were in charge," rasped Spengrave. "In any case it was unnecessary. I identified the body."

"Yes, of course. After you had flown down from Edinburgh. The major examination had not then taken place. The body was almost exactly as it had been found in the gymnasium." Rason leaned forward and tapped the picture of the green crepe dress. "Did you see that dress on the dead body of your wife?"

"I can't remember."

"You can't remember!" echoed Rason. "Do you mean that you may or may not have seen that dress on the body?" As Spengrave assented, Rason produced a police photograph of the corpse taken in the gymnasium.

"That is the dress you saw in the mortuary. You can't see the color, but the line of that dress is quite different. And here it is in color."

Rason thrust at him a second mill board, a little crumpled and faded, on which was a painting of a red dress in velvet corduroy.

"Do you recognize that red velvet

corduroy dress, Mr. Spengrave?"

"No," snapped Spengrave. "I've told you I've no memory for women's dress."

"But you've a memory for your own work, haven't you? You designed that dress yourself. You painted the picture you have in your hand. It's the dress she wore in her act with you — The Lady Who Wouldn't Laugh."

"By Jove, you're right!" exclaimed Spengrave, as if surprised.

"On August 18th last year," continued Rason, "you signed the book, in the keeping of your caretaker, for the key of the robe-room, or whatever you call it. You entered the robe-room with a suitcase. On August 21st, your chief dresser sent you a chit reporting that that dress was missing. You wrote on the chit 'O.K.' and initialed it. Why did your wife want that property dress, Mr. Spengrave?"

"I now remember the incidents you describe." Spengrave spoke in the same authoritative, irritable voice. "But I don't remember why my wife wanted that dress."

"Let me suggest why you wanted her to have it, and you tell me if I'm wrong," pressed Rason. "You created an act in which a girl is rolled in that carpet of yours. You asked your wife to play the girl and said you'd put on the act for the party. You fixed it so that she could slip into that carpet without anyone seeing her but you. And you fixed it so that someone should suggest rolling that carpet up. When Mr. Periss offered to do it you said, 'Yes, please,' thereby procuring the death of your wife. And that means murder."

"You asked me to tell you if you were wrong," chuckled Spengrave. "You are."

"Maybe I've slipped up on a few details," said Rason. "But do you deny that you created an act in which a girl is rolled up —"

"I deny it absolutely," thundered Spengrave. "It would be an utterly futile act."

"At the repository I found nothing in your desk — it was practically empty," said Rason. "But under the cushion of the armchair that used to be in your study I found a manuscript in your handwriting. Here's a typed copy. I don't altogether understand stage directions. But there's one bit where it says: 'Clown kicks coil of carpet (laugh). Clown struggles with carpet. Fails. Walks away (laugh). Returns. Unrolls carpet. Girl sits up —' "

"All right!" Spengrave stood up. The figure of the clown facing destruction was not even tragic, only bizarre. "It will take me twenty minutes to change. Do you mind waiting in the foyer?"

"Sorry, Mr. Spengrave." Again Rason's eye traveled along the frieze — to the altar of Ishtar, where the Clown is slain. "We shall have to stay with you."

But, as is well known, Spengrave succeeded in shooting himself while he was changing, with the gun which he kept in a drawer for precisely that contingency.

# YEGGS FLORENTINE

*by GUY GILPATRIC*

MR. AND MRS. WELLS came out of the Grand Hotel and paused on the sidewalk looking around. "Nope, no taxi," said Mr. Wells to the doorman. "Just going for a stroll to look the town over. Which way's the Ponte Vecchio?"

They crossed the square and walked along the Lungarno Torrigiani, which runs beside the Arno. "Gosh, that's a muddy river," observed Mr. Wells. "I wonder what kind of fish those soldiers are trying to catch? Sunfish, I bet. Oh, yes, look, Mama, there's the Ponte Vecchio there. Looks just like the pictures, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wells, who hadn't been listening. "I wish we'd had the car come 'round. I know we'll get lost."

"Yes? Well, I notice every time we roll up to any place in that Isotta, zip go the prices. The chauffeur gives the storekeepers a high-sign and gets maybe a twenty per cent rake-off on everything we buy."

"Well," said Mrs. Wells, doubtfully, "I've got an idea my feet are going to hurt. Oh, look here, Tom — here's a jeweler here."

"Sure," said Mr. Wells. "But Faustino says they're all yeggs on this side of the river, and he ought to know! We'll go down to the bridge, cross over, and . . ."

"Wait a minute, Tom; do wait a minute. Now, look, Tom, there's a nice one there — the one with the red stones, sort of."

"Sure, he's probably got a gross of them, all junk. Oh, look, Bella, see the way they've got shops built right on the bridge. Say, now, that's interesting, isn't it? I mean, it's quaint, now, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wells. "My, these cobbles are terrible! Oh, why, look, Tom, those shops look like jewelry shops. Look, Tom, they *are* jewelry shops, every one of them!"

"Unh-huh," agreed Mr. Wells. "All gyp jewelry shops. Lot of junk made up for the tourists, like Atlantic City. — Wonder what that statue is. . . . Oh, why, it's Benvenuto Cellini! Sure, don't you remember in the guidebook, Bella? He had his shop out here on the bridge."

When they had crossed the bridge, they came to a large shop the window of which was filled with jewelry. "There!" exclaimed Mrs. Wells, halting resolutely and pointing at the fifth necklace from the left. "There's what I want, Tom, yes, just exactly! See, it's the sardonyx one. It's exactly . . ."

"S-h-h! Wait a minute, wait a minute!" muttered Mr. Wells out of the corner of his mouth. "Don't go getting all excited! Don't you see that man in there piping us off and getting

set to gyp us? Keep on walking past and . . ."

"Oh, you make me sick!" declared Mrs. Wells. "I'm going in anyway."

The Italian took the necklace out of the window and laid it on the counter. "Oh, yess!" he said. "Ees beootifoola teeng, I guarantee ees ver' old. I guarantee ees make five-a honedred years ago, een da quattrocento."

"Hunh!" grunted Mr. Wells, picking it up as Mrs. Wells reached for it. "It looks pretty new to me. What are you asking for it?"

"Seex-a tosanda lira — all handa carve. Ver' chip, sir!"

"Six thousand's what you're asking, but what will you *take?*" snorted Mr. Wells.

"Seex-a tosanda lira ees da price, sir. Ees ver' chip! See, ees beootifoola stone, beooti . . ."

"Oh, shucks, talk like a business man!" urged Mr. Wells. "I s'pose you're used to a lot of Americans who . . ."

The Italian bowed stiffly. "I am sorry," he said. "Our price-a ees feex, we are estableesha house of feexa price."

"Horse feathers!" declared Mr. Wells. "Come on, Mama, I told you this bird was a yegg. Now, down here in the little side streets . . ."

"Now, you shut up, Tom Wells!" said Mrs. Wells, blushing with embarrassment. "Six thousand wasn't much for that and you know it."

"Now, Bella, Bella, please!" begged Mr. Wells. "Just you leave this to me. I tell you all these birds on the main streets are gyps. Why, if that thing had been a genuine antique we couldn't have bought it for ten thousand lira."

"Well, it was exactly what I wanted. I'm going to remember that address — Via Benfratelli, Number 61."

"Look!" exclaimed Mr. Wells. "Here's a quaint little street. This is the kind of a place to find bargains. Let's go down here."

"Why, Tom, it's only an alley. Phew, smell it? And those cobbles. . . ."

"Oh, now, Ma, say, for goodness' sake, what do you expect, Michigan Boulevard?"

They walked along an alley which twisted, turned, and finally came to a blind end. As they were about to go back, Mr. Wells peered into a doorway and saw an old man bending over a workbench on which were several pieces of jewelry.

"See there, Bella, look inside there!" he exclaimed triumphantly. "Come on!"

As they entered, the old man arose, bowed, and offered Mrs. Wells his chair.

"Good morning, lady and gentleman," be beamed. "I speak-a good English."

"Fine!" said Mr. Wells, glancing around the dark little shop and nodding at Mrs. Wells. "We were looking for a necklace, something kind of heavy gold — real antique of course — with sort of square sardonyx stones in it."

"Ah, yes?" said the old man, wrinkling his forehead. "Ah, I do not know eef I have still such piece . . . pardon, please, I go see." He hobbled into the gloom in the rear of the shop and disappeared behind a curtain.

"Now!" whispered Mr. Wells. "This is the kind of a place to snag off bargains! There's no flash fronts or frock coats about this place. I told you we'd find something if . . ."

"Pardon," said the Italian. "Here ees someteeng. . . ."

"Ah-ha! There!" exclaimed Mr. Wells. "Look that one over, Bella!"

"Oh, why, it's just like the other one!"

"Hunh — it's just like the other one, but, boy, what a difference! You can tell that *this* one wasn't made day before yesterday!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wells, trying it around her neck.

"Fine-a antique!" declared the old man, proudly. "I sell-a only da fine-a antique."

"Yes," repeated Mrs. Wells. "How much is . . ."

"What are you asking for it, brother?" broke in Mr. Wells. "I mean, what'll you take, no fooling?"

Once more the Italian wrinkled his forehead. "For thees lady, I maka special price," he said. "Ten tosanda lira — ver' chip!"

Mr. Wells winked at him and poked him in the ribs. "Yes, yes, go on — I'm listening!" he chuckled.

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Ah-ha!" he laughed. "I see-a thees gentleman ees smart-a man. Nine-a tosanda five honedred?"

"I heard you the first time. Nine thousand!" said Mr. Wells, slapping him on the back and reaching for his wallet. "How about it?"

"Ah," sighed the old man, shaking his head but smiling at Mrs. Wells. "Your gentleman ees ver' smart-a man! But for you, lady, I say yes. I sell eet for nine-tosanda lira."

"At-a-boy!" approved Mr. Wells. "Here's your money, and now we're all happy. Put it on and wear it home, Bella. Guess it was worth the walk and the sore feet, hey?"

"You walk-a far?" inquired the Italian sympathetically. "You like-a taxi for hotel, lady?"

"Oh, could you get one?" asked Mrs. Wells, looking out at the dismal alley.

"Yes. Please come-a thees way." He led them to the rear of the room, drew aside the curtain, and ushered them into a bright and spacious and familiar jewelry store. "Here ees da fronta my shop," he explained proudly. "Via Benfratelli, Number 61."

*We are leafing through a copy of "The American Magazine" dated May 1922. The magazine is chock-full of advertisements — full pages, half pages, and assorted "wee" ones. And it is interesting to note the names of the commercial products advertised nearly twenty-six years ago. We are told the virtues of Life Savers, Westclox, Ivory Soap, Campbell's Soup, Robt. Burns Cigar, Dodge automobile, Palmolive Shaving Cream, Goodyear Tires, Remington Portable Typewriter, Squibb, Elgin Watches, Grape-Nuts, Western Electric, Edgeworth Tobacco, Sheetrock, Venus Pencils, Rand McNally Maps, Florsheim Shoes, Fuller Brushes, Westinghouse, Ivor Johnson Bicycles, Carter's Ink, Colt's Fire Arms, Fleischmann's Yeast, Odo-ro-no, Listerine, "Standard" Plumbing Fixtures, Swift's Premium Hams and Bacon, Kodak, and many, many more including the perennial sets of Mark Twain, James Whitcomb Riley, and Conan Doyle.*

*After twenty-six years these products are more famous, more flourishing than ever. Indeed, from an advertising standpoint, this copy of "The American Magazine" might well have been published today. But what about the other contents of the magazine? The fiction, for example? Has that stood the test of time as ruggedly as the commercial trademarks? Well, here's a story from "The American Magazine" of May 1922. Read it and judge for yourself. In our opinion Frederick Irving Anderson's "The Half-Way House" is as undated as it was a quarter of a century ago. It too might have been first published today.*

# THE HALF-WAY HOUSE

*by FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON*

SHORTLY after the old chimney clock struck nine, Grinder, the jaunty dog combing burrs out of his stump tail by the fire, suddenly lifted his head and looked keenly at his master, Belden, the bridge builder, and his good friend, Armiston. The pair were poring over chess.

The two men, in rough homespun and with neglected beards, were wholly unconscious of the sudden alert pose of the dog. Inside, only the muffled ticking of the old clock and the faint rustling of the fire on the hearth disturbed the silence.

Grinder quietly arose, on stiff pins. Something was on the wind. Something was coming up the hill. Grinder moved stiffly to his master's side and halted, expectant, listening. Grinder nudged his master's wrist with his shoe-box nose, and Belden absently stroked the great dog's head. It was incomprehensible to Grinder that these

two precious foolish humans should sit here dreaming.

Belden, who was to build a bridge in the Andes, had come up here to his abandoned ancestral hulk, to be alone to think. Oliver Armiston, extinct author, now living on the royalties of a past career in fiction crime, had invited himself, saying he would be cook and bottle-washer.

If this had been the old days, there would have been excitement enough in this house by now. The thorough-brace coach, tugging up the steep grade, would announce itself with a triumphant blast of the horn. The old tire-iron still hanging from its stout gallows in the front yard, under the battered sign of the Three Crows, would moan its rhythmic lament, summoning 'ostler and maidservant. The coach and four, bound up from Hartford for Albany, would pull up at the gate on haunches; and the ladies would flutter in and gentlemen would thump pewter mugs on the cherry bar and drink to news, from north and south, which met here. But that was long, long ago. The sign, with its three crows dilapidated, still creaked on its weathered hinges; but mine host was gone, and even the road had stopped coming up that hill — or was little more than a torrent-gashed gully now.

"Queen check," said Belden.

Grinder moved to the door and putting his muzzle to the crack, he whined. Belden rose to let the dog out. It was a nasty night; the drizzle was beginning to freeze as it fell.

Belden peered out.

"Isn't that a motor?" he said, puzzled. There was the sound as of huge wings beating the air. As he stared at a point in the dark, two ghostly headlights appeared. The car came on slowly, feeling its way. It reached his gate, passed it.

"Hello! Hello!" cried Belden, and the dog barked. But the car continued on. Belden ran to the tire-iron, and seizing the chained sledge, hanging there since the beginning of time, struck it a blow, and the moaning thing responded with eerie clamor. The car stopped, and slowly backed to the gate.

"Hello, the house!" cried a voice; and then, "Where does this road lead?"

"Nowhere," shouted Belden. "This is the end of it. You should have followed the river. How did you climb that hill?"

"Heaven knows!" responded the voice from the car. A searchlight picked up, in its luminous spray, Belden and the dog standing under the old gallows; then, as if endowed with a curiosity of its own, the luminous spray investigated the old gallows tree, climbed it, and came to rest on the battered sign of the Three Crows.

"Oh, a road-house!" the unseen driver exclaimed. "That's better!"

"This isn't a road-house. There are no accommodations here," put in Belden.

"It isn't? You're displaying a sign, aren't you?" The voice in the dark became suddenly aggressive.

"That sign has been there for a

hundred and fifty years," said Belden.

"Read Blackstone," retorted the voice. "He settled the matter of signs — just about the time you hung that one. I believe his dictum still stands as good law. In any event, I am not going down that hill till daylight."

"I will not go another step!" announced a woman behind the curtains. Belden fairly cringed. He must make the best of it. Oliver came up with the lantern.

"They take this for a road-house," chuckled Belden in his ear. "Let them dream on."

Going on ahead with the lantern, he piloted the car down the overgrown drive to the barn. Two vague figures in furs got down.

"You'll find two bags in the rumble," said the man.

"I'll take one. You take the other," said Belden, smiling to himself.

He set down the bag in the kitchen and went out to get fresh wood. When he returned the man was drawing off his gloves in front of the fire. The woman was caressing the jaunty Grinder, cheek to cheek. Laughing, she stood up and let her furs slip from her shoulders, revealing a modish outline. Her hair, prematurely white, sparkled with tiny facets of rain; her face, as round and smooth as a child's, showed high color that suited admirably her vivacity. She held off the playful dog long enough to take stock of the room.

"Lovely!" she cried; and she clapped her little hands ecstatically. In the flickering light from the fire and the candles, with their delicate scent of bayberries, the room and its antiquated furnishings showed mellow and inviting. In her tour she came to the cherry bar.

"Is this the register?" she asked gayly, discovering an old book chained to the bar. "Are we to sign our names?"

"So the law prescribes, madam," said Belden, opening the book at the last blank page. He took a quill pen from a drawer. She laughed, delighted, as he passed it to her.

"Who was the last one to register?" She read: " 'Jonathan Croyden, Gent., his lady; and two servants, one free. Thursday, fifth month, seventeenth day, eighteen fifty-four.' " She drew a long breath. "Eighteen fifty-four!" she repeated. "And I come next!" Then, with sparkling eyes, she wrote, in a prim hand, trying to match the chirography of the remote Jonathan Croyden, Gent.

"Business has been quiet of late years," said Belden drolly. This to the man, who was examining the page on which the lady had written. She seized him by the lapels and turned him around.

"Isn't it romantic! Our coming here — out of a night like this!" To Belden: "I wonder — how did Jonathan Croyden, Gent., come, with his lady, and his two servants, one free?"

"In the good coach, Lightning Express, madam."

"Yes! In their coach and four!" she said. "And we — in our coach, and — what is it, Angus, — forty?"

"Eighty, I believe," said the man.

She burst out, dramatically:

"'Twas a wild night. Only knaves were abroad, on the high road!" Smiles played about her lips. "The landlord was a sur-rly fellow. He would turn us away! But . . . we said —" and her dancing eyes were turned upon the man beside her — " 'Sirr-ah, why dost thou display a sign? Dost thou not know that Blackstone — Blackstone — hath said that whosoe'er displays a sign obligates himself to provide food and lodging, for whomsoe'er may apply?'"

"I'm afraid I did labor under a slight misapprehension," said the man mildly.

"My fathers kept open house here for a hundred years," said Belden. "I could do no less, on such a night. Have you eaten?"

"Oh, yes," replied the man comfortably. Then, for the first time, he noticed the set game of chess, and he moved over to it and sat down.

"Ah, Philidor, eh?" he said musingly. "Rather archaic, isn't it?"

"We're trying it out."

"Proceed," said the man. "I'm interested, really."

"And might I look about?" asked the lady.

"Just where are we?" demanded the man abruptly.

"Don't tell us," she interjected, placing a hand over his lips. "We don't want to know."

The three men lapsed into the silence of chess. The woman's little French heels beat a tattoo on the hard maple floor, as she moved from one object of adoration to another. The quiet became so profound that the three men started nervously when she asked:

"Might I look up-stairs?"

"But, my dear!" the man protested.

"Let me give you a candle," said Belden.

When she came down again, the game was finished; the three men chatted idly in front of the fire with the easy fellowship and anonymity of a club car or a smoking-room.

"Is there a ghost?" the woman asked, dropping down beside Grinder.

"I believe there is — a horse."

The pair exclaimed in unison:

"A horse?" "

"Yes — a horse."

"But how, a horse? Ghosts are the residue of souls. A horse has no soul."

"I don't know anything about that," said Belden. "It comes to the front lawn, to graze, nights. It stamps. It has a dead man tied to its heels."

A loose shutter banged violently, and they started, then laughed.

"It's a bit of history of our family we don't usually relate," explained Belden. "This house, and these lands — so the story runs — were won in a game of cards, with the aid of a mirror, from some poor drunken devil, by one of my distinguished progenitors — two of them, in fact; it was the wife, I believe, who held the mirror."

"Didn't the victim revenge himself?" she said in an awed tone.

"Yes. He stole a horse from the stables — one of his own horses he had lost at play — Oh, he had lost every-

thing! He tied himself fast to its heels, and blew out his brains — and the horse galloped home. . . . They heard it stamping, all night. In the morning, they found him."

"I see." She was smoothing Grinder's head. "Angus," she said, softly.

"Yes, my dear."

"This is the place."

"Oh, my dear — Please!"

"It is!" she persisted, holding up Grinder's head and gazing into the dog's eyes. "I knew it, the instant I came into the room."

"My dear, I beg of you. We have thrown ourselves on the mercy of these two gentlemen; and I am sure they have put a very good face on it." He turned to Belden as one asking indulgence for a wayward child. "Madam," he said, with somewhat ironical emphasis, "is a trifle inclined to abruptness. If she sees a thing that pleases her, there is no intermediate step between liking and possession. Evidently, she has taken a fancy to your ancestral hall, sir. I warn you."

"I have never seen another room like it," she murmured. "It has been in your family all this time?"

"Since 1789 — since the lady manipulated the mirror." Belden was watching her narrowly.

"And these things?"

"They came gradually. Nothing in the last seventy years. You see, the road went away, and left our front door hanging over space."

"I'll buy it — just as it is." Her eyes were aflame.

"I must protest!" ejaculated the man, rising, and showing his irritation.

"I want nothing disturbed," she went on, "not even the ashes on the hearth."

"And the ghost?" Belden threw in.

"Oh, I insist on the ghost!"

"Did you look in the pink room? The one over in that corner?" asked Belden, pointing at the ceiling.

"The one with the great rope bed?"

"Yes. That's something else we don't usually talk about in the family. It may chill your enthusiasm. People don't sleep there. Several have tried. They woke up dead in the morning."

"Angus! Angus!" she cried ecstatically. She jumped up and threw her arms about his neck, though in his pettish mood he tried to hold her off. "Think of it! It's all here! A ghost horse — that stamps! And a lethal chamber! And *this* room! It is all mine! I knew it, the moment I entered." She turned to Belden. "What is your price? I want it now — instantly!"

The man's face twisted into a scowl.

"This promises to be an unpleasant sequel to a rare evening," he said shortly. "I don't know your name, sir; nor yours, sir," turning to Oliver. "You haven't asked mine. I don't know where I am. Strange as it sounds, I could not tell at this moment if this is New York, Massachusetts, or Connecticut. All I know is that, after being unnecessarily rude, I am the guest of a most gracious host." He turned to the woman. "And now you propose to take the roof from over his head," he said, with ill-concealed chagrin.

She laughed lightly.

"You don't know where you are? What better could you wish?" she said.

There was a moment of tension. Oliver glanced curiously at Belden.

"You are really willing to let her have it?" asked the man. "Forgive me . . . it seems like sacrilege."

"On the contrary, I'd be glad to be rid of it. It's too full of unholy memories. Its actual value is small. There are four hundred acres of land — abandoned. Here is the house, as you see it — abandoned, too. There is no way to get here. You came up the hill tonight, sir, with fool's luck. On a second try, you would surely break your neck. You see the appraisal is largely fantastic. These . . . things —" Belden said, indicating the relics of antiquity crowding about as if straining their ears to catch what was afoot. "For another, they might have sentimental attachment. Not for me! I never liked the place. . . . There *is* something, upstairs — in that pink room. I don't know what. But it's there! I warn you."

The woman drew a deep breath.

"Ten thousand, cash?"

"Too much — it will cost you that to build a road."

"That is satisfactory to me," said the man shortly.

"Ha!" she cried, as she fell on her knees on the hearth rug and hugged the compliant Grinder. Belden rose and went to the escritoire. He wrote, reading aloud as his pen moved:

"'For one dollar paid, I grant option of sale of the land known as the Belden Half-Way House and Farm, situated in the town of —'"

"Please! No!" interrupted the woman imperiously, in high-pitched tones. "We don't wish to know *where* it is situated."

"'In the town, county and state, of blank,'" rumbled on Belden, "'— to —'" He turned. "To whom? I can't sell a place at Nowhere to Nobody."

The woman questioned the man with her eyes. There was a slight pause. Belden abruptly stepped to the register and read aloud what she had written:

"'Agnes Witcherly, lady; and her Gent. Both free.'"

"Grant it to Agnes," she said; and Belden returned to the desk.

"'To Agnes Witcherly, of the city and state of —' Another blank?" She nodded quickly. "'Blank, together with the contents of the dwelling, barns, outbuildings, including the ashes on the hearth. And it is agreed, in further consideration, that the said Agnes Witcherly, pay to the Newsboys' Home of New York City the sum of Ten Thousand Dollars — as from an anonymous donor — within thirty days from date. Signed, Webster Belden.'"

"'Webster Belden'?" said the man, turning slightly in his chair.

"'Webster Belden,'" repeated Belden. "Witness, Oliver, like a good fellow. You sign, too, madam. Thank you. Would you like to see it, sir?"

The man folded the paper, put it on the mantelshelf, produced a dollar bill, and handed it to Belden. There was a

moment of embarrassed silence. It was astonishing how the atmosphere had changed. The man shivered; he threw some more wood on the fire. With an effort at levity he said, "I suppose I may, now. It's mine. Or, at least, hers."

The woman, singing, mounted the stairs, holding a candle high above her head. They could hear her rummaging around up there. She came down presently carrying two bags, which she let fall to the floor. She went to the hall and returned with a fur coat.

"Is this your coat, sir?" she asked sweetly of Belden.

"Yes, madam."

"And might I help you on with it?"

"My dear! My dear! This is carrying things with too high a hand!" broke in the man.

"You understand, don't you?" She turned to Belden.

"Perfectly," he replied, taking the coat from her. She went again to the rack, and this time brought back Oliver's coat.

"I don't know where your caps are. I packed your bags — just the things in your rooms. That was all, wasn't it?"

"But — you can't turn them out, like this!"

"It's my house! I own it!" she replied.

She opened the door. "The moon has come out again. It's freezing. I think you will find the walking good, sir. Thank you." An icy blast swept in, tossing the ashes into fantastic eddies. Grinder stood waiting, eager. The two men stepped across the threshold.

"A boy from the village will be up early in the morning to clean out the furnace and build a fire," said Belden.

As the door closed on them softly, Belden, turning up his collar, remarked to Oliver: "What an astonishingly coldblooded woman!"

It was four days later.

"Hello! I thought you were off for Antofogasta," exclaimed Armiston, as the bridge builder entered his study. "No; I'm not busy," said Oliver, quickly, as Belden looked inquiringly at Armiston's visitor. The visitor shifted uneasily. It was Parr, deputy of police. Belden drew up a chair. "What's the trouble?" asked Oliver.

"Money," growled Belden. With a childlike smile he added, "Could you let me have a couple of millions?"

"As bad as that?"

"Worse. Did you notice the market this morning?"

"My dear fellow!" said Oliver in gentle reproof. "I invest. I don't gamble. I only notice the market afternoons."

"It sagged again," said Belden glumly. "Hit a whale, or something. Nobody seems to know just what. Probably somebody's got a toothache. I'm building a bridge, a railroad, a power plant. I need money. 'They' said, 'Wait — market's soft.' I can't wait. I told them so. 'They,'" muttered the engineer, referring to some remote hierarchy of money, "'They'

said, 'Go down and see Winchester.'" Armiston and Parr pricked up their ears. They exchanged a glance.

"Winchester is 'Light-and-Power,'" explained Belden. "You may not know it, but every time you turn on a light, you do it by royal warrant from a man named Winchester."

"Did you see him?" demanded Parr.

"I went there, like a fool," said Belden. "Nobody home."

"What did they tell you?"

"Oh, he's having a conference in Kalamazoo — or Kamchatka. You know what satisfaction you can get out of a frozen-faced clerk. The Chileans have got a time-limit on me. I've got to have money! I've got to find Winchester."

"So have I," remarked the deputy of police blandly.

"Eh?" ejaculated the bridge builder. Armiston chuckled.

"I don't believe in using coincidence in my stories," said Oliver. "But occasionally in real life it is necessary. Eh, Parr?" He fixed a quizzical look on the old man-hunter. "It seems that several gentlemen, whom we may designate generically as 'They'" — he shot a look at Belden — "waited on Mr. Parr last night. They had a 'hush' job for him. They explained that a certain mogul of the Street, at a critical moment, had casually tossed everything he owned over his left shoulder, including a wife and family at Coronado, and stepped off the earth — with a left-handed lady."

"Winchester?" exploded Belden. Oliver nodded.

"'They' want him back. That's Parr's job. Not to save his mortal soul. 'They' don't give two whoops for that. But to save themselves."

Belden cursed softly under his breath. That his enterprise, involving thousands of labor, and millions of dollars, must wait on the mad hour of one weak human being seemed too ironical for credence.

"Would you know him if you saw him?" asked Parr. Belden shook his head and Parr produced a photograph from his pocket.

"Good God!" roared Belden and Oliver, in unison, both jumping up.

"You do know him?" cried Parr.

"Know him!" bellowed the engineer, galvanized into action. "Know him? Didn't he let his woman kick me out of my own house four nights ago?" He seized his hat and stick. "He'll know me, before I get through with him."

There was a dog howling. They had just crested the hill.

"Isn't that Grinder?" This from Armiston, in sharp-drawn exclamation.

Belden and Armiston started forward at a sharp run. Parr caught up at the turn of the road.

"It *is* Grinder. Under that window," said Oliver, and they hurried on.

On the kitchen porch, half covered with drifted snow, was a pile of things, supplies left by the boy from the store. The boy had stuck a note in the crack of the kitchen door. It read:

DERE SIR. The eggs and milk are in the potato bin. I built a fire. I saw a rat. I set the trap.

"Made their get-away, eh?" remarked the sardonic Parr.

Belden threw open the barn door. The car had not been moved. He looked up at the chimneys; they were cold.

He and Oliver put their shoulders to the stout old door. Parr added his weight to the task, and the door fell with a crash.

The room was as they had left it. Her mink coat and toque and a purple veil lay on an ottoman; the chess book, leaves open, rested on its stool before the fireplace. The fire was dead, its ashes stone cold. With a curious constriction of the throat Belden started for the stairs, his companions shuffling at his heels. The pink room they left to the last.

"Damn that woman!" Belden was muttering under his breath, obsessed now with horror. He thrust the door open. A faint musty odor met his nostrils. The wintry light struggling in through half-drawn curtains discovered to them what they sought: First their eyes picked up her little intimate luxuries of dress — a pair of tiny mules lying before a chair, a peignoir dropped carelessly across the foot of the bed; there, as if in serene sleep, lay the woman, one long white hand resting on the coverlet. As they stepped into the room they saw the body of Winchester, where he had dropped before the window.

"He was trying to open that window," said Parr, in his businesslike tone.

It was dark when the old village doctor came, summoned by Parr, who had gone down to the station to wire discreetly to the hierarchical "They," so they could make ready props for the crash. The old man, his long beard and furs tinseled with snow, came in shaking himself like a big dog.

His eyes rested on the woman's garments on the ottoman. Thoughtfully he followed them up-stairs; at the door of the pink room he stopped, sniffing. "Humph!" He took the candle from Belden's hand. "Here, eh? I thought old Jeduthalum had finished sharpening that ax!"

" 'Ax,' " said Oliver.

"Ah, there's the other." The doctor swung the candle, and the great shadows of the room revolved with it. He bent down over Winchester. "Cyanosed — do you see that?" Armiston nodded, curious. "Didn't they know about this room?" asked the doctor.

"I told them. But — that woman! She had to find out for herself," said Belden.

"Well, she knows now." The old physician added after a pause, "I don't believe in spirits — but I like fresh air." He threw up the windows, then joined them outside, drawing the door tight behind him. As they desended. Parr was coming in.

"What was it, Doctor?" said Parr. The old man shook his head, thumb-

ing his beard. "Something that has yet to be solved," he said in his quiet voice. "They have been dead for days."

Belden was thinking of the blind blows the dead can strike.

"We must obliterate that woman," he said.

"And that room," said the old man.

Belden took from the mantelshelf the paper by which only four nights gone by he in a moment of absurd whimsy had granted the option of this house and these lands to that woman, in consideration of one dollar. He put the paper in his pocket.

The afternoon papers of the next day carried the news of the sudden death of Winchester from an old heart affection, while sojourning for a few days' rest in the hills of Litchfield County, where he had planned to accumulate lands for a preserve. There was a distinct shock evidenced in the Street, but "They" had placed their props well, thanks to Parr. An obscure notice in another column recited the death of one Agnes Witcherly, a name that attracted no claimants.

"I'll run to town for a day to gather up loose ends," said Belden. "You and Grinder can hold the fort."

"I intend to," said Armiston. "May I prowl? Are there any family records?"

Belden produced the old family Bible and a batch of ancient records. Armiston rescued the eggs and milk from the potato bin. It was while he was thus engaged that Grinder made the noisy discovery of a cage full of trapped rats.

There was something almost providential in this discovery, at least to the eager mind of the extinct author, seeking for leads. He carried the cage with its cowering creatures up-stairs to the pink room, and put a supply of cheese and water handy for them. Then he shut the windows and withdrew.

It was three days before Belden reappeared.

"What do you make of it?" he demanded as they smoked by the fire.

"Nothing, I suspect. No one ever has."

"No one has ever tried, so far as I can find out," retorted Oliver. "I want to ask some questions." Belden nodded. "Two of your granduncles died on the same day — December 5th, 1844. Ebenezer and Jeduthalum. Jeduthalum was the man with the ax. Your grandfather, the surviving brother, wrote against his death, here in the family Bible: 'The Lord is a god of recompenses; He will surely requite.' What about that ax? Was Jed suspected of murder?"

"My grandfather always said he caused Ebenezer's death," said Belden. "Ebenezer was the first to die in that room. The morning they found him dead, they went down to the water-mill to tell Jeduthalum. He had gone down to grind his ax. They found him dead on the snow — brained. A belt had broken — snapped like a whip — crushed his skull. But there was nothing to show he had any connection with his brother's death."

"Then that same winter, Constance Hagar, maiden aunt, died in that room," said Oliver.

"Yes."

"And then what?"

"My grandfather attached no significance to her death," said Belden. "Mortals do die in bed, you know — one bed or another, it's all the same. Still, they did shut up that room. No one used it after that." He paused. "Wait," he said "There was another, ten years later. No connection — he's not in the Bible. One winter night, in 1854, I think, a no-account toper, Cyrus Whitman, crawled in there when no one knew — dead in the morning."

"And then?"

"That was the last straw. Things had been going from bad to worse — road leaving them, and all that. My grandfather closed up the place, abandoned it. When my father came into the property he never occupied it permanently. . . . It's queer," said Belden slowly. "I myself have slept in that room several times."

"You have?" Armiston leaned forward.

"Sheer bravado. When I was in college, my father and I used to come up here summers, fishing. Does it surprise you?"

"No," said Armiston unexpectedly. "I've got a cageful of rats up there. I feed them every morning. They seem to like it. Tell me more about this Jeduthalum. The chain seems to start with him."

Belden combed his memory. His disjointed recollections came out in scrappy sentences: Jeduthalum was wild — had been a sailor, a gold digger, a traveling tinker. He had spent his patrimony, and would return now and again, to cajole and threaten his brothers. His visits weren't all bad, however. Occasionally he would come back in funds, and bring some ingenious implement from the outer world, or some idea for improving the place. He had induced them to put water in the kitchen. He put up the furnace, an old wood-burning affair — an innovation.

Oliver walked about while Belden talked. When Belden ceased he continued his prowl, from one room to another. When he returned, Belden was in the cellar. He had started a fire in the furnace and was bedding it down for the night.

Just before breakfast the next morning Armiston walked in with his cage of rats — all dead! He set it down outside, and regarded it queerly.

"Last night?" gasped Belden. Oliver nodded. The thing had struck again, while they slept.

"Now I go to the bottom of it!" cried Belden savagely. "This house must stand till it gives up its secret."

"Does anything occur to you?"

Belden shook his head.

"I can make a long guess," said Armiston. He turned at the sound of the dog barking. "In fact, here comes the man now who sent Winchester and that woman to their reward."

The grocer's boy came stamping up the creaking steps.

"Son," said Oliver, "what time was it when you built the fire the other morning — last week Tuesday, I mean."

" 'Bout six o'clock in the mornin'," said the boy. "Why? Did it go out? I couldn't raise nobody. But I left a note."

"No; it was all right — I just wondered. Tell the doctor we'd like to see him later in the day. Will you, like a good fellow?"

As the boy went off, the mystified Belden turned to Armiston.

"What are you driving at?"

"It was in winter, when Ebenezer, Constance, and the no-account man died in that room. Wasn't it?" asked Armiston.

"Yes. What of it?"

"That boy, on your instructions, built a fire in the furnace at daybreak while Winchester and that woman were still asleep," said Oliver.

"Good God! What do you mean?" cried Belden.

"You built a fire last night in the furnace. This morning my rats are dead. Do you follow me?"

"Yes — yes —"

"Jeduthalum built that furnace," went on Armiston. "Well, there you are. There is something in that room — what it is I cannot pretend to say. I don't know. But I know it gives off deadly fumes when the heat strikes it. If Jeduthalum put something there to finish Ebenezer, he probably intended to take it away as soon as it had done its work. But the hand of God had struck him, while he was grinding his ax. The stuff has been there ever since. Whenever the heat has been turned on in the pink room, someone has died. Other times it is harmless. Let us find out the answer. First, we will draw the fire."

They waited until they thought it would be safe for them to investigate the room up-stairs, then they went to work. They had ripped up the floor around the register when the old doctor came up the stairs, sniffing.

"What have you got there?" asked the doctor. Oliver passed him, on a dustpan, the fragments of an old box. The doctor pushed aside the pieces with a pencil.

"Jed really did it, eh? I always thought so. I've been wondering," he said vaguely, "about that smell . . . It has haunted me ever since . . . I was coming up here myself to find out."

"But what is it?" demanded Belden.

The doctor uncovered a dusty lump of some substance the size of an egg.

"Cyanide," he said, peering. "Heat it — to ninety, or a hundred degrees — it gives off a deadly gas — cyanogen."

The Half-Way House still stands. It was restored, and a road built to it, and a modern heating plant installed. The shutters have been so well repaired that no longer on stormy nights can one hear the ghost horse "stamping."

The pink room is now a sun parlor.

Continued from back cover

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**1**

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**2**

### *The Case of the* HALF-WAKENED WIFE

IT'S night. You're aboard a yacht. Suddenly . . . a shot! Then . . . "Man Overbo-o-oard!" And you find yourself clutching a woman holding a gun—*from which one shot has been fired!*

The lady is accused of *murder.* Mason, her lawyer, is the ONLY one who believes her innocent. So what does she do? She FIRES him!

**3**

### *The Case of the* CROOKED CANDLE

A FIGURE lies on a blood-stained carpet aboard a boat aground in the bay. The tide goes out. The boat keels over. The body rolls over and over, until it slams against the wall!

The "corpse" jumps up—*with a big grin!* It's Mason—and he has just solved a case that rests on the curious clue of a candle!

*Continued on inside cover*

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