ELLERY QUEEN'S

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

MWA INC.

MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA INC.

April 21, 1948.

Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak,
Publisher,
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,
570 Lexington Avenue,
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Spivak:

I am happy to inform you that as a result of nation-wide balloting by some two hundred members of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., members of your staff have won two of the six Edgar Allan Poe Awards for distinguished achievement in the mystery field during 1947. The winners:

HOWARD HAYCRAFT, named best mystery critic of the year for his "Speaking of Crime" reviews in EQMM.

ELLERY QUEEN, for the year's outstanding contribution to the mystery short story, as editor of EQMM and of numerous anthologies.

The "Edgars" are being presented at MWA's annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner tonight, which, as you know, marks the birthday of the detective story -- the 107th anniversary of the original publication of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Congratulations!

Sincerely

Lawrence G. Blochman

Lawrence G. Blochman,
President, MWA.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Fourth

$6,000 SHORT STORY CONTEST

($1,000 of the $6,000 will be contributed by Little, Brown & Co., publishers, of Boston)

First Prize $2,000

Second Prize $1,000

8 ADDITIONAL PRIZES

TOTALING $3,000

Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, *EQMM* will award a Second Prize of $1,000, four (4) Third Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Fourth Prizes of $250 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at *EQMM's* regular rates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1948.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1948. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1949.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $25 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

8. Every care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

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SECOND PRIZE WINNER: HELEN McCLOY

"Through a Glass, Darkly" is Helen McCloy's first short story about her well-known psychiatrist detective, Dr. Basil Willing. It was suggested by the real-life story of Emilie Sagée, which was one of a great pile of notes on various macabre subjects accumulated by Miss McCloy over a long period of years. Miss McCloy hopes to use this fascinating material in a psychopathic novel. Actually, when Miss McCloy sat down to write a story for EQMM's Third Annual Contest, she had an entirely different plot idea in mind. But while she had a wonderful beginning, she found as work on the idea progressed that she could not think of a satisfactory ending. All the time the Sagée incident kept haunting her and all the time she kept planning the book of which it was to be merely a detail. True, Miss McCloy knew she could not write the book for at least six months, but unfortunately Miss McCloy's subconscious pays no attention at all to the prior contractual obligations entered into by her conscious mind — perversely, her subconscious goes off on its own tangents whenever it feels like doing so, planning whole books in minute detail and usually at a time when it is impossible for Miss McCloy to write them.

So, it was very largely in order to keep her subconscious appeased that Miss McCloy finally seized on the Sagée incident and turned that thread of a larger weaving into a short story for EQMM. Since the Sagée occurrence in real life had been developed in Miss McCloy's mind on quite a grand scale, the first draft of "Through a Glass, Darkly" came out of the typewriter as a 143-page manuscript — obviously much too long for a short story. Miss McCloy cut this original version to 68 pages — still too long — and finally to its present 33 pages of manuscript.

Concerning the original Sagée incident, Miss McCloy sees only two possible real-life explanations — either the events actually happened just as the witnesses described, or the witnesses were deliberately lying. Miss McCloy does not believe that such "impossible" effects could have been produced by fraud, though she hesitates to say so dogmatically because she is sure writers like John Dickson Carr and Clayton Rawson could work out more than one fictional solution. For source material on the Sagée story Miss McCloy used the Flammarion version, and long ago in Paris she read Aksakoff's account at the library of the Institut Métapsychique. *Like most reports of supposed real-life "doubles," the Sagée story is far more*

interesting to Miss McCloy than 99 9/10 per cent of fictional ghost stories, which depend so mechanically on props and sound effects.

The best treatment in Miss McCloy's opinion of the "double" in fiction is Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Tale of Tod Lapraik," a short story embedded in one of Stevenson's novels. This tale follows so precisely the details and theories of alleged occurrences reported to psychic research societies that it is probable Stevenson also used a real-life incident as a fictional springboard. That is undoubtedly why Miss McCloy felt a cauld grue, *a* frisson d'horreur, *when she first read the Stevenson version. Incidentally, Miss McCloy rates "The Tale of Tod Lapraik" far above the usual anthological choice among Stevenson's ghost stories, "Thrawn Janet" — above too the favorite Scottish story of the supernatural, Sir Walter Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale." Both these overanthologized stories, according to Miss McCloy, follow too closely the conventional treatment of the supernatural — don't misunderstand: they're both fine stories, but not in the class with the comparatively unknown "Tod Lapraik." By the way, the story of Goethe seeing his own "double" can be found by inquisitive readers in* CONVERSATIONS WITH ECKERMANN, *also in* MEMOIRES DE GOETHE, *translated from the German by Mme. Carlowitz.*

All of which brings us to Helen McCloy's own "Through a Glass, Darkly," and if the reminiscent rambling above has not whetted your appetite for a story of the supernatural, resolved in terms of the purest detective story, you are infinitely less curious about such indefinable things as suspense, terror, and the mystery of the unknown than we have always thought you to be . . .

THROUGH A GLASS, DARKLY

by HELEN McCLOY

In her own mind Mrs. Lightfoot thought of the whole matter as "that unfortunate affair of Faustina Crayle." Characteristically she did not try to find out what had actually happened. She showed little curiosity and no fear. Whether the peculiar gossip about Faustina Crayle was based on malicious lying or hysterical hallucination, its effect was equally damaging to the Brereton School. That was the only thing that mattered to a headmistress as single-minded as Mrs. Lightfoot.

By the end of the week she was comfortably sure she would never hear the name Crayle again. And then, that bright October morning,

when she was just settled in the study with her morning mail, Arlene brought her that dreadful visiting card:

Dr. Basil Willing

Medical Assistant to the District Attorney of New York County

The man, Willing, did not look like her idea of a man who held a political appointment in New York. He entered the room with easy, not ungraceful deliberation. He had the lean figure and sun-browned skin that come from living outdoors. Yet the wide brow and deep-set eyes gave his face a stamp of thoughtfulness. Those eyes were more alert, direct, and disturbing than any she had ever seen.

"Dr. Willing?" Mrs. Lightfoot held his card fastidiously between thumb and forefinger. "This is Massachusetts, not New York. And I fail to see how anything at Brereton can interest the district attorney or his medical assistant."

"That happened to be the only card I had with me," returned Basil. "I rarely use it. The district attorney's office plays only a small part in my working life. I'm a doctor of medicine, specializing in psychiatry. And I've come to see you because Faustina Crayle consulted me. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Paul Willing, employed her as a governess two years ago."

Mrs. Lightfoot could be blunt when necessary. "Just what do you want?"

Basil met this with equal bluntness. "To know why your art teacher, Faustina Crayle, was dismissed after five weeks' employment, without warning or reason given, even though, under her contract, you had to pay her a year's salary for the five weeks."

So Faustina hadn't told him the truth. Or . . . could it be she didn't know the truth herself?

"I've ruled out any defect in teaching method or scholarship, appearance or deportment," Basil was saying. "My sister-in-law would not have employed Miss Crayle if she had any fault so obvious and you wouldn't hesitate to have called such a fault to her attention. What remains? Something libelous that you suspect and can't prove. One of our old friends dipsomania, kleptomania, or nymphomania. Lesbianism is always with us. And now there's communism. Miss Crayle might have concealed any one of these *gaucheries* from my sister-in-law since Miss Crayle did not live with the Paul Willings. She was only in their apartment for a few hours each day."

Mrs. Lightfoot lifted her eyes. "It was none of those things."

Basil saw with surprise that she was genuinely moved. He realized that it was a rare thing for such a woman to feel strong emotion. "What was it, Mrs. Lightfoot? I think you owe it to Miss Crayle to let her know. You've made it almost impossible for her to get another position as a teacher. People talk. And then . . . two curious incidents occurred, just as Miss Crayle was leaving, which she herself

cannot explain. She met two pupils on the stairs, girls of thirteen — Barbara Vining and Diana Chase. She said their faces were 'bland as milk' and a pair of light voices fluted demurely: 'Good-bye, Miss Crayle!' But when she had passed them, a sound followed her down the stairwell — a faint, thin giggle, shrill and tiny as the laughter the Japanese attribute to mice. . . In the lower hall Miss Crayle passed one of the maids, Arlene Murphy. Her behavior was even more extraordinary. She shrank back, with dilated eyes, as if she were afraid of Miss Crayle."

Mrs. Lightfoot was beaten. "I suppose I'll have to tell you."

He studied her face. "Why are you afraid to tell me?"

Her answer startled him. "Because you won't believe me. You'd better hear it from some of the eye-witnesses. We'll start with Arlene." She pressed a bell on the wall beside her.

The maid was as young as the graduating class at Brereton — probably eighteen, at the most twenty. Under a white apron, she wore a gray chambray dress, high-necked, long-sleeved, full-skirted. Mrs. Lightfoot had won the battle for low heels and no cosmetics, but Arlene had carried two other hotly contested points — flesh-colored stockings and no cap.

"Come in and shut the door, Arlene. Will you please repeat to Dr. Willing what you told me about Miss Crayle?"

"Yes, ma'am, but you said not to tell anybody!"

"I'm releasing you from that promise, just this once."

Arlene turned vacant, brown eyes on Basil. Her brows were hairless. This gave her face a singularly naked look. Some glandular deficiency, he suspected. She was breathing through her mouth and that made her look stupid.

"I was upstairs, turning down beds for the night," said Arlene. "When I got through, I started down the backstairs. It was getting dark, but it was still light enough to see the steps. Those backstairs are enclosed, but there's two windows. I saw Miss Crayle coming up the stair, toward me. I thought it was a bit odd for her to be using the back stairs instead of the front. I says: 'Good evening, Miss.' But she didn't answer. She didn't even look at me. She just went on up to the second floor. That was kinda queer 'cause she was always polite to everybody. But even then I didn't think much about it until I went on down into the kitchen and . . ." Arlene paused to swallow. "There was Miss Crayle."

The girl's hands were trembling. Her eyes searched Basil's face for some sign of disbelief. "Honest, sir, she couldn't have got back to the kitchen by way of the upper hall, the front stairs, the dining room, or the pantry. Not in the little time it took me to finish going down the back stairs to the kitchen. She just couldn't, even if she'd run."

"What was Miss Crayle doing in the kitchen?" asked Basil.

"She had some flowers she'd just got in the garden. She was fixing a vase with water at the table by the sink."

"Were the two dressed exactly the same way? The one on the stair and the one in the kitchen?"

"Like as two peas. Brown felt hat. Bluish gray coat. Covert, I think they call it. No fur, no real style at all. And brown shoes. The kind with no tongues and criss-cross laces they call 'ghillies.' And some old pigskin gloves she always used for gardening."

"Did the hat have a brim?"

"Uh-huh. I mean, yes, sir."

"Did you see Miss Crayle's face on the backstairs?"

"Yes, sir. I didn't look at her particular. No reason why I should. And the hat brim was down over her eyes. But I saw her nose and mouth and chin. I'd swear it was her."

"Did you speak to Miss Crayle in the kitchen?"

"Soon as I got my breath, I says: 'Lord, miss, you give me a turn! I coulda sworn I just passed you on the stair, comin' down.' She smiled and said: 'You musta been mistaken, Arlene. I been in the west garden the last half hour. I only just come into the house and I haven't been upstairs yet.' Well, sir, you know how it is. Something like that happens and you think: 'What the —' I mean: 'Oh, well, I musta been mistaken.' And that's the end of it . . . if nothing more happens. But this time — well, that was just the beginning. In a week or so there was stories going all over the school about Miss Crayle and —"

Mrs. Lightfoot interrupted. "That will do, Arlene. Thank you. And will you please ask Miss Vining and Miss Chase to come to my study immediately?"

"Goethe," said Basil, as the door shut. "The gray suit with gilt edging. Emilie Sagée. And *The Tale of Tod Lapraik*. The *doppelganger* of the Germans. The *ka* of the Egyptians. The double of English folk lore. You see a figure, solid, three-dimensional, brightly colored, moving and obeying all the laws of optics. Its clothing or posture is vaguely familiar. It turns its head and — you are looking at yourself. A perfect mirror-image of yourself, only — there is no mirror. And that frightens you. For tradition tells you that he who sees his own double must die."

"Only if he sees it face to face," amended Mrs. Lightfoot. "The history of the *doppelganger* legend is very curious. Lately I've begun to wonder if the atmosphere could act as a mirror under certain conditions, something like a mirage but reflecting only one person . . ."

A light tap fell on the door. Two little girls about thirteen entered the study and curtsied to Basil when Mrs. Lightfoot introduced them as Barbara Vining and Diana Chase.

The drab masculinity of the Brereton uniform merely heightened by contrast the delicate, feminine coloring of Barbara Vining — pink and white skin, silver-gold hair, and eyes the misty blue of star sapphires. The

line of her lips was so subtly turned that even in repose they seemed to quiver on the edge of suppressed laughter.

The same uniform brought out all that was plain and dull in Diana Chase: the straight, mouse-colored hair; the pinched, white face; the forlorn mouth. Only the eyes, a clear hazel, showed a sly spark of potential mischief.

They listened gravely as Mrs. Lightfoot explained what she wanted. "Barbara, suppose you tell Dr. Willing what happened. Diana, you may correct Barbara if she makes any mistake."

"Yes, Mrs. Lightfoot." The faint pink in Barbara's cheeks warmed to rose. Obviously she enjoyed being the centre of the stage. "We two were in the writing room on the ground floor. I was writing my brother, Raymond, and Diana was writing her mother. All the other girls were down at the basketball field and most of the teachers. But she was outside the middle window — Miss Crayle. It was a French window, standing open, so I could see her plainly. She'd set her easel up in the middle of the lawn and she was sketching in water colors. She was wearing a blue coat but no hat. It was fun watching the quick, sure way she handled her brush."

"You've forgotten the armchair," put in Diana.

"Armchair? Oh . . ." Barbara turned back to Basil. "There was an armchair in that room with a slip-cover in Delft blue. We called it 'Miss Crayle's chair' because she sat there so often. I rather expected her to come in and sit in that chair when she was through painting and then — it happened." Barbara's voice faded, suddenly shy.

Diana took over. "I looked up and saw that Miss Crayle had come in without my hearing her. She was sitting in the blue armchair, her hands loose in her lap, her head resting against the back. She didn't seem to notice me, so I went on writing. After a while, I looked up again. She was still in the armchair. But that time my eyes wandered over to the window and . . ." Diana lost her nerve. "You tell him, Babs."

"Miss Crayle was still sketching outside the window?" suggested Basil.

"I suppose Mrs. Lightfoot told you." Barbara looked at him sharply. "I heard Di gasp, so I looked up and saw her staring at two Miss Crayles — one in the armchair, in the room with us; the other on the lawn, outside the window. The one in the chair was perfectly still. The one outside the window was moving. Only . . ." Barbara's voice wavered. "I told you how quick and sure her motions were? Well, after we saw the figure in the chair, the figure outside the window was — slower. Every movement was sort of languid and weighted. Like a slow-motion picture."

"Made me think of a sleepwalker," added Diana.

"What was the light like?"

"Bright sunlight on the lawn," answered Barbara. "So bright the

shades were drawn halfway down inside."

"It was pretty awful," went on Diana. "Sitting there, the two of us, alone in the room with that — that thing in the armchair. And the real Miss Crayle outside painting in that slow, unnatural way. Afterward, I thought of all sorts of things we might have done. Like trying to touch the thing in the chair. Or calling to Miss Crayle from the window and waking her from her — her trance or whatever it was. But at the time — well, I was just too frightened to think or move."

"I sat there and told myself it wasn't happening," said Barbara. "Only it was. I suppose it only lasted a minute or so. It seemed like a hundred years. Then the figure in the chair got up and went into the hall without a sound. The door was standing open and it seemed to melt into the shadows beyond. We sat there about three seconds. Then we ran to the door. There was no one in sight. So we went back to the window but — Miss Crayle had gone. . . ."

When they were alone, Mrs. Lightfoot looked at Basil. "Was a practical woman ever confronted with such a fantastic problem? Six girls have been withdrawn from Brereton already. That's why Miss Crayle had to go."

"But Barbara and Diana are still here. Didn't they write their parents about this?"

"Barbara has no parents — only a brother, a rather light-hearted young man of twenty-six who doesn't take his duties as guardian too seriously. Diana's parents are divorced. The father lives with a second wife in California. The mother is chiefly occupied in nursing her grievances against the father and nagging the courts to increase her alimony. Neither is greatly concerned with Diana. She's been a pupil here since her seventh year. Barbara only came to us this Fall. She's been going to a day school in New York."

Basil studied the intelligent face under the sleek mound of dark hair flecked with gray. "What is your own opinion?"

A hint of defiance crept into Mrs. Lightfoot's voice. "I am a modern woman, Dr. Willing. That means I was born without faith in religion and I have lost faith in science. I don't understand the theories of Messrs. Planck and Einstein, but I grasp enough to realize that the world of matter may be a world of appearances — that even our own bodies are a part of this dance of electrons. What's behind it, we don't know. How does my mind act on my body when I decide to move my arm? Neither psychology nor physiology can tell me . . .

"By what trick could Faustina Crayle create the illusion of her double? And why? She gained nothing. It cost her a job. She may be an unconscious trickster — an hysteric with impulses to amaze and frighten people, impulses that she can't control because she is not aware of them herself. That might explain why she

played such a trick, but not how.

"There is a third possibility. Suppose Faustina Crayle is . . . abnormal in a way that modern science will not acknowledge?"

If Mrs. Lightfoot feared an outburst of that outraged skepticism that is a sure sign of hidden credulity — the fool's fear of being fooled — she had misjudged her man. "Did anyone else see Miss Crayle's double? Besides two girls of thirteen and a maid of nineteen or twenty?"

Mrs. Lightfoot caught the implication. "There was one other witness — middle-aged, sober, reasonably shrewd and observant. Myself."

After a moment, she went on: "I had a dinner engagement outside the school that evening. I came out of my room about six. A pair of sconces are always lighted in the upper hall at that hour. Each has a hundred-watt bulb under a small shade. Their light extends to the first landing of the front stair. Below that landing the stair was in shadow this particular evening, for Arlene had neglected to turn on the ceiling light in the lower hall. I started down the stair with one hand on the balustrade, moving slowly because my dress had a long, full skirt. As I reached the first landing, someone, one in greater haste, brushed past me without a word of apology and I saw that it was Miss Crayle.

"She didn't actually jostle me, but I felt the drafty displacement of air that you feel when anyone passes closely and swiftly. And her ungloved hand brushed my arm where the skin was bare between my cuff and my glove. That contact was inhumanly cold. I remember thinking: *she must have been outdoors* . . . I didn't see her face as she passed. But I recognized her back — the brown hat and the blue covert coat, the only outdoor clothes she had except a winter coat still in storage. I was irritated by her rudeness. Manners are important at Brereton. I raised my voice, making it crisp and peremptory: 'Miss Crayle!'

" 'Yes, Mrs. Lightfoot?'

"Dr. Willing, that answering voice came from the upstairs hall, above me, and I could still see Miss Crayle's back moving into the shadows of the lower hall, below me. I looked up. Faustina Crayle was standing at the head of the stairs, in the full light of the upper hall, wearing the brown hat and blue coat. Her eyes, bright with life and intelligence, looked into mine, and she spoke again: 'You called me, Mrs. Lightfoot?' I looked down. There was nothing in the lower hall then — nothing but shadows. I said: 'I thought you passed me just now on the stair. I didn't know you were just behind me.' She answered: 'That's rather odd. You were going down so slowly and I was in such a hurry to get the evening mail that my first impulse was to slip past you on the stair. But I didn't because I realized how rude that would be.'

"So she'd had the unrealized intention. . . . I recalled how often a sleepwalker will carry out an intention previously suppressed in his

waking state. Suppose that uncensored, autonomous action of the unconscious mind in sleepwalking could be pushed a little further? Suppose that the unconscious mind could project some form of itself outside the body? Not a material form, but a visible one. Just as mirror-reflections and rainbows are visible and even photographable though materially neither one exists. Or suppose a case of split personality where the secondary personality gathers enough vital energy to project that sort of visible yet immaterial image of itself . . .

"I assure you it took all the nerve I had to go on down that stair into the darkness and turn on the light in the lower hall. There was no one — except Arlene coming into the drawing-room from the dining room. 'Did you meet anyone just now?' I asked her. She shook her head: 'No, ma'am. I haven't seen a soul.' "

"No wonder you didn't dare tell Faustina Crayle why you wished her to leave!" Basil's glance strayed to the lawn outside the window where the autumn breeze tumbled the dead leaves and pounced on them in erratic starts and sallies like an invisible kitten.

"She would have thought me mad. Do you?"

"No. A conformist skepticism is a pretty cheap commodity. He who accepts the incredulities of his time without question is as naive as he who accepts its credulities." Basil's eyes returned to Mrs. Lightfoot. "You spoke of a drafty sensation when the double passed. Any sound? Swish of air? Rustle of clothing?"

"No sound at all."

"Footfalls?"

"No, but that would be so in any case. The stair carpet is thick and soft."

"Every human body carries some faint odor or combination of odors," mused Basil. "Face powder, lipstick, hair tonic, permanent wave lotion, or shaving lotion. Iodine or some other medicine. The breath odors — food, wine, tobacco. And the clothing odors — mothballs, shoe polish, dry cleaning fluids, Russian leather, or Harris tweed. Finally there are those body odors the soap advertisements worry us about. You are one witness who was close enough to touch the double, however briefly. Did you notice any odor, however faint or fleeting?"

Mrs. Lightfoot shook her head emphatically. "There was no odor, Dr. Willing, unless I missed it."

"I doubt that." He glanced toward a row of flower pots on the window sill. "Only a woman with keen senses would enjoy a fragrance as delicate as rose geranium or lemon verbena."

Mrs. Lightfoot smiled. "I even use lemon verbena on my handkerchief. My one really gaudy vice, but a French firm puts out an essence of *verveine* I can't resist. It's supposed to be an after-shaving lotion for men, so I'm probably the only woman in the world who uses it."

"Did Miss Crayle use any perfume habitually?"

"Lavender. She always used it on her hair."

"No hint of lavender about the double?"

"No." Mrs. Lightfoot's smile became ironic. "You wouldn't expect a reflection in a mirror to have an odor, would you?"

Basil picked up his hat and driving gloves. "Why did this double of Miss Crayle appear only at Brereton? Didn't Miss Crayle teach at another school last year? A place in Virginia called Maidstone?"

Mrs. Lightfoot looked at him grimly. "I hadn't meant to tell you. Mollie Maidstone is a friend of mine and I got the truth out of her a few days ago, under pledge of secrecy, but . . . Miss Crayle left Maidstone last year under precisely the same conditions that she is now leaving Brereton."

The apartment house stood between Lexington Avenue and the river. Basil passed through a door flanked by copper tubs planted with ivy to a self-service elevator and pressed the button marked Penthouse. In a vestibule on the top floor he lifted a knocker and chimes rang. The young woman who opened the door was tall for her sex, but slenderly fashioned with frail wrists and ankles, tapering hands and narrow, high-arched feet. Her hair was a pale tan, almost a biscuit color, so fine and soft that it had no shape or sleekness, but floated about her small head in a thistledown halo, stirring gently with each movement she made. The long face was sallow and earnest, the lips thin, the nose prominent and rather sharp. She led the way to a terrace. The sun had just set. Beyond the parapet the peaks and valleys of the mountainous city shimmered insubstantially in a silver haze.

Basil offered cigarettes. She shook her head impatiently. He lit one for himself. "Miss Crayle, do you know the German legend of the *doppelganger?*"

Tears gathered in the cloudy blue eyes. She covered her face with her hands. "Dr. Willing, what am I going to do?"

"Then you do know. Why didn't you tell me before you sent me to Mrs. Lightfoot?"

"Would you have believed me? I don't know anything . . . except what people said about me at Maidstone." Her hands dropped. She turned toward him, apparently unconscious of reddened eyelids. "Now I suppose it's happened again at Brereton. Mrs. Lightfoot wouldn't tell me, but I thought she might tell you — a psychiatrist, working with the district attorney in New York . . ."

Basil told her all he had learned at Brereton. "Is that the sort of thing that happened at Maidstone?"

He caught a hint of lavender as Faustina dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. "Pretty much. Maidstone is quite like Brereton. Only in Virginia instead of Massachusetts. The girls don't wear uniforms but it's strict in other ways. No male

visitors except Sunday and so on. After I'd been there a week I knew I was being watched and talked about. Other teachers refused my little invitations for tea or shopping. Even the servants waited on me grudgingly. I took it for hostility. Now I believe it was fear. In my fourth week I got a note from Miss Maidstone. Dismissal with a check for a year's services. I took the note to her study. She was quite emotional about the whole thing. She even wrote me a letter of recommendation. That got me the job at Brereton afterward. You see, though she had to keep it secret because of her school, Miss Maidstone has dabbled in psychic research. She took books out of a locked cupboard and read me about other 'doubles' that had been reported to various research societies in Europe. She didn't suspect me of fraud. For that very reason she would not keep me at Maidstone."

"Do you believe in this yourself?"

Faustina smiled bitterly. "I know I'm not a fraud. You don't know that, of course. But I do. And I can't see how or why anyone else should play such a trick on me. What remains? When you've lost your job twice because of a thing, you don't think it's just imagination . . . I'm like Madame du Deffand. I don't believe in it, but I'm afraid of it."

"Of what?"

"Of this . . . thing. Suppose I were to see it myself? I've had just one glimpse, on the front stair at Brereton. All I saw was the back of a figure, dressed in clothes like mine, brushing past Mrs. Lightfoot. That could be anyone who looked like me and wore similar clothes. Even if I were to see a face resembling mine, at a distance, in a dim light — that could be illusion or trickery, a face resembling mine by chance or made up deliberately to look like mine. But if I should suddenly come upon a face close at hand, in a clear light, and recognize it as my own face in every small detail — I believe I should die. Because that couldn't be faked."

"How often was the double seen at Maidstone?"

"Three times. On the front lawn while I was asleep upstairs. On an upstairs sleeping porch while I was teaching a class in a downstairs room. And once it passed an open door while I stood inside the door with another teacher."

Basil crushed the stub of his cigarette in an ashtray. "Miss Crayle, is there anyone who has reason to hate you? Or who would benefit by your death?"

"No one I know of. I have no family. My mother died when I was six and I don't remember my father."

"Any property?"

"A small cottage at Seabright on the Jersey coast, left to me by my mother. And some jewelry. Just trinkets, I suppose, for my mother was not a wealthy woman. Mr. Watkins, the lawyer, is going to have it appraised for me."

"Who gets the jewelry and the cottage when you die?"

"I'm leaving the cottage to a school friend. I'm not supposed to inherit the jewelry until my thirtieth birthday."

"What becomes of the jewelry if you die before then?"

"I really don't recall." The colorless brows knitted. "There was something in the will about that."

"Better give me the name and address of your lawyer . . . Septimus Watkins? He manages half the big trust funds in New York." Basil rose to go. "Are you staying here long?"

"I'm leaving this evening. The friends who live here will be back tonight. They just lent me the place for this weekend. I need rest. And privacy. So I thought I'd go down to the cottage at Seabright."

"Don't." Basil looked up sharply. "Go to a hotel. The biggest, brightest, noisiest hotel you can find. And let me know where you are as soon as you're settled. . . ."

When Basil arrived, Septimus Watkins was just leaving his office. He laid hat and gloves and silver-topped malacca stick back on his desk and sat down without removing his topcoat. While Basil was talking, Watkins's bleak glance traveled toward the window view of Old Trinity, dark and dwarfish among higher buildings. "The whole business sounds like adolescent humor to me."

"Who inherits the jewelry if Miss Crayle dies before thirty?"

"Dr. Willing, I know your reputation. I believe you'll be discreet. So I'll tell you as much as I can. For that is the quickest way to disabuse your mind of the preposterous idea that anything threatens Miss Crayle. That unfortunate girl, Faustina, is illegitimate." Watkins's small, close smile seemed to savor the lubricities of the past, safely sterilized by time. "Did you ever hear of Rosa Diamond? She was the daughter of a man who wrote hymns and lived in Philadelphia. She had red hair. In the nineties she ran away from home — first New York, then Paris. There she became a star of the *demi-monde* — one of those fabulous courtesans Balzac describes in such rich detail. A provincial American girl, she learned from her lovers to speak and write perfect French, to understand music and art and letters. It's hard to make your generation understand such hetaerae. Only Paris and Athens in certain periods have produced them."

"Wasn't she co-respondent in a divorce case of the 1900's?"

"In 1912. A corporation lawyer of New York wanted a divorce without accusing his wife. Rosa Diamond was so notorious that he had only to go to Paris and be seen once, driving in the Bois with her in an open carriage, to obtain his divorce. That single drive was considered adequate proof of adultery. It was said that he paid Rosa Diamond a thousand dollars and that they parted at her door without his even kissing her fingertips. But they met again and . . . Faustina Crayle is their daughter. Rosa knew

her trade. She was to have been simply a convenience. Instead she altered the whole course of his life. He fell in love with her . . ."

Again came the little smile of reminiscent salacity. "He brought her back to America. He gave her a town house in Manhattan and a seaside cottage in New Jersey at Seabright. But he didn't marry her. Such men didn't marry such women in those days."

"And that is the origin of that meagre, bloodless girl!" Basil thought of the flat chest, the narrow flanks. "Does she know?"

"I've tried to keep it from her, as her parents wished. Several times she has asked me if she were illegitimate. I lied, but I'm afraid she didn't believe me. . . . It was in 1918 when Rosa was forty-three that she gave birth to Faustina. The father already had a legitimate heir by his divorced wife. He was in his fifties then and knew he had not long to live — a heart condition which Faustina has inherited. He wanted to provide for the little girl without unpleasant publicity which might affect her future. To avoid mentioning Rosa or Faustina in his will, he gave Rosa a collection of handsome jewels which had belonged to his mother. There was another fund to put Faustina through school, but the jewels — sold at a fair price, with the proceeds invested judiciously — would give her a tidy income for life — say, ten thousand a year in 1918 and even more today. The value of Faustina's jewels has appreciated in the last thirty years, while, unhappily, the crash of 1929 wiped out the fortune left to the legitimate heir. That young man shot himself leaving two minor heirs, legitimate grandchildren of Faustina's father, who have less money than she today."

"But if Faustina dies before the age of thirty, the jewels revert to these children of her natural half-brother?"

"There was some bad feeling when the grandfather gave family jewels to Rosa Diamond and she developed a sense of guilt about it. According to her will, Faustina inherits the jewels at thirty but if Faustina dies before thirty, I, as executor, must dispose of the jewels according to instructions in a sealed envelope deposited with me, which can be opened only after Faustina's death and in the presence of a probate judge. Rosa herself told me this envelope contains instructions to give the jewels to the legitimate heirs. The sealed envelope was a device she contrived so that her will could be read to Faustina without Faustina learning the name of her natural half-brother or suspecting their relationship. That name I cannot reveal, even to you, Dr. Willing. It would betray a trust to revive such an old, unhappy scandal."

"Do the legitimate heirs know about Rosa's will and the sealed instructions?"

"Naturally. The family knew from the beginning what had become of

their jewels. When they asked me if there was any legal way to recover the jewels, I convinced them there was not, by explaining exactly what disposition Rosa had made of them."

"Did you mention Faustina Crayle by name?"

"I believe I did. Why not?"

Wearily, Basil rose to take his leave. "Tell me one more thing: has either of these legitimate heirs any connection with the Maidstone School? Or Brereton?"

"I must decline to answer that."

It was full night when Basil reached the narrow brownstone house on lower Park Avenue where he had lived so many years. Before the war he had regarded it as a poor substitute for his father's home in Baltimore. Now, after years overseas, this was his home and always would be. He loved the river of cars flowing uptown at office-closing-time, the soft bloom of curtained lamplight in the low, old-fashioned houses on either side of the wide street, the glitter of the Grand Central building against velvety blue darkness, the whisper of tires, the ring of heels and the nip of frost in the air which announced winter and a new season of gaiety.

Juniper met him in the vestibule. "Some folks waitin' in the library."

Basil went up a flight of stairs to the long, white-paneled "library" that was also living-room and study. Juniper had drawn wine-colored curtains and lighted lamps. At the sound of Basil's step a young man turned swiftly toward the door. The lamplight found golden highlights in the ash-blond hair, cut close to his small head. "Dr. Willing? Forgive this intrusion, but the matter is urgent. I am Raymond Vining, Barbara's brother. It was Mrs. Lightfoot who suggested that we should see you. This is Dr. Willing — Mrs. Chase, Diana's mother. And my *fiancée*, Miss Aitchison."

The women were shadows beyond the lamplight. Basil pressed the chandelier switch. Mrs. Chase had kept the tilted nose, chubby cheeks, and rounded chin of youth, but there were deep lines scored on either side of the mouth. The bright, reddish brown hair was as patently artificial as the tomato-red of her lips. She was dressed with ostentation—dark mink, black velvet, and diamonds. Miss Aitchison was a ripe beauty of eighteen or twenty with splendid dark eyes, golden skin, and fruity, red lips, set off by a neat brown suit and a vivid scarf of burnt orange. Basil paused as he caught the ghost of a familiar fragrance — lemon verbena. But he could not tell which of the three had brought it into the room.

"Do you think I should withdraw Diana from the school?" demanded Mrs. Chase.

"I can't advise you about that." Basil realized she was the sort of woman who tries to unload any responsibility on the nearest man.

"At least you can tell us what has been happening there!"

"All sorts of odd things happen at

schools," drawled Miss Aitchison insolently, her legs crossed, a cigarette smoking in one gloved hand.

Basil seized the opening. "You went to Brereton?"

"No, I'm Maidstone and —"

Raymond Vining interrupted. "Dr. Willing, just what did happen? Was it hysteria? Or fraud?"

Basil turned to look at Vining. He had Barbara's fresh pink and white skin, and her eyes, the misty blue of star sapphires. He had her lips — the line so subtly turned that even in repose it seemed to quiver on the edge of laughter. He had the attenuated face and figure Victorian novelists called "aristocratic." Basil had seen the same traits too often in the families of farmers and factory workers to accept the odd biological belief that the human bone structure can be altered in a few generations by property and leisure.

"Was Miss Crayle an agent?" went on Vining. "Or a victim?"

Basil took a book from his shelves. "Here is something that is supposed to have happened in Livonia in 1845. It's been published in various versions by Robert Dale Owen, by Aksakoff, by Flammarion." He began to read aloud. It was almost the same story as Faustina's. Only the girl's school was at Volmar, fifty-eight miles from Riga, and the girl was a French teacher from Dijon, Emilie Sagée, fair, gentle, aged thirty-two. Two identical figures were seen simultaneously by an embroidery class of forty-two girls — one appearing for several minutes in a chair in the classroom while the other could be seen gathering flowers in the garden outside the window. As long as the appearance remained in the chair, the girl outside moved "slowly and heavily like a person overcome with fatigue." There were other appearances, even more curious, until finally all but twelve of the forty-three girls were withdrawn by their parents and Mademoiselle Sagée was dismissed. She wept and cried: "This is the nineteenth time since my sixteenth year that I have lost a position because of this!" From that moment, when she walked out of the Neuwelcke School, she vanished from history. What became of her, no one knows. But in 1895 Flammarion looked at the birth records in Dijon for 1813 — the year of Mademoiselle Sagée's birth if she were thirty-two in 1845. There was no Sagée. But on January 13, 1813 an infant girl named Octavie Saget was born and, of course, Saget is pronounced precisely the same as Sagée in French. In the record after that name appeared the significant word: *illegitimate*.

"There is one striking point about all this," concluded Basil. "The exact parallel between the two cases. In some details the Crayle case is a plagiarism of the Sagée case."

"Except for the illegitimacy," murmured Vining.

"So what?" said Miss Aitchison rudely.

"Someone who wishes to injure Miss Crayle has read the story of

Mademoiselle Sagée and adapted it to that purpose. But that isn't the worst. According to tradition, she who sees her own double must die. Miss Crayle lives in fear of seeing the figure herself. This haunting by a double is a constant threat of death to her — psychologically on the same plane as threatening, anonymous letters. It could end in insanity, suicide — even murder."

"How could anyone fake the thing?" cried Vining. "Mirrors?"

"Not when Miss Crayle was painting on the lawn and the double was sitting in an armchair inside the house."

"Alice . . ." Vining turned to Miss Aitchison. "I'm going to take Barbara out of that school. Wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so." Miss Aitchison looked bored.

"You're right!" Mrs. Chase would always join the majority with enthusiasm. "I'm going to take Diana away the first thing tomorrow. . . ."

After dinner Basil called Assistant Chief Inspector Foyle at his Flatbush home. "Nothing we can do tonight," said Foyle, when Basil had outlined facts and conjectures. "You told her to go to a big hotel. Couldn't be any hocus-pocus there. Tomorrow I'll see this Watkins character at his office. If I busted in on his home tonight, it would be twice as difficult . . ."

It was six forty-five A.M. when the telephone rang beside the bed. "Dr. Willing?" Mrs. Lightfoot's voice roused him. "I'm sorry to disturb you, but a policeman just called me from New Jersey. Faustina Crayle is dead."

Basil met an early train from Massachusetts at Grand Central and took Mrs. Lightfoot to breakfast in the station. Then he drove her to Centre Street.

"After you phoned this morning I got what dope I could from the New Jersey State Police," said Foyle to Basil. "No evidence of suicide — let alone murder. Not even accident. Just natural death from heart failure. You told me yourself Watkins said her heart was weak."

"I wonder how many people he told . . ." muttered Basil.

"She didn't go to a hotel," added Foyle. "Her friends at the penthouse say Miss Crayle got a phone call that changed her mind about that. She went down to this seaside cottage she'd inherited. Her body could have lain there for weeks if the caretaker hadn't happened to pass the house around three A.M., coming home from a covered-dish supper at the church there. She saw a light and notified the state police. They found the front door ajar, Miss Crayle's key still in the lock outside, and her key-ring dangling. Just one light inside — a lamp in the hall. There's a couple of little parlors to the right of the hall with a pair of transparent glass doors between. Miss Crayle was lying prone in the middle of the first parlor, her

head toward the glass doors, still wearing hat, coat and gloves, her purse and dressing-case beside her. Nothing in the room disarranged. No money taken. The Jersey cops found a taxi-driver who drove her from the station to the cottage and left her there around eleven fifty. The doctor says she must have been dead by midnight at the latest.

"It's plain what happened. She unlocked the door and left it ajar with her key in the lock while she stepped inside to switch on a few lights. What every woman does when she enters an empty house alone at night. Before she got any farther than the first parlor, her heart just stopped."

"Did you check alibis?" asked Basil.

"Oh, sure. Mrs. Chase was with a supper party from eleven P.M. to three thirty A.M. Miss Aitchison and Vining were at the Crane Club. Bartender remembers their coming in together at ten P.M. and leaving together at one thirty A.M."

"Anything else?"

"Well . . ." Foyle hesitated. "It's pretty silly. You know how superstitious hayseeds are. One of the yokels down at this place, Seabright, declares he passed Faustina Crayle walking along a backroad at three thirty A.M. He didn't know it when he testified, but that was after the cops had found her dead body. . . ."

In the car Basil glanced at Mrs. Lightfoot. "I'm going to Seabright."

"May I go with you? I'm beginning to feel responsible for Miss Crayle. If I hadn't turned her out so summarily . . ."

Miss Crayle's cottage was three miles beyond the village, between pinewoods and sea — white clapboarding with shutters and door of grayish green. Though the road was unfrequented, Russian olive, bayberry, and scrub pine had been cultivated to mask the windows. A ragged lawn sloped up to the crest of a dune covered with poverty grass. There was no one in sight but the front door was unlatched. "Would police be so careless?" murmured Basil.

Mrs. Lightfoot followed him inside reluctantly. "Dr. Willing, could a . . . a double survive the death of the personality that projected it? Even for a few hours?"

He wasn't listening. He was looking at the hall — white woodwork, white wallpaper flecked with green. A lamp stood on a telephone table in the curve of the stair. Basil examined the bulb — one hundred watts. The only light in the hall. It would illuminate the hall itself brilliantly, but the light would be low, ceiling and upper wall remaining in shadow. Some radiance would spill through the wide archway into the parlor on the right but it would still be low, and the second parlor, beyond the transparent glass doors, would be lost in shadows. Basil stepped into the first parlor. He pressed a light switch beside the archway. No light came. The bulbs

in the ceiling fixture looked smoky. Probably dead.

The second parlor could be reached only by way of the first. The two were almost exactly alike. Each had white woodwork and a bay window at the far end with frilly, white curtains and green upholstered seat. Each had a rug of faded-rose color, slipcovers splashed with roses the same shade, and leaves of faded green. Only close inspection showed a difference in such details as the color of ashtrays and the arrangement of chairs.

"Monotonous," said Basil. "Two rooms in the same colors."

"It would be worse if they were decorated in contrasting colors," retorted Mrs. Lightfoot. "That would make both rooms look smaller by dividing them. Just as a woman in a contrasting blouse and skirt looks shorter than a woman in a dress all one color. This way the eye travels from one room to the other without a break and you get the effect of one long room even with the glass doors closed."

"Why doors at all? Why not one big room?"

Mrs. Lightfoot glanced about her. "There's no radiator. Probably no furnace in a summer cottage like this. But with the glass doors closed, this first parlor is small enough to be heated by a portable stove, electric or oil."

Basil walked down the room to the glass doors. "What do you make of these marks?" They were minute scratches on the wooden frames that separated each small transparent glass pane from the others.

"It's hard to paint the wooden frames without smearing the glass," suggested Mrs. Lightfoot. "Amateur painters often cut a piece of cardboard the same size as the pane and fit it inside the frame over the glass while they're painting. Afterward you have to pry out the cardboard. This painter seems to have used a needle."

"It wasn't a painter. Those scratches were made after the paint was dry and —"

"What's that?" exclaimed Mrs. Lightfoot. "It sounds like footfalls upstairs!"

"It is," agreed Basil calmly. "I've been listening to them for some time."

The footfalls were coming downstairs. There was no attempt at stealth. The heels rang clear and unafraid on each step. Then came a sudden pause. Basil visualized a figure arrested in motion by sight of the front door, which he had left wide open. The footfalls resumed with a certain caution. In the hall archway appeared the large, formidable figure of Septimus Watkins.

"Dr. Willing!" Surprise seemed to master indignation. "I trust you've learned enough from the local police to accept as I do their statement that Miss Crayle's death was perfectly natural. As I mentioned yesterday, her heart —" His voice wavered, stopped. All three listened to the sound of other footfalls — younger, fleeter — running down the stair.

"So you didn't come alone?" Basil moved toward the arch. The footfalls ceased as abruptly as they had begun. Basil was the first to speak. "I'm glad Alice Aitchison told me she went to Maidstone."

Raymond Vining moved forward. With him came a faint scent of lemon verbena. "What has that to do with . . .?"

"Your murdering your grandfather's illegitimate daughter, Faustina Crayle? Everything."

"Don't say a word, Ray!" called Watkins. "I'll get you the best criminal lawyer money can buy!"

Basil spoke as if thinking aloud. "Alice Aitchison must have known or guessed the truth. Enough to charge her as accessory? Probably, since, as your wife, she would share the money you got from the sale of Faustina's jewels when you received them. And Barbara? She's only thirteen, but she's intelligent. She may have guessed —"

"No!" Vining shouted. "Alice didn't know and neither did Barbara! You can charge me but you can't charge them! I won't let you!"

"Why, that's a confession!" gasped Mrs. Lightfoot.

Not until the drive back to New York did Basil have a chance to give her the details: "I suspected Vining the moment I saw his close family resemblance to Faustina, his grandfather's daughter. He was the only person involved who was physically able to impersonate her double, even under favorable conditions. Both Vining and Faustina had the attenuated "aristocratic" figure — narrow flanks, finely cut wrists and ankles, tapering hands, slender, high-arched feet. In woman's dress, his figure would look like hers. And in a dim light at a fair distance his face could pass for hers. Both had the "aristocratic" small head and long, oval face, the prominent nose and thin lips. Both were the ash-blond type, with cloudy blue eyes like star sapphires. Rachel face powder would make Vining's fresh pink skin as sallow as Faustina's. He was actor enough to subdue the mocking expression of his lips to Faustina's look of wistful seriousness. Especially when his face was shaded by a wide hatbrim.

"He discovered the resemblance when Alice Aitchison was at Maidstone a year ago. He wanted to break the strict rule against male visitors on any day but Sunday. He was in love and he wanted to visit her at any time of day or night he pleased. So he used a trick as old as pagan Rome. Remember how the intrusion of young Clodius, dressed as a woman, at a ceremony deigned for women only, caused Caesar to divorce the wife that wasn't above suspicion? Like Clodius, Vining was young, slight, beardless. He could pass as one girl among many girls if he wore a girl's clothing and kept at a distance from others in a dim light. But he didn't pass as one girl among many. He was mistaken for a particular girl — one

of the young teachers, Faustina Crayle. Miss Maidstone kept her books on psychic research under lock and key, but they were there. Trust some of the girls to get hold of the key and read about the *doppelganger* myth. Stories of a mysterious 'double' began to crystallize around Faustina. Alice Aitchison would report the fact to Vining with great glee for she would have noticed his resemblance to Faustina and she would realize how the stories had started. But Vining himself would know why that resemblance existed. Thanks to Watkins, he knew all there was to know about his grandfather's natural daughter and he was in a position to recognize that rather unusual name — Faustina Crayle. He made a point of seeing Faustina for himself. He saw how strong the family resemblance was though the difference in sex, and therefore in dress, made it unapparent to the casual observer. All this gave him the idea for a unique method of murder that would not leave any mark on Faustina's body or even require his presence at the moment of her death.

"When she went to Brereton, he sent his little sister Barbara to the same school as an unconscious spy, reporting to him quite innocently all that went on inside the school. The front and back stairs and the French windows at Brereton made it fairly easy for him to slip in and out of the building, especially when most people who saw him at a distance mistook him for Faustina who had a right there. For his more startling effects he chose his witnesses carefully — a stupid, suggestible young servant and two flighty little girls of thirteen, one his own sister who wouldn't give him away if she ever guessed the truth. I think his meeting with you on the stair was accident. You were too shrewd an observer for him to seek you deliberately. But there were bound to be some accidents. He made the best of that one, slipping through the drawing-room and out a French window, just before Arlene came in from the dining room. He let his hand brush your arm purposely because he knew his hand was icy cold — he had just come in from outside — and he knew that coldness would be almost as effective as the filmy, unreal texture of the Sagée double's touch which he couldn't imitate. At Brereton he appeared in a coat and hat copied exactly from Faustina's and reproduced one striking incident from the case of Emilie Sagée — slow motions during the appearance of her double. Presumably he did this by drugging something Faustina ate or drank, timed to affect her at the moment he appeared as her double.

"No wonder Faustina herself came to believe in the double and fear it. That was how he killed her — with her own fear. He knew the plan of the Seabright cottage — it had belonged to his grandfather. He knew about the two parlors which were the same size and shape, with bay windows facing each other at opposite ends, and the pair of glass

doors between the two rooms. Watkins could tell him they were still decorated in the same colors. The rest was simple. He went down to Seabright in Faustina's absence. He obtained mirrors the same size and shape as the panes of glass in the pair of doors and fitted a mirror over each pane, inside the wooden frame. He put dead bulbs in the ceiling fixture of the first parlor. That was all. Except the telephone call to Faustina last night. He would introduce himself as one of the mysterious family she had wondered about for so long and make an appointment to meet her at her own house that same night. He could tell her things about Watkins and her mother that would make his identification convincing. Then he went off to the Crane Club with Alice Aitchison to establish an alibi.

"At eleven fifty Faustina let herself into the dark, empty cottage with a latchkey, leaving it in the door while she snapped on the hall light. It was chance that she stepped into the first parlor next. But she was bound to enter it sooner or later that evening and when she did — only one thing could happen. She would press the ceiling switch beside the hall archway. No light would come on since the bulbs were dead. A movement would draw her eyes to the pair of doors, now mirrored. Whose movement? Her own, reflected there. *But she wouldn't know it was a reflection!* She would believe with absolute conviction that there was transparent glass in those doors and that she was looking *through* it. There was nothing to tell her in that first, swift glance that she was looking at the first parlor reflected in a mirror, instead of the second parlor viewed through glass — remember, both rooms were alike in shape and color and the low, irregular light from the single lamp in the hall was deceptive by the time it reached the mirrors in the pair of doors.

"You see what happened? *Faustina's own reflection killed her!* She had a weak heart. For over a year her mind had been subjected to intensive psychological preparation for belief in the *doppelganger*. As she said: *when you've lost your job twice because of a thing, you don't think it's just imagination.* She toppled face down, frightened to death by the oldest, the simplest of all illusions — her own reflection. She lay dead of terror when there was nothing to terrify anyone — merely a mirror imaging the prone body of a dead girl.

"Vining had to remove the mirrors before the body was found. He went down to Seabright to do that after he'd given Faustina ample time to die. He wore woman's dress for the last time. He might not have been seen at all. As it happened he was seen and mistaken once again for Faustina. When the police checked the time and found 'Faustina' had been 'seen' after she was dead, only one thing could happen. The story of Faustina's double became the story of Faustina's ghost and the police would write the whole thing off as village superstition.

"As Faustina's double, Vining tricked the eye adroitly. No doubt he wore rubber-soled shoes to trick the ear as well, for the double never made a sound. His cold hand even tricked your sense of touch. But there was one grosser, more primordial sense he didn't trick — smell."

"But the double had no odor at all!" objected Mrs. Lightfoot.

"That's the point. Every human body has some odor. Yet you said the double had none. Did that mean it really was inhuman? Or was there some condition that would make one body seem odorless to another? There is just one such condition: when two bodies have the same odor — for example, when they are both using the same perfume. A nonsmoker kissing a smoker is keenly aware of nicotine fumes. Two smokers kissing will each believe the other has a clean breath because neither detects the odor.

"You used lemon verbena. So I knew, after my first talk with you, that *Faustina's double was someone who also used lemon verbena.* Any other odor you would have noticed — except your own. Faustina herself used lavender water. You told me so and I noticed it when I was with her. So the double couldn't be Faustina herself. That narrowed my search considerably. I wanted someone who looked like Faustina, someone who used lemon verbena, someone who had connections with both Maidstone and Brereton, someone who had a motive for injuring or destroying Faustina. Vining alone met all those conditions. When I entered my own library last night I caught a hint of lemon verbena. I wasn't sure which of the three was using it — Mrs. Chase, Miss Aitchison, or Vining. But Vining was the most likely since he was the only man among them and you had told me it was a man's lotion. Today, the moment he came downstairs, I noticed it again. I suppose lemon verbena was such an ingrained habit with him that he forgot to suppress it when he was impersonating the double."

"You've solved the mystery of Faustina Crayle," said Mrs. Lightfoot. "But what about the mystery of Emilie Sagée?"

Basil slowed for a sharp curve, then accelerated. "That is a mystery that we must always see through a glass, darkly . . ."

'O'

Margery Sharp is best known to her vast American public through her characters of Julia Packett, the "endearing lady of easy virtue" in THE NUTMEG TREE, *and Cluny Brown of the novel and motion picture of the same name. Miss Sharp's latest book is* THE FOOLISH GENTLEWOMAN, *a story of post-war England and Margery Sharp's third Book-of-the-Month selection in a row. Readers of "Saturday Evening Post" and "Collier's" and other national magazines need hardly be reminded, therefore, that Miss Sharp has an outstanding gift for light comedy, for "inventiveness and accurate sense of entertainment."*

Miss Sharp's short stories occasionally deal with crime and detection. We have been fortunate to discover one of her early ones which illustrates perfectly all the qualities we have mentioned. In "The Adventure of the Gent's Romeo" you will find crime and detection blended with light comedy, inventiveness, and a most accurate sense of entertainment. You will also find something else, and for this added (and deeper) quality, may we quote from William Soskin's review of THE NUTMEG TREE: *"Inherent in Miss Sharp's seemingly light story there is a shrewd study in . . . contrasting psychologies."*

On the manuscript of "The Adventure of the Gent's Romeo" the author wrote her own brief teaser: it reads, "There were 'Six Keys to Edward's Heaven' — here is the history of the first one." The "Six Keys," as you will learn, are "six author's copies of a first novel." It is with great regret that we inform you that the other "Five Keys" are unavailable for reprint — unless Miss Sharp relents, which we hope she does.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GENT'S ROMEO

by MARGERY SHARP

"So this," said Edward loudly, "is Fame."

The exaggeration was natural, and even touching: but as a matter of fact the publication of *After Birth* bore about as much relation to fame as a white rose to the Elephant and Castle. Of this, however, Mr. French was not yet aware.

Now the way of youthful genius is notoriously hard: garrets, duns, and empty beer bottles blaze the trail, guttering candles illuminate it, and from each signpost dangle the bones of a starveling masterpiece; yet in spite of everything there come moments when all these inconveniences are forgotten in a blaze of glory

and the six author's copies of a first novel burst from their wrappings. At least that is the generally accepted idea.

But to Edward French, as he hove his six copies one after the other into the empty grate, generally accepted ideas were as dust upon the wind. The gay jacket made him feel ill, the publishers' compliments were a hollow mockery — for he had six copies of his first novel and not a single friend on earth to give them to!

For the first time in years he now felt the disadvantages of being an orphan. Even his Aunt Cordelia, who had died six months before, leaving him the works of Longfellow, would have been better than no one. Or if he were still living in Birmingham, he could have presented a copy to the Alpha and Omega Club, where he had spent so many eloquent and profitable evenings; and, of course, if he had been in love with anyone, what endless possibilities of triumphant tenderness! But five weeks in Sansom Square had brought him only one acquaintance besides his landlady: the policeman at the corner of the road had once wished him good morning.

With his mouth full of cold porridge (for the time of the tragedy was nine o'clock in the morning) Edward went to the window and looked out. Yes, there he was, large and reassuring, cleaving the traffic like the Rock of Gibraltar. Would he be interested to know that the thin but distinguished young man at No. 40 had just published his first novel? Would he by any chance perceive the subtle connection between the bit at the end of Book One and the bit in the middle of Book Three? It was sad to think that he would never read that description of Westminster Bridge by night . . . because, after all, one could hardly expect policemen, even if they were one's only friend in London, to go about buying seven-and-sixpenny novels.

On the other hand, if he were *given* one. . . .

Because, after all, he *had* said good morning in a very friendly manner. . . .

And then there would only be five left.

A moment later Edward was seated at the untidy breakfast table composing an inscription suitable to a policeman whom one has known slightly since the Saturday before last. It took some time.

To my only friend in London, with the Author's compliments.

With the Author's compliments, to his only friend in London. (Bit on the maudlin side, that.)

With the Author's compliments, in memory of a fine morning.

With the Author's grateful compliments.

With the Author's compliments.

The last was undoubtedly the best, and with rising spirits Edward retrieved a copy of *After Birth* from the grate and carefully transcribed

the wording on to the flyleaf. It looked so well that he repeated the process with a second copy, then a third, after which it seemed a pity not to finish off the half-dozen.

It was not as difficult as he had anticipated to make presents to policemen in the middle of traffic: one simply thrust the parcel into their hands with a murmured "For you, constable," and jumped on to the nearest 'bus. At least that was how Edward did it, and no one (except a passing errand boy) seemed much surprised. Errand boys are notoriously ill-bred.

Shortly after nine the following morning Edward's publishers rang up advising him to get under cover at once, since a uniformed policeman had just been in demanding his private address.

"Did you give it him?" asked Edward.

"I'm afraid so. I know it's against the rules and all that, but with six foot of policeman hanging over one's desk ——" It was obviously the junior partner speaking; and he was obviously enjoying himself.

"That's quite all right," Edward assured him. "Awfully decent of you to ring me up."

"Oh, that's nothing." There was a short pause, and then the voice began again, scarcely above a whisper.

"I say, French."

"Well?"

"I hope it's nothing serious?"

"No, of course not. Nothing at all."

"Because I believe it always pays in the end to plead guilty and work on the jury's feelings. I say, French ——"

About an hour after he had finally cleared himself of the grosser forms of crime, there arrived a beautifully-monogramed invitation card from Messrs. Folliott and Pye, seeking permission to add his portrait to their gallery of distinguished surgeons; and scarcely had he completed a suitable reply (which took him the rest of the day) when his landlady knocked defiantly at the door and ushered in Constable Porson. So quickly does Fate work in a just cause.

Seen at close quarters he was even more imposing than Edward had imagined — an enormous blond young man of about twenty-four with a small mustache and bright blue eyes that even from the shadow of the helmet surveyed mankind with gentle wonder. His shoulders were broad, his reach impressive; and in one gigantic hand he bore a copy of *After Birth*. Like his host, he appeared considerably embarrassed.

"Mr. Edward French?"

Edward bowed, indicating with an awkward enough gesture his pleasure and delight. Mr. Porson indicated the novel. Edward indicated the armchair. Mr. Porson indicated that he preferred a hard one. The thing was getting ridiculous.

"It's awfully good of you," achieved Edward at last, "to come and look me up like this."

"Not at all," said Mr. Porson.

There was another short silence,

during which they both acquired and lit cigarettes. The policeman sat very squarely in his chair, knees well apart, *After Birth* grasped firmly in both hands; and presently it became apparent that he was working up to the point of speech.

"Mr. French," he began at last, "I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth and ask you why you gave me your book. An impulse, probably. I know what impulses are — I have them myself. But the fact remains that I look on it as little less than an act of Providence."

"By Jove, do you really?" said Edward, considerably excited. "Go on."

"Yes. Mr. French, as an author, it is your business to study the human heart. You know all about men and women."

Edward saw no reason for denying it — not after the bit in the middle of Book Three.

"All about — Love." His guest leaned forward impressively, marking the points with an enormous forefinger. "Mr. French, I am in such a state of mind — through Love — that I begin to wonder whether it isn't my duty to report sick. Her face, Mr. French, comes between me and the traffic: a thing I never would believe. It's come between me and a lorry in the Edgware Road, and when that happens it isn't safe. I can't sleep for thinking of her at nights, and if I do she haunts my dreams. I brood on it till I'm fairly silly, and there's no one — *no* one — that I can turn to for support. A member of the Force, Mr. French, is supposed to know most things, and generally speaking he does; but when it comes to Love — why, we're just the same as the public."

"And so," prompted Edward gently, touched to the heart by this glimpse of the man behind the uniform, "and so you've come to me?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Porson; and settling back in the chair gave himself over to the luxury of self-analysis. He was, it appeared, completely enslaved by the charms of a certain Miss Parker, employed by a discriminating management to work the main lift at the Grand Hotel Superbe. To do this she was attired in the uniform of the Blue Hussars, than which no costume could be more becoming to female beauty; and such was its range that Mr. Porson, merely passing by on the other side of the great glass doors, was transfixed forever by the fatal dart.

Through the intermediary of his brother-in-law, a master window-cleaner, he had scraped acquaintance with one of the waiters, and within a month had escorted Miss Parker once to the pictures and twice to the play. His triumph, however, was short-lived, and it was soon evident that his attentions were regarded as mere trifling, pleasant interludes in the more serious affairs of Roberts, the commissionaire, and Leroux, the resident coiffeur. They were the favorites, though odds had also been laid on the boy at the newspaper

stand and the man who worked the vacuum cleaner — the remainder of Miss Parker's leisure being devoted to a mild flirtation with the leader of the band.

"Tell me," interrupted Edward, "what does Miss Parker look like?"

"Slightly under medium height, slender build, fair hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion," replied Mr. Porson promptly. "Not that that gives you any idea, not really. She's got a way of looking at you like — like — well, I suppose it's just a way she's got and that's an end of it." He sighed deeply and fell silent, overcome by the hopelessness of life and love in general.

"And so you want my advice?" suggested Edward tactfully, when the silence seemed to have gone on long enough.

Mr. Porson roused himself.

"Not precisely — that is to say, not alone. The point, Mr. French, is this. In addition to everything else Miss Parker has brains. She's intelligent. She reads books, and so on. It's one of the things she's always had against me, that I haven't any interest in literature. But if I could introduce her to one of my friends who was a real author — one who not only reads books but writes them as well — Mr. French, is it asking too much?"

"I should think not!" cried Edward, leaping out of his chair and stalking delightedly up and down the room. "There's nothing I should like better." And indeed the situation was one which appealed to him immensely. He saw himself as the remote benevolent genius — a sort of cross between Thomas Hardy and the Fairy Queen — descending for a moment from his lonely eminence to make two lovers happy.

How wisely, how gently would he discourse to the reverent Miss Parker! In what glowing terms would he paint the virtues of the Metropolitan Police Force! Until, having joined their hands in perfect understanding (or even given the bride away at the parish church), it was time for him to slip back to the chill companionship of Fame . . . But they would never forget what he had done for them: year after year a humble Christmas card would find its way on to his mantelpiece, so that distinguished guests (such as nightly thronged his chambers) would ask in amazement for the story behind the robins; when he would smile, a little sadly, and shake his head . . .

Thus far had his flying thoughts carried him when he became conscious of Mr. Porson's voice, husky with gratitude but still eminently practical, developing the campaign. It appeared that two days later the Superbe would be given over to the Staff Fancy Ball, a magnificent affair lasting from 10 p.m. till dawn, and one to which outsiders might be invited. Mr. Porson was, of course, attending, and his plan was simply to introduce his friend, the distinguished author, to Miss Parker and leave them together for as long as possible, he himself disporting in the vicinity

with the more attractive of the other female guests.

This double attack on jealousy and literary pride could not, he thought, fail in effect; and if, in addition, Mr. French could manage to put in a word for the attractions, both material and moral, of the Police Force — why, the trick was as good as done. At this point he paused for his host's approval; and Edward, though slightly disappointed at finding everything in such good train, admitted the scheme to be very well organized. One last point, however, struck him as important.

"What," he asked thoughtfully, "will Miss Parker be dressed as?"

"Juliet," replied Mr. Porson. "She told me the last time I saw her. Out of the play, you know."

"Then you must be Romeo. No, don't argue — you must. It's the little touches like that that women appreciate." He spoke with all the authority of an author, but for a moment Mr. Porson remained unconvinced.

"You think I'm the right build?" he inquired doubtfully, heaving himself out of his chair. "Myself, I'd thought of going as a barrel. I generally go as a barrel, and last time I won the first prize."

"At a dance?"

"No, at the Swimming Gala. I see what you mean, in a way; but having the costume all ready, and after winning that prize ——"

"Nonsense!" cut in Edward firmly. "It's Romeo or nothing. You can hire the clothes at any costumer's, and what's more, I'll come with you and help."

Overcome with gratitude, Mr. Porson could hold out no longer, and with many expressions of mutual esteem they parted until the following evening.

They had agreed to meet at Piccadilly Tube Station, and for a few moments Edward, who arrived first, wondered whether he would be able to recognize his friend out of uniform. His fears were groundless: there was no mistaking that stately figure in brown plus-fours, and as he watched its slow, inevitable progress, Edward tried for a moment to analyze the elements of such authority. It lay not in the noble stride alone, nor in the stubborn set of the shoulders, but in some mysterious way pervaded the whole man, pull-over and all. Even the brown tweed cap (than which few forms of headgear have less in common with the regulation helmet) was not as other tweed caps. It had majesty.

"I hope I haven't kept you waiting," apologized Mr. Porson, bending slightly from the hips so as to bring his fair mustache level with the top of Edward's hat, "but I was delayed." He sounded so portentous that Edward, though burning with curiosity, was afraid to pursue the subject further, and all the way down Shaftesbury Avenue amused himself by wondering what on earth could delay a policeman. Nothing less, surely, than the wicked fleeing. One could not,

for instance, pursue a murderer until 5:30 precisely and go off duty when halfway up a drain.

"I've got your ticket all right," said Mr. Porson at length. "Not a separate card, I'm afraid, but Mr. Pitt's written 'and friend' on mine. I hope you don't mind?"

"Not at all," Edward assured him gratefully. "Who is Mr. Pitt?"

"Well, he's either the King of England or the headwaiter at the Superbe," explained Mr. Porson, "and nobody seems quite sure which. Least of all himself." He paused a moment and winked elaborately, thus relieving them both from any suspicion of *lèse-majesté*. "Between you and me, Miss Parker sees a great deal more of him than I would wish. Unavoidable, of course, but there it is. Quite a well set-up figure of a man, too, besides the glamor of his position."

"Rubbish!" said Edward sharply. "You're letting yourself be beaten before you start. What's the glamor of a waiter — a headwaiter, then — compared with the glamor of a policeman in — in the discharge of his duty?"

"Ah, but does she ever *see* me in the discharge of my duty? That's what I ask you. And the answer is, she does not. Whereas Mr. Pitt spends the day hobnobbing with dukes under her very nose. That sort of thing will influence a girl, look at it how you may." And not until they reached Perugini's could Edward rouse him to more than stoic resignation.

The tone of Perugini's world-famed establishment is definitely popular, and having flourished for nearly eighty years on certain well-defined lines it sees no reason for switching on to others. Skirts may have been shortened, trousers may at last have found their way into the ladies' catalogue, but the staple attractions remain unchanged. Here are no Symphonies in Lemon or designs from the Russian Ballet; Cowboy and Cavalier, Dutch Girl and Harem Lady continue to supply a never-failing demand. It was obviously the place for Edward and Mr. Porson.

"One Gent's Romeo," noted the assistant approvingly. "A very popular costume: Shakespearean, of course." He led them through a grove of Spanish Gipsies and up a broad staircase lined with suits of armor. The trying-on rooms, it appeared, were situated somewhere in the Middle Ages; and by the time they reached a vast dusty chamber at the top of the building even Edward's spirits were beginning to flag.

The Romeo visualized by Perugini was a gorgeous affair of mustard-colored satin and black velvet, brightened by a diamanté baldric and epaulets to match. With these glories went black-and-mustard striped hose, a round felt cap with a pheasant feather, red morocco boots, and several yards of cheerful scarlet silk.

"To be flung gracefully over the shoulder," explained the assistant. "*Very* handsome. Would the gentleman like to take it with him?"

"Steady on," put in Edward. "Hadn't he better try it on? It mayn't fit."

"Certainly, if you wish, but we have nothing larger in stock. This costume, sir, was worn by the late Signor Cornelli, who was very much the same build as your friend. It will be perfect — look!" And he held the doublet up under Mr. Porson's chin while Edward gazed in admiration.

"All right?" inquired Mr. Porson, sheepishly from between the dazzling epaulets.

"Magnificent," said Edward sincerely, his mind filled with vague images of titanic splendor — whales and elephants and the fabulous colorings of Aladdin's Cave.

"Then we'll take it with us," decided Mr. Porson. "Better not take any risks."

Still slightly dazzled, Edward strolled over to the window to steady his nerves with a glimpse of the gray street below, and in passing the great open wardrobe caught sight of an apparently interminable row of scarlet cloaks and pheasant feathers. There must be dozens of them, then, each complete with diamanté baldric, striped hose, and black-and-mustard slashings. He looked at his friend and thought once more of whales, dozens of whales, ploughing majestically through a sunset-colored sea. . . .

Said Mr. Porson as he walked down Shaftesbury Avenue, carrying the major portion of one Gent's Romeo, "And what are you coming as, sir?"

At which Edward, less heavily burdened with a rapier, a pair of morocco boots, and one pheasant's feather, stopped dead on the curb and admitted that he had no idea.

"I ask," proceeded Mr. Porson, "because I understand it's to be masked and if I'm to meet you in the entrance it would be helpful to have some indication. Most gentlemen," he added thoughtfully, "seem to go as either Babies ——"

"Heaven forbid!" interjected Edward.

"Or Influenza. Merely a dressing gown, if you take me, and a muffler, and perhaps a bowl of gruel."

"Make it a whisky-and-soda," said Edward, "and I don't mind if I do."

Scarcely had he adjusted the black silk mask provided by the management when Edward caught sight of his friend leaning gracefully against the ballroom door, so majestic in Mr. Perugini's finery that he felt quite proud to go up and hit him on the back.

To his amazement, the attention was calmly but quite definitely spurned.

"I beg your pardon," apologized Edward, "but for a moment I took you for Mr. Porson."

The flashing baldric heaved slightly, but without any further sign of emotion the second Romeo turned coldly away, leaving Edward uncertain whether he had been insulting an ordinary being or a peer of the realm. Nor had he wholly recovered his composure by the time Mr. Porson

himself made a stately entry from the gentleman's cloakroom.

"You don't mean to tell me — well, I'm blessed," commented Mr. Porson, when he had heard the story. "That must have been Mr. Pitt. And you say he was dressed just the same as me?"

"Exactly," confirmed Edward, surveying the noble figure before him. "Except — what have you got on your feet?"

His friend extended an enormous scarlet bedroom slipper with some complacency. "Not bad, are they? I couldn't get into those other things, try as I would, and these are just the color. You say Mr. Pitt was wearing his? How did he look?"

"Oh, rather overdressed, I thought," replied Edward tactfully. "Showy, you know."

"Huh," said Mr. Porson.

There were altogether eight Romeos at the Superbe Staff Fancy Ball, of whom four had quite evidently been to Perugini's. So the boy at the newspaper stand (who had been to the Scout's Dramatic Cupboard) stood out with striking originality in a costume adapted from Robin Hood. In spite of minor variations, however, the general effect was striking enough to attract the attention of everybody in the room — everybody, that is, except Miss Parker, who persisted in assuming that they had all come as bull-fighters.

She stood at the far end of the ballroom, straight and slender in her Juliet gown, watching the festivities with innocent enjoyment; and as they approached, Edward was struck with the justice of his friend's description. Her rather obvious prettiness, crimped fair hair, and pink mouth, left him cold. But she had a way of looking at you — a wide, childlike gaze — a melting blue glance — a cheeky street-urchin stare — that defied description and made resistance futile.

"My friend, Mr. Edward French," Mr. Porson was saying proudly. "The celebrated author of *After Birth*." And from the folds of his cloak he neatly produced the first of Edward's signed copies.

"*Well*," said Miss Parker admiringly. She raised her eyes timidly from the jacket and engulfed him in a wave of girlish rapture. "Did you really write all this?"

Scarlet as Romeo's cloak, Edward made vague affirmative noises.

"*Well*," said Miss Parker again. "George, why didn't you tell me about your friend before?"

"Oh, there's lots of things I haven't told you about yet," countered Mr. Porson airily. "Who's that pretty girl over there in the spangles?"

"With the ginger hair? I really couldn't say — kitchen staff, most likely. You'd be surprised," she added, turning to Edward, "the number of people employed in a big establishment like this. I always say it's as much as one can do to remember the First Floor and the Royal Suite."

"I've half a notion to go and ask her to dance," mused Mr. Porson. "Looks as though she could dance, doesn't she? Ankles like those ——"

"Don't mind me," said Miss Parker archly. "I'm perfectly happy where I am."

"Then I think I will, if you'll excuse me. So long, Mr. French — you know where the bar is." And turning a square back, he dived gallantly into the throng.

"And he really is a friend of yours?" marveled Miss Parker, watching his stately progress through the pierettes. "*Well!*"

"My best," replied Edward, plunging into his subject without further loss of time. "He's one of the finest men I know. *The* finest, probably. The Metropolitan Police Force, as you are probably aware, is probably the finest body of men ——"

"That's what George says," observed Miss Parker. "And they get pensions, too. But tell me, Mr. French, how do you *begin* writing a book?"

For the next half-hour Edward waged a losing battle against Miss Parker's literary tastes, the way Miss Parker had of looking at you, and the attentions of Miss Parker's innumerable admirers. He did his best, but the odds were heavy. All he could manage were a few odd phrases of general approbation slipped in between a waltz with Mr. Pitt and an appreciation of Florence Barclay. And all the while Mr. Porson and his spangled partner circled round and round them until he began to see Romeos as men have seen pink rats.

He had made some slight impression, to be sure, but would it last? Miss Parker undoubtedly thought a trifle better of Mr. Porson than she had done at the beginning of the evening, but she was still far from placing him in the same category as head-waiters or Royal Suites. Such were Edward's gloomy meditations when he felt an enormous hand descend upon his shoulder and draw him quietly into the shadow of a French window.

"I want you to do something for me, sir," came Mr. Porson's whisper; but it was an official whisper, curt and commanding. "I want you to slip out through the main door, like as though you were going for a breath of air, and get hold of the first constable you see. There's generally one on duty about fifty yards to the right."

"But why ——" began Edward.

"Never mind 'Why' for the moment, sir. Somebody spoke to me just now in error for someone else, that's all. You get hold of him as quickly as you can and tell him to come in funny-like, as though he were someone in fancy dress, so as not to alarm them. Come straight up the main stairway and along to the left, and there'll probably be a slight disturbance in Room 15. Got it?"

"Got it," said Edward.

Tingling with excitement, he strolled across the ballroom, wavered artistically towards the bar, and decided for the lounge. The night was fine

— what more natural than a few minutes' stroll on the pavement of Park Lane? Wrapping his dressing gown carefully round him, he lit a cigarette and stepped out into the cool air; and about fifty yards to the right, as Mr. Porson had predicted, he saw the lamp-light shining down on a policeman's helmet.

As briefly as possible Edward told his story, and to his infinite relief the man believed him and came. He even hurried, while Edward, forced into a trot to keep up with the long piston stride, panted out all he knew and most of what he guessed.

"Asking for trouble," commented the policeman when he heard about the fancy ball. "Draw every thief in London, a show like that will. What was Porson doing there, anyway?"

"He was invited," explained Edward. "He's dressed ——"

"As a barrel. I know, I saw him in it at the swimming gala. Fine costume it was, too. This is the place, isn't it?" And mindul of his colleague's advice to come in funny-like, he flung an arm round Edward's shoulder and advanced in a series of zigzags towards the main staircase.

"Room 15," whispered Edward, feeling like Guy Fawkes and Sherlock Holmes rolled into one. "Here it is."

For the purposes of active assistance they were unfortunately too late; but the *tableau vivant* framed in the doorway of Room 15 was sufficient to reward any but the most bloodthirsty amateur of crime. In the centre of the room lay a gentleman in evening dress, swathed about the body with several yards of scarlet silk; over by the window, Mr. Porson and Mr. Pitt had evidently just terminated an argument as to who should hold a revolver; and in the easy chair hunched a small white-faced person with fair hair, whom Edward had little difficulty in identifying as Juliet. . . .

"But how did Miss Parker come to be mixed up in it?" asked Edward two days later, Mr. Porson having spared the time for an evening call. "I left her dancing in the ballroom."

"Ah, but she saw us talking together and then slipped up after me, curious as a kitten. Gave me quite a turn, I can tell you, to see her peeping up behind that chair."

"Rather!" agreed Edward appreciatively. "Now begin at the beginning."

"Why, there's nothing hardly to tell," said Mr. Porson, preening himself a little nevertheless. "Not what *you'd* call a story. I was just standing there watching the dancing and wondering how much longer Miss Parker and Mr. Pitt were going to stay in the conservatory, when this gentleman I was telling you of came strolling out of the bar. He was in ordinary evening dress, with a mask, as it might be someone staying in the hotel. Presently he began moving in my direction, staring at me pretty hard though unobtrusive; and finally he brushed against me quite close and said 'Room 15, son,' and went on out into the hall." Mr. Porson paused dramatically; he liked a story to shape well.

"Now first I thought he might be just drunk or fooling. But he didn't look tight; and then I remembered Mr. Pitt, and how you'd made the same mistake earlier in the evening. He was still in the conservatory, you see, which made it quite natural. So it looked as though someone in Room 15 wanted Mr. Pitt, and without too much publicity. And then all at once — funny how the brain works, isn't it? — I remembered the big jewel robbery in that very hotel about six months before."

"What was that?" asked Edward.

"Theft of Lady Charlton's emeralds while she was called to the 'phone. They'd always suspected inside help, but never proved anything. It was funny, but I could see the very headlines: 'Historic Jewels Stolen from West-End Hotel,' and with no more evidence than what I've told you I knew I'd got the man. Sounds foolish, doesn't it? It's a thing you can't explain — like the instinct some men have for cards. Anyway, I found you and sent you for help — you know that part. And then I went up to Room 15.

"Would you believe it, the door wasn't even shut! There was a man in evening dress sitting on the bed reading the paper as cool as you please. And when I came in, he just glanced up once and said, 'Oh, here you are, Pitt, thank you. Everything was very satisfactory.' Just like a gentleman giving a tip, and for a moment I wondered if I were wrong after all — till I looked at what he'd given me and saw that it was a hundred-pound note. And at that very instant — maybe he had his instincts, too, for I hadn't moved or spoke since I came in — he looked at me once again and made a jump for the window. So I collared him."

"Just like that," said Edward.

"Exactly. It was easy enough, for I was the bigger man, and he had the sense not to carry firearms. But I hadn't hardly done with him when I heard a woman's scream behind me and there was Mr. Pitt and his revolver blocking up the doorway. Funny, I never noticed Miss Parker till it was all over — yet she'd been there all the time, and in a manner of speaking brought Mr. Pitt along. He'd seen her on the stairs and followed. So then I had to collar *him*. And that," finished Mr. Porson, "is about all."

"And quite enough, too, for one evening," observed his host ruminatively. If life were going to be so prodigal of incident he would have to revise his theory of the novel. "But what had Mr. Pitt done to deserve a hundred pounds? It was easy enough to get into the place, wasn't it?"

"In *and* out," agreed Mr. Porson. "But Mr. Pitt, he so to speak greased the wheels. He knew which millionairesses kept their jewels in their rooms and which gave them to the manager. He likewise saw that the hotel detective would be having a drink at the right time. Oh, there's a heap of ways you can help a burglar from the inside . . . But he did for

himself in the end, just as you saw for yourself.

"He wouldn't let his pal slip him the money in the ballroom, where nothing would have been noticed; oh, no, he wanted to see him alone first — wanted to talk things over. Blackmail it was, if you ask me, what with that revolver . . . Anyway, first the other man said he shouldn't, then he got the wind up and said he would — that was when he came down to the ballroom and gave me the message. It's no use working with a man you can't trust. There's a moral in everything, as I told Miss Parker."

"Oh, so you noticed Miss Parker in time to tell her that," observed his host. "I wondered when she was going to come on the scene again."

"Well, she's on the scene for good, now," said Mr. Porson complacently. "Do you like it with or without icing?"

"Like what?" asked Edward.

"Wedding cake," said Mr. Porson.

It was considerably later in the evening when Edward inquired of his friend what particular passage in *After Birth* had suggested his first visit.

"Why, no particular passage," replied Mr. Porson in some surprise.

"No, but I just wondered. There's a bit in the middle of Book Three —"

"Well, of course, I haven't *read* the book," began the policeman.

"Then how did you know about my knowing all about men and women — the human heart — Love?"

"Why, I thought all authors did," said Mr. Porson simply.

"I never thought of that," said Edward.

SPECIAL PRIZE FOR BEST TOUR DE FORCE

In June 1945 Jack Moffitt, the well-known Hollywood screen writer (who has become even better known in recent investigative days) submitted a manuscript titled "The Necklace," which proved to be a veritable tour de force. Mr. Moffitt's tale was a continuation of de Maupassant's famous short story of the same name. We published Mr. Moffitt's criminous sequel in the February 1946 issue of EQMM, and as your Editor had expected, the fans loved it. We had already announced that "The Necklace" would be, Mr. Moffitt willing, the first of a series of literary sequels in which Mr. Moffitt would attempt to finish such celebrated unfinished stories as Frank R. Stockton's "The Lady, or the Tiger?" The truth can now be told that we had almost no faith at all in Jack Moffitt's ability to unriddle the great Stockton enigma. "The Lady, or the Tiger?" first appeared in book form 'way back in 1884 and for more than sixty years it has completely baffled the most astute readers. No one could answer the question in the last sentence of the story: "And so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the open door, — the lady, or the tiger?"

Well, Mr. Moffitt took his time — but he finally worked a literary miracle. He devised a solution that not only told who came out of the open door — the lady or the tiger — but presented his answer in so satisfying a manner that we are sure Frank R. Stockton himself, if he were alive, would be the first to applaud Mr. Moffitt's ingenuity. (Incidentally, Mr. Stockton wrote a sequel to his own riddle. In his book titled THE CHRISTMAS WRECK AND OTHER STORIES, *1886, you will find a story called "The Discourager of Hesitancy." Mr. Stockton actually subtitled the story "A Continuation of 'The Lady, or the Tiger?' " — but with diabolical tongue in cheek Mr. Stockton ended his sequel with an equally impossible situation, asking the reader this time to decide which of two ladies a certain Prince chose, the one who smiled or the one who frowned; and only if the reader could answer this second conundrum would Stockton tell which came out of the open door, the lady or the tiger.)*

It is only fair, in your Editor's opinion, to pass one more critical judgment on Mr. Moffitt's second tour de force. "The Lady and the Tiger" is not, we honestly believe, the mere answer to an old riddle. It is a full-blooded, three-dimensional short story in its own right. It depicts a fascinating historical period with both imagination and accuracy, and its final paragraph is not only a stunning climax (one which your Editor read with

complete surprise) *but it imparts to the story a larger meaning than most of you, we are certain, will suspect.*

Mr. Moffitt is now working on a third sequel — the answer to Cleveland Moffett's THE MYSTERIOUS CARD. *We no longer have any doubts: in due course Mr. Moffitt will show his hand — and we'll bet our bottom editorial chip it will be a royal flush!*

THE LADY AND THE TIGER

by JACK MOFFITT

You may find it faintly ridiculous that I, Charles Sevier, a stout and fortyish researcher working in Rome at the Vatican Library, should be in love with a woman who has been dead two thousand years.

This strange infatuation was brought about by the most prosaic of instruments — Frank R. Stockton's short story, "The Lady, or the Tiger?" which was published in 1884, sixteen years before my birth.

During the intervening years I doubt if there has been a single literate American who has not attempted to answer the riddle, which Mr. Stockton propounded in words which I have taken the liberty to abridge:

"In olden times there lived a semi-barbaric king, whose ideas, though polished and sharpened by the progressiveness of distant Latin neighbors, were still large, florid and untrammeled.

"When one of his male subjects was accused of a crime, public notice was given that on an appointed day, the man's fate would be decided in the King's Arena. Here the prisoner faced two doors, exactly alike and side by side. It was the obligation of the person on trial to open one of these doors. He was subject to no guidance or influence. He could open either he pleased.

"If he opened one, there came out a hungry tiger.

"But if he opened the other, there came forth a lady, the most suitable to his years and station that the King could select from among his subjects, and to this lady he was immediately married, amid appropriate ceremonies.

"Sometimes the tiger was behind one door, sometimes the other. Chance was the only arbiter.

"Now the ruler had a daughter as blooming as his most florid fancies, and with a soul as fervent and imperious as his own. As is usual, in such cases, she was the apple of his eye, and was loved by him above all humanity. But among the King's courtiers was a young man who was handsome and brave to a degree unsurpassed in all this kingdom, and the princess loved him with an ardo

that had enough of barbarism in it to make it exceedingly warm and strong.

"This love affair moved on happily for many months, until one day the King happened to discover its existence. He did not hesitate nor waver. The youth was immediately cast into prison, and a day was appointed for his trial in the King's Arena.

"As the youth advanced toward the doors, his eyes were fixed upon the princess, who sat to the right of her father. Had it not been for the barbarism in her nature it is probable she would not have been there. But her intense and fervid soul would not allow her to be absent.

"Possessed of power, influence and force of character, she had succeeded in doing what no other person had ever done — she had managed to learn the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the rooms was the tiger, and in which the lady.

"She also knew who the lady was — and she hated her. The girl was lovely, but she had dared to raise her eyes to the loved one of the princess. With all the savagery transmitted to her through long lines of barbaric ancestors, the King's daughter hated the woman who blushed and waited behind that silent door.

"She trembled as her lover turned and looked at her. His eye met hers as she sat there, with features paler and whiter than any in the vast ocean of anxious faces that surrounded her. And he saw instantly that she knew behind which door crouched the tiger, and behind which stood the lady.

"He had expected her to know it.

"Then his quick and anxious glance asked the question: 'Which?' It was as plain to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash; it must be answered in another.

"Her right arm lay on the cushioned parapet before her. She raised her hand and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was fixed on the arena.

"He turned, and with a firm and rapid step, walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was fixed immovable upon that man.

"Without the slightest hesitation, he went to the door on the right and opened it.

"Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady?"

I had heard that Stockton had obtained the idea for his story from a Roman Catholic antiquarian in the city of Rome; so it is small wonder that I determined to solve the riddle when, after several years as a researcher in the Library of Congress, I was sent to introduce a modern cataloguing system in the Vatican Archives. The immediate purpose of my employment was to search for a long-lost letter supposed to have been written by Pontius Pilate. But I had plenty of time for private research.

After considerable study I decided

that Stockton's king could have been none other than Herod Antipas, who ruled Judea under the supervision of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. He was the only eastern monarch who owned an arena, which his father had built after the Roman pattern, but he also had a daughter — or rather a step-daughter — of whom he was unnaturally and inordinately infatuated.

This girl was the Princess Salome.

The logic fitted. I felt that I had identified two of the characters in Stockton's story. But it was not until I found the cracked and yellowed parchment, covered with Hebrew characters and written in a sprawling, girlish hand, that I was certain of it. For this letter was written by the girl who had waited behind the second door.

To the High Priest, Caiphas; from his daughter, Miriam.

Beloved Father,

How can I tell you how much I love you? I know that you must be ashamed of me because all Jerusalem now knows that I love the Greek youth, Jason. I know you will feel humiliated — almost defiled — to see me married to him, by a pagan ritual, before all the people in the King's arena tomorrow. Yet I know that even now, despite your sorrow and your humiliation, you are praying to our one true God to defend Jason and asking the Lord to lead him to the door behind which I will be waiting.

I know that you are doing this, in spite of your conviction that Jason is shallow and ambitious — one of those youths who came swaggering out of Alexandria to seek his fortune at the court of Herod. And I feel that you are praying for Jason, even though you dislike him, because you abominate murder and because you have always been a just and merciful man.

Oh, dear! It is dreadful to be young! It seems odd to remember that I didn't want to go with you to Herod's palace on that day last autumn — when I first met Jason. For weeks I'd heard you and Grandfather discussing the arrogance of Pontius Pilate who had displayed the eagles of his legions on the fortress of Antonia, overlooking the Temple courtyard. Of course, I'd been taught to regard graven images as sacrilegious, but I wondered why older people made such a fuss about things.

When you decided that the family should ask Herod to intercede, I pretended to have a headache. But I didn't fool you. You said the visit would seem more tactful and more friendly if the whole family went along. I was amused to see, when we arrived at the palace, that your strategy had not fooled Herod any more than mine had fooled you. His chamberlain led you and Grandfather away to the King's audience chamber, while the rest of us were sent to wait for you in one of the private courtyards.

As soon as my little brothers saw the fountain splashing in the center of the palace, they rushed toward it squealing and laughing.

I tried to get them interested in the pictures in the floor of the courtyard. They were mosaics showing the fall of Troy. I told as much of the Pagan story as I thought was good for them.

But you know Nathan. He can't sit still for more than a minute.

"Look!" he shouted, "I'll bet I can jump all around this place and never put my foot on anything but the women!"

This wasn't easy. There were many more warriors in the mosaic floor than there were goddesses. Nathan missed on the third jump. But he had started a game. Soon the whole place was filled with the hopping children, wobbling and tottering as they leaped from Minerva to Aphrodite to Helen, and so on. I know it was childish, but it really was fun. So, just to keep them quiet, I pulled up my dress above my knees and joined in.

And then I heard someone laughing.

Dearest heavens! I could have died! A man had entered the courtyard — a tall, lithe man wearing sandals of silver leather and a tunic and cloak of green silk.

He laughed and said, "Who are you?"

You can imagine how confused I was as I dropped my skirts and tried to brush the hair out of my eyes. It was too awful for a grown-up woman to be caught like this by a member of the court, playing a ridiculous childish game. After all, I am fourteen years old.

"Who are you?" he repeated, coming toward me. "Surely you must have a name — is it Daphne? Or Thetis? Are you a dryad? Or a nymph?"

I was afraid the stranger might laugh at me when I told him who I was. But he didn't. He bowed and replied courteously.

"You must come with me, Miriam," he said. "I have been commanded to bring you to the princess."

I wasn't so sure I should go. But the young man kept laughing and assuring us that he was repeating a royal order — until I finally let him lead me away through the maze of splendid corridors.

I couldn't find anything to say as I walked beside him, listening to his easy conversation. He told me that his name was Jason and that he had lived in Rome and Alexandria. He was the most interesting man I had ever met.

Finally, we came to a larger courtyard, where Salome idled beneath a pinkish awning, surrounded by many courtiers. Youths and maidens from all over the world were there — Greeks and Arabians and officers from the Roman garrison, and even a number of young Jews — though these were unlike any Jews I had seen before. Their cheeks were shaved and they wore Greek or Roman clothing.

Salome was a surprise. She didn't look at all like the kind of girl who could have caused the death of the young preacher whom the country people called the Baptist. She wore no veils or oriental draperies. Her gown was simple and Grecian, with

the skirt folded into many soft pleats that concealed but outlined her small and doll-like figure. I had seen her mother, Herodias, in a procession once, and I had expected the daughter to have the same stately figure and proud eyes.

But Salome was a kitten. She had a little heart-shaped face and large and limpid brown eyes and she had learned how to use them.

"You are late, Jason," she said reproachfully, "our treasure hunt is over. Only you have returned empty-handed."

"You are wrong, Princess," said Jason, leading me forward, "you told me to bring you a Hebrew Diana — and I have."

"This is ridiculous!" Salome's pink small lips were pouting. "You knew I meant a statue."

"Did you, Princess? How could you? You know the Hebrews have made no images since the days of the Golden Calf. But it pleases you to demand the impossible of me."

"If I do, it is because you think you are so clever! Right now you feel quite proud of yourself!"

"Proud, yes. But not conceited." I felt my face burning as he held up my hand and slowly turned me around. "Praxiteles himself would be proud of the golden girl that I have brought."

"All you Greeks seem to think of gold in connection with women!" The milk-white Salome seemed to resent my olive skin. "To call this little thing a Diana is ridiculous."

"Let me go!" I struggled to free my wrist. "I despise every one of you!"

"No!" Jason's strong hands gripped my elbows as he lifted me up on a bench. "I didn't bring you here to be insulted! We'll show this princess that her taste is as bad as her manners! Hold your head up — you are the High Priest's daughter — you are as good as any of them!"

His voice was harsh, as though he were fighting a duel in which I was his weapon. I was trembling and overwrought, but I held up my head and tried to stare defiantly back at Salome, even though I was blinking back the tears.

"Observe the slender strength of her neck line!" he cried, as he snatched up a silver bow from the loot of the treasure hunt. "And have you noticed the supple gracefulness of her figure? Diana has come to life again!"

He fitted an arrow to the bow and placed it in my hands. The arrow was aimed straight at Salome. But she didn't flinch. There was a brooding hatefulness in her eyes.

"There!" said Jason, stepping back as I held the pose. "Is she not even more lovely than Diana? Can any of you say that the Diana of Epheseus has half her beauty? Answer me!"

"Well, it theems to me —" lisped the Greek called Philo, with a nervous glance at Salome.

"I'm not asking Greeks!" snapped Jason. "I am asking the Romans! What do you say, Galba?"

It was clever of him. The Romans

loved to show their disdainful independence of Herod's provincial entourage. A slow grin spread over the youthful face of Galba. He passed his big hand over his close-cropped hair.

"By Jupiter! You're right," he said. "I have wasted incense before the statue of Epheseus, but I'd sacrifice my very sword and armor for the Diana we have here!"

All the other Roman officers were quick to agree with him. The courtiers chimed in too. I heard myself praised and complimented in a dozen accents, and my skin tingled with pleasure, just as it had flinched and trembled a few minutes before. It was glorious to be defended and admired.

And then I heard King Herod's smooth chuckle and saw him coming across the courtyard, followed by you and Grandfather.

"By Aphrodite!" he said. "Jason, it seems that you have found a jewel in my threadbare little country. I am very pleased."

I don't remember the rest of that day very clearly. All I remember is the horrible trip home. Grandfather Annas said that I had done something monstrous. It was a shameful thing for the daughter of the High Priest to pose as a pagan goddess before a throng of infidels.

I had little appetite for the dinner old Anna kept urging me to eat. She just can't forget that I no longer need a nurse. I went up on the roof and gazed out through the twilight toward the Mount of Olives. A great sense of poignancy welled up in me. I felt so lonely that it hurt. Then I heard you behind me.

"My dear," you said, "I know it is hard for you to believe but once, a long, long time ago, I was young too. I try to remember those times."

"Yes, Father," I replied looking out across the mystic Valley of Kidron.

You crossed the floor and stroked my hair. "We must have patience, Miriam," you said, "the heroes of our nation have always been men of the spirit — men who combined courage with inspiration. In our bitterest days they come to us — these men who live gloriously close to God. There have always been such men."

"Where are they now?" I asked.

"I do not know, child," you answered musingly. "But people tell of certain men in Galilee — there is the oldtime ring of greatness in much that I have heard of them."

Before you could go on, there was a pounding at the door and a voice: "Open in King Herod's name!"

I think, for all your dignity, Father, you were as frightened as I was as we stood, close together in the passage, and heard the officer tell us that I was to become a lady-in-waiting to Salome, and go with the court to Herod's winter palace at Tiberias.

No child knows how much it loves a parent until the time comes to leave home. Do you remember how melancholy the first autumn rains were when you took me to the Gennot Gate to join the royal caravan?

The trip was a lonely one. None of the women paid any attention to me. And I'd seen nothing of Jason. Shortly before dawn on the last day, I heard one of the camel men exclaim: "Tiberias!" and I poked my head through the curtains to get my first look at our destination.

It was a strange and wonderful sight that lay spread out before us in the fresh washed air of the morning. The sun was just breaking through the clouds beyond the solemn dome of Mount Tabor and the light flashed back from the Sea of Galilee — really only a large lake — as though from a silver shield.

As I watched, there was a thunder of hoofs and a chariot swept past — a chariot drawn by four deep-chested, black-maned Arabians. Jason held the reins. He wore a tight tunic of orange-colored leather and an orange cape streamed back from his shoulders. He was a flame flashing down from the hills upon the black city of Tiberias.

Later, I was glad to see that Herod's palace wasn't so gloomy once you were inside. The rooms were bright with rich hangings and imported marbles. I was given a pretty little chamber at one end of the women's building. The King, himself, came with his royal housekeeper to see that I was comfortable. My only worry was that the balcony window could be reached from a nearby cedar. But, of course, I didn't complain. The King might have thought I was silly.

Some of the dresses that had been provided for me were positively indecent. You could see right through them. The others made of heavier materials had their skirts split too far above the knee. I was glad old Anna had taught me to sew, and that I'd brought my needle kit. With a little work I could make some of them look modest.

I had plenty of time. Neither Salome nor the Queen ever sent for me. Day after day I had nothing to do except work on my dresses and try new ways of fixing my hair.

Some weeks later I found Jason seated beside me at the first of the King's banquets. I suppose I shouldn't say "seated." The guests reclined on long couches placed by the banquet table. Jason lounged by my side. I wasn't used to this fashion and was embarrassed.

But Jason made me feel at ease. He was smiling and very respectful. Even after the seventh course, when the wine was flowing much too freely and the party was getting a good deal worse than rowdy, he drank sparingly and never once touched me.

Salome didn't drink much either. She reclined across the room from us, between her mother and stepfather. I felt a little disloyal and unpatriotic for noticing that the King was getting tipsy. He laughed too loud and kept whispering things into the Princess's ear.

I would have thought that the Queen might have protected her daughter, but Herodias ignored her husband and kept her eyes fixed coldly on the entertainers, giving no

encouragement to the suggestive dancers and their off-color songs. Though a member of the same mongrel clan as Herod, she conducted herself with the calm dignity of a Jewish matron.

Time and again I saw Salome's brown eyes look appealingly across the room to Jason. She seemed to envy us. And in spite of the way she'd neglected me, I felt sorry for her.

"Never feel sorry for a beautiful woman," replied Jason, when I mentioned this to him. "They know how to look out for themselves."

"My! Haven't you grown sophisticated and cynical!" I tried to speak mockingly, like one of the court ladies.

He turned to me and said, "I was born a slave but I might have been a prince — one of the rulers of the Roman world — if it hadn't been for a woman even more beautiful than Salome."

"A slave! You are teasing me! I don't believe it!"

"Even though I was born a slave," he said, "I am not a complete impostor. My father was a nobleman. He served on Marc Antony's flagship at the Battle of Actium."

"I don't care who you are, Jason — you don't have to tell me!"

He drank wine and stared morosely toward Salome. "My father became a slave and I was born in slavery because of the vanity of a woman. There was no reason for Cleopatra to be in that battle. Marc Antony begged her to stay ashore. But she was very brave as long as the enemy galleys were on the other side of the horizon and she knew she looked very pretty in her armor. She wanted to be a sea queen and inspire the men!"

Jason spat upon the pavement and exclaimed, "To think that such vanity could have changed the fate of the world! At the height of the battle Cleopatra's ships turned and ran — and do you know why they ran?"

"I have heard that it was because Octavius who opposed her used his catapults to throw great glass globes filled with serpents and that when the globes broke on Cleopatra's decks, she became terrorized of the serpents —"

"That's not the real reason. Cleopatra wasn't afraid of snakes. She deserted Antony because she suddenly decided that it would be safer to win Octavius with her charms than to meet him in battle. And because of her cowardice, Marc Antony killed himself and my father was captured and reduced to slavery. Octavius forced him to become a gladiator."

He stopped abruptly as though he'd decided that he had talked enough. So this was the background of this seemingly gay man. He was the son of a slave and a gladiator.

Herodias was following her drunken husband from the room and Salome was picking her way among the sodden revelers toward the great arch that led to the moonlit gardens. She paused on the threshold and looked back toward us. And for the first time she was smiling.

"It is getting late," Jason told me.

"You had better go to your room."

There was nothing to do but obey him.

After that it became apparent that the King had ordered Jason to be my escort at all court functions. But he didn't obey very often. It was exasperating to have him send an excuse, accompanied by some rich present, at the last moment.

Once the young people got up an excursion, with a picnic lunch and chariots, to hear a country preacher who addressed a great multitude on Mount Tabor. This preacher was quite the rage. The people told marvelous tales about him and even the court circle regarded him as a new sensation. I wondered if he was one of the men of Galilee whom you had mentioned. But I never found out. Jason didn't invite me, so I stayed with Salome and Herod and Herodias. After the scandal about the Baptist, they weren't much interested in country preachers.

Some weeks later, when the moon was waning, Herod gave an elaborate fête in the palace gardens. The grounds were illuminated by Greek fire thrown into the waters of the fountains. The floating flames transformed the black basins into gigantic lamps, and in this flickering glare Italian contortionists and acrobats and tight-rope walkers performed.

At first I was shocked by their nakedness. But Jason, seated beside me in the shadows, said that instead of scorning the poor mountebanks, I should pity them. For all we knew, he said, these boys and girls might be the children of aristocrats, or even of the Emperor. In Rome, he told me, unwanted children were left out in the hills for the wolves to eat and sometimes these abandoned creatures were found by human wolves — vagabonds and criminals who took them home and trained them for strange and evil callings.

"I can't understand your world," I said. "It is a terrible place! No Jewish mother could abandon her babies to such a life. No matter how low she had fallen."

"I know," he whispered. "My mother couldn't leave me out on the hill either — even though she tried to. It might have been better if she had."

Somehow I knew that I must comfort this man in his terrible gnawing misery. It was what God had put me in the world for. I put my hands on his cheeks and kissed him.

Then he was on his feet, pulling me up to him. His strong arm was around me as he led me into the shadows. He was returning my kiss — on my lips, my throat, my shoulders — and his kisses were fierce and hard.

"Darling, oh, my darling!" I cried, clinging to him. "You needn't be so fierce — so hurried — I will never run away from you — never!"

He paused and looked at me, and his arms were a tight circle around my body.

"Don't you see?" I said. "You need never be lonely again, ever — it doesn't matter what you've been —"

"You're wrong! It's the only thing that matters!" His arms grew slack and his voice was bitter. "I started as a piece of human garbage — left out on a Roman junk pile — and all my life has been a struggle to keep from going back there."

The fierceness had gone out of him. He sank to the ground with his face turned toward the distant fountains, where the children's bodies glittered above the flickering fire.

"I never knew my mother," his words came moodily. "I hardly knew my father. The only clear memory I have of him is of one night — when I must have been about twelve. I was seated beside him at a great banquet in the barracks of the gladiators. The air was foul with the fumes of torches and there was a great deal of noise.

"Most of the gladiators were roaring drunk; guzzling liquor and gorging themselves until they vomited — trying to forget that they might die the next day. Others scarcely touched the heaping tables, because they hoped to be more fit in the arena. Some, too stupid or calloused to care what happened, tumbled on the floor with the slave women provided for their convenience.

"My father sat at a small table with an older gladiator named Longinus — a man whose life my father once had spared in the arena. They kept me on the bench between them.

"As the night wore on, he placed his hand behind my head and forced me to look at the hoggish couples who wallowed on the floor. 'Look, my son,' he said, with a mirthless smile. 'Look and see how you were created! Your mother was just such a drab as these!'

"I remember that I began to cry. And people stopped to stare at us. A child was the one thing they didn't expect to see at a gladiators' banquet. Longinus growled to my father to shut up. The scene was horrible.

"But my father continued in a low, intense voice. 'I am telling the boy this so that he may remember his destiny when I am gone! I didn't know his mother — I couldn't have told her from any of the other slatterns. The one time I embraced her, I was drunk. But, by the Gods, she remembered me! I shall never forget the dumb look that was on her face when she came to the barracks with her baby. I saw adoration there, not for me, but for the child — for you, son!'

"He told me that my mother had left me out on the hill, as she had left her previous children. But something nagged at her stupid mind and told her that she could not let the child of a prince die that way. So she went back to the hill and brought me to my father.

"And as he held me in his arms, my father felt that the ignorant trull was right. She had inspired him.

"His thick-skinned sword-hand gripped my shoulder as he told me all this and he said, 'I can only find freedom through you, my son! My blood in you can be a prince again! And this I demand of you,

that no matter what happens — whether I live or die — that you shall fight by every method to reclaim our lost greatness!' "

Jason repeated his father's words in a voice that was low but excited, the tone he always used when he spoke of how important he might have been. Now his voice went flat.

"My father died the next day. He had been matched against Longinus. It was an honest fight. It had to be, or both men would have been thrown to the lions. Suddenly, though he had suffered no wound, my father collapsed upon the sand. I guess his heart gave out, after the long years of fighting. As I watched, his feeble arm went up in the gesture that asked for mercy. He wanted to live because of me.

"Longinus looked toward the Emperor. But Tiberius reached out a brawny arm and pointed his thumb — down.

"I saw the pleading look on Longinus' face. He hesitated. There were tears on his cheeks. The arena attendants were running forward to split my father's skull with mallets — the death reserved for a coward.

"Longinus' sword flashed down."

Jason had finished his story. The last of the flaming fountains flickered into darkness. We heard Herod ordering the servants to light the torches. I held Jason close and tried to comfort him. But when the flares were ignited, he moved away.

A few days later he was my escort when Herod took the court to his race course outside the city. Now he seemed to be trying to forget everything he had confided. His robes were rich and perfect. His eyebrows had been thinned and his smile was aloof and distant as he glanced toward the royal box, where Salome sat beside her stepfather.

In each race the colors of the charioteers were the same — white, red, blue, and green. Jason explained that these identified the four great racing syndicates in Rome. Herod favored the blue because that was the faction of the reigning emperor.

"I want to bet on the whites," I told Jason.

"Why?" he asked. "The blue is the best bet, but if you want a good long shot, choose the red. It is an exciting color."

"But the whites are your horses!" I said. "I saw you drive them into the city."

His face clouded as he replied, "They are not my horses!" He spoke with undue vehemence. But I continued to smile at him. I knew what I had seen.

"Look, Miriam!" he cajoled. "The white hasn't a chance! They are older than the others, and the horse on the inside trace has a bowed tendon."

"Nevertheless, I want to bet on them!"

"All right," he shrugged. "At least, you'll get good odds."

Perhaps I imagined it, but as the chariots paraded past, I thought a slight signal passed from Jason to the charioteer in white.

I know you don't know much about racing, Father, so I'll try to explain to you. The two center horses are harnessed to the tongue of the chariot, while the outside animals run in leather shafts called traces. On the white chariot the outside horse was in a long trace so that he ran far out from his teammates. He wasn't pulling, he was running free and independently. And his long trace made a leather barrier across the track so that no other chariot could pass.

It was the first time this trick had been seen in Palestine. The shouts from the grandstands were deafening. At first, people thought there had been an accident and that the outside horse had broken his harness. But soon the air was filled with the excited frenzy of those who had backed the white and the curses of those who had bet on the other colors. Then everybody forgot money in their amazement at the skill of the thing. The outside horse swept around the track, keeping close to the outside railing — and the other chariots didn't try to pass for fear of getting entangled and turned over.

Of course, the white won! I turned excitedly to Jason.

"These provincial drivers are amateurs," he shrugged scornfully. "If this race had been run in Rome all the chariots would have had long traces. The green would have run into the white so that the blue could get through. Afterwards the drivers would have shared in the winning purse — and the Emperor's favor."

"But what of the drivers? They wear the ends of the reins wrapped around their bodies — wouldn't such crack-ups be dangerous?"

"Of course," he replied indifferently. "If they were quick, they might cut themselves free with their daggers — or they might be killed. That's the chance you take in Rome."

The odds had been twenty-to-one. I won almost fifty silver shekels, even after the bookmaker had taken his commission.

I soon discovered that, even at Herod's court, a girl can have many friends after she's won fifty shekels. It was astonishing how many of the court ladies were short on spending money. They came to me for little loans — which they never paid back; and by way of compensation, they included me in their conversation, most of which was catty — if not positively evil. They seldom came right out and said anything vicious. But they were full of hints and innuendos. According to them, the King was in love with Salome.

"And, my dear, his interest isn't entirely fatherly," one of them giggled.

I didn't like to hear this, even though I felt it might be true. The King's attitude toward Salome was anything but decorous. Still, the thing they hinted at was perfectly monstrous — and I doubted if even Herod, who had defied the Law by taking his brother's wife, would pile incest on incest by now making love to his stepdaughter.

"Whatever the King may lack," I said, "He is still our King — and the only protection we have from the Romans. And, as long as we are members of his household, we owe him our loyalty and our patriotism."

"Listen to her silly preaching!" laughed an Athenian girl named Enid. "Of all people! If Herod wasn't in love with Salome, little Miriam wouldn't be here!"

I didn't like this Enid. She had a long jaw that kept her from being pretty, so she tried to attract attention to her figure. To make sure of this, she walked with her hips thrust out in a most preposterous and vulgar way. She had borrowed more from me than the others. Maybe that was why she was always giving me digs.

"What do you mean?" I flared.

"Oh, please, Miriam!" She glanced over her shoulder at her hips with an air of exaggerated patience and languor. "You of all people shouldn't be naive! Don't you realize that the King brought you here to keep Jason away from Salome?"

"You are absolutely insane!" I retorted. "I never heard of anything so stupid! The King is the King! If he doesn't like Jason, he can send him away!"

"What a dull little thing you are! Herod isn't rude to one who's been favored by Pontius Pilate!"

"But how do I fit into his plans?"

"Darling, are you actually asking me to tell you? I was hoping we could be more delicate. Why do you think the King gave you this lovely room with a window — so accessible from the gardens?"

"Get out!" My face was flaming. "Get out! I won't answer your filthy accusations! I never want to see any of you again!"

Enid strutted toward the door, followed by the others. Their steps were insolent and leisurely.

"All right, we'll go, my dear! There's no need to be shrill. After all, it isn't our fault that the King's plan miscarried — and that the Greek prefers Salome. He never goes near you except when he is commanded, and even then he scarcely dares speak — he's so afraid of Salome. No wonder you're jealous!"

When they were gone I threw myself on the couch and cried. I wished I could go back home to Jerusalem. I longed for a life that was clean and decent. The court and everyone in it was hateful. I wanted you, father. I wanted to crawl in your lap, like a little girl, and to forget everything.

But that afternoon we were ordered to accompany the King to the famous mineral hot baths, south of the city.

I sent word that I was too ill to go to the baths. But they refused to accept my excuses. Queen Herodias herself came to persuade me. Her attitude was almost motherly, and she was so serene and dignified that it was hard to argue with her. She said the baths were good for all sorts of ailments and were bound to make me feel better. Furthermore, she said

that the King had sent her to tell me that Jason was waiting. I wondered if she knew that she and I were both pawns in his love game. But I didn't dare ask. I was too discouraged to do anything but submit. I let her take my hand and lead me out to Jason's chariot.

He was driving the Arabians and he looked very handsome. At once he began his amiable chatter.

"Please," I said. "There is no need to be charming. I know that you are with me only because of the King's orders."

His look was pained. "Miriam, you don't understand —"

"I think I do. Your father was a slave and you are a slave — a slave to your ambitions."

I wanted to hurt him. The anger flushed up behind his sunburn. He lashed the horses and the chariot spun forward ahead of the rest of the procession. He didn't draw rein until we had reached the baths.

"Miriam," he said. "You have to believe me!"

"Why should I? I know that you have lied to me. You even told me that these horses weren't yours!"

"In a way, they aren't," he said. "These horses were the property of the White Syndicate. I took them from Rome with me when I retired from racing."

"You stole those horses?" I made my voice scornful. "You *are* dishonest — and more foolhardy than your reckless nature seems capable of being."

"Well, why not!" he exclaimed. "They're my luck! Longinus apprenticed me to a charioteer after my father died, and I won two hundred and thirty-nine victories with these horses in the Circus Maximus. They made me a millionaire!"

"But you are not satisfied with being a millionaire! You must have the love of a princess, even though you have to share that love with her stepfather! You are as evil as they are!"

He restrained me as I started to leave the chariot.

"Please, Miriam!" he begged. "I know you have good reason to be angry. But doesn't the fact that I let my horses win for you mean anything? I had planned to keep that trick up my sleeve."

"I don't doubt it! And I still don't know why you became so generous — I don't want your pity! And I don't want your favors!" I flung myself out of the chariot.

The rest of the royal procession was driving up just then. Salome looked hatefully at me and even the Queen seemed irritated. But Herod was smiling and bland. We went into the baths.

I was relieved to see that the men's and women's quarters were separate. I hadn't known what to expect. As soon as we were in the women's section, Salome and the others threw their clothes off. I found a dark spot in a corner of the steam room and tried to be inconspicuous. The Queen had a pitcher of wine brought to her.

It was the first time I had seen her drink. She explained that she did this to increase her perspiration. After a while she and her favorites played ball with a sphere stuffed with feathers. They caught it with their right hands and threw it with their left. Soon the Queen and an Abysinian girl grabbed for the ball at the same time, and began to wrestle for it.

I clutched a towel around my self and tried to stay out of their way, as they grunted and strained in their efforts to throw each other. But they kept bumping into me and I had the feeling that these accidents were deliberate.

Finally I got away — only to face new tormenters. Salome and her girls were rushing around the room, rolling light metal hoops. I did my best to avoid them. But inevitably, Salome ran her hoop across my feet.

"Excuse me!" she would cry mockingly — then hit me with the stick she used to guide the hoop. "Oh, I'm sorry!" she would laugh.

The other girls were quick to take up the game. No matter where I went, they came toward me screeching, "You clumsy slattern! Get out of our way!"

I was so angry I forgot I didn't have any clothes on. I wanted to hit Salome and pull her hair and throw her on the pavement — even if the other girls all fought on her side. I knew I would be punished, but I didn't care. You can endure just so much. I wrested the stick from her hand and aimed a blow at her.

But before it could land, the other girls surrounded me and with shrieks and shouts, bore me through the great bronze doors to the plunge. They threw me in and leaped in after me. The water was hot. It smelled of sulphur and had a bitter, salty taste. I was ducked several times, then suddenly they let me alone and I crawled out and got dressed. The others, by now, were splashing in the showers or being massaged by the serving women. I slipped out of the building, without waiting for this.

A peasant woman with some donkeys was passing. I asked her to take me back to Tiberias. The road was dusty and the donkeys slow.

It wasn't long before my skin started itching and my eyes watering. From my sandals to my headband, I was feverish. I felt so ill I hardly noticed that a chariot was overtaking us. Jason swung the horses across the path of the donkeys.

"Get down!" he shouted. "Get down, you little fool!"

He was out of the chariot, reaching strong hands up to me.

"You poor little thing, I know what they did to you at the baths —"

"Don't touch me!" One of his arms was beneath my knees, the other around my shoulders. He carried me toward a thicket at the side of the road. The bewildered peasant woman made no effort to stop him. Beneath the shadows of gnarled olive trees the air was close and heavy with the fragrance of blossoming almonds. I could hardly breathe.

"Take off your clothes." He put me down beside a little stream. "You must bathe in fresh water."

"No —!" I backed away from him.

"You little idiot, don't you see their treacherous scheme? If you don't bathe in fresh water after the sulphur plunge, your skin will become blotched and hideous." He gripped my shoulders and shook me roughly. "I'll not have your beauty marred — you are the loveliest thing I've ever seen! Do as I tell you or I'll strip you and throw you in!"

As though reading my thoughts, he suddenly relaxed. His smile was gentle, and his voice tender.

"Don't be afraid. I'll go back down the path and wait."

He kissed my forehead and turned back into the bushes beneath the dark trees.

The brook was cool and refreshing. I lay back on the soft sand and let the waters rush over me. The ripples moved caressingly. All the discomfort and the fever was washed away. A sweet and dreamy lassitude overcame me. I wondered if he was watching from the depths of the thicket. But I didn't think so.

And then I wondered why he didn't come. Perhaps he only protected me as a child is protected. Was this another of his pitying favors? If a man really loved a woman, he could not stay away from her.

There was a stir in the undergrowth. Enid and the simpering Greek, Philo, stood looking at me.

"Oh, excuse us!" tittered Enid. "We saw Jason's chariot, so we sneaked in to see what he was up to. Of course, we didn't dream —!"

She turned as she saw Jason coming toward her.

"Thorry to dithturb your little idyl," lisped Philo.

Jason threw a stone and the intruders ran laughing into the thicket. We both knew they'd make a malicious scandal of what they had seen as soon as they got back to Tiberias.

While Jason turned his back, I put my clothes on and we drove home in worried silence.

That night I didn't go to the dining hall for supper. And no one came to persuade me. As soon as it was dark, I took a dark cloak and what money I had left and slipped out through a side gate. Staying close to the walls in the dark streets, I headed for the fishing quarter at the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

The fishermen's nets, on drying racks, looked like acres of delicate lace in the moonlight. Shadowy figures were removing them. The sky was threatening and we were close to the season of spring rains.

I approached a slight, aristocratic-looking young man who was struggling rather clumsily to fold up some of the nets. He listened sympathetically as I told him that I was the daughter of Caiphas, the High Priest, and that I had to get home to Jerusalem.

"It is a dangerous journey," he said with a kindly smile. "A desperate

journey for a young girl. After the waters of the Galilee enter into the Jordan, the course is swift and tortuous. And the eastern shore is peopled with savage Bedouins —"

"I know! But anything is better than Tiberias! If I stay here I'll surely die! I'll pay you anything!"

"It isn't the pay." There was a deprecating smile on his fine Jewish features. "It is just that I am not a boatman. My name is Matthew — I used to be a tax gatherer. So you see, I have not been trained to do anything very useful."

He turned and pointed to a camp fire farther up the beach, where a number of men sat around the flames.

"But some of my friends are fishermen, very good fishermen — Peter and Andrew and James. Our Master teaches us that we must love our neighbors as ourselves — so I am sure that they will help you."

"Oh, if they only would!"

He hurried away toward the camp fire. Something about the man had given me reassurance and a certain feeling of hope.

And then from among the shadows and the foamy nets, I saw Jason's tall figure before me. I turned toward the boats drawn up on the sand. I didn't want to talk to him.

"Don't go, Miriam!"

"I have to — you shouldn't have followed me —"

"If you go, I must go with you. I will be your boatman." He took my hand. "Whither thou goest, I shall go — thy people shall be my people, and thy god, my god."

"Please, don't mock me! Leave me alone!"

"I can never do that, dearest! God knows I have tried not to love you. I was a slave to ambition as you said — but now, I have forgotten everything — but you."

"If I could only believe you!"

The silvery moonlight, through the thick, scudding clouds, cast an uneven causeway across the waters. The far shores of Galilee, the savage shores, were wrapped in beckoning mystery.

"Come!" Jason lifted me into a boat and pushed it into the water. With a hasty movement he picked up the sweep and poled us out of the shallows.

I lay back against the rough wood and looked up toward the dappled heavens. Why did I always surrender? I seemed to have no will when Jason was near me. Still, if he was telling the truth, if he really loved me —

"Was Salome angry?" I asked.

"Furious! She made a terrible scene!"

"Are you sure that you want to leave her? That you don't love her?"

"Love! That woman doesn't know what it is to love! For months she has kept me dangling — simply playing with me."

"It is hard to believe that any woman could do that to you, Jason. You seem so sure of yourself."

"She is a princess," he said bitterly. "And the stakes were high. I learned

to gamble when I was a charioteer. Herod is a worthless puppet. Everyone in Rome despises him and Salome is of royal blood. Her husband would be in a position to guarantee the Eastern empire. He might become emperor himself when Tiberius dies —"

"You dreamed of that!"

"Why not! I have a fortune and so has Salome. The throne will be sold by the Praetorian Guard — the palace troops control the empire. But all that is forgotten. Let's not talk about it any more."

I didn't want to talk. I was too happy. Jason raised the sail and little gusts of wind propelled us southward. He came forward and lay beside me. We looked up at the changing sky.

Then, without warning, the squall broke upon us. The sail was split with a roar like a bull. Shredded canvas whipped in the wind as the boat was lashed by the fury of the spring rains.

Jason scrambled to the sweep, struggling awkwardly to keep us from the trough of the waves. I was drenched as I fought to take in the whipping fragments of the tattered sail. Then the whole keel shivered as the craggy nose of a concealed rock forced its way through the splintering wood. The waves closed over us and I felt Jason's arm around me. I sank into a swirl of thunder and darkness.

How long it lasted I will never know exactly. After a time my mind struggled toward consciousness — only to slip back to oblivion again. In these rare, half-lucid moments it seemed that I was again in my room in Herod's palace. Once I seemed to see Jason's face bending over me and feel his hand behind my head. A cup was pressed to my lips and I heard him say, "Drink, Miriam, dearest, you must get strong and well for my sake."

Finally the fever left me and I returned to the consciousness of a bright, sunshiny day. It hadn't been a hallucination. Outside the windows of my room in the palace the trees were in full blossom. But my chamber had the untidiness of a sick room. I crawled from beneath the covers and looked at myself in the steel mirror. It was a thin, drawn face that looked back at me. I rang for the serving maid, but she did not come.

Finally, trembling and pausing to rest at frequent intervals, I managed to wash myself and dress in clean clothes. Then, supporting myself with a hand against the wall, I faltered out into the corridors. There was a littered, deserted look to the halls. The serving women, in untidy dress, gossiped in slatternly clusters. When I talked to them their looks were bold and insolent and their words just barely courteous. They told me that Herod and the entire court had returned to Jerusalem to celebrate the holidays.

I returned to my room to find one of the lesser servants — a girl about as old as I am — putting my gold hairpins in her hair. When she saw me, she made a guilty movement and

knocked over the alabaster lamp — the one that Jason had given me. It smashed upon the floor.

I was so angry I snatched a girdle from the wardrobe and began to whip her with it. She dropped to her knees and whined for mercy.

"Stop sniveling!" I said. "And tell me what has happened. Take me to Jason!"

"He has gone — on the day after the Princess and the women's caravan left for Jerusalem. Enid came back here with a message for Jason."

"And?"

"It seemed to disturb him. He had not left your side since the night of the great storm. He put on his traveling cloak. Then he threw it aside. He walked in the gardens, hour after hour. He called for his chariot, then he returned it to the stables. It was not the first message the Princess had sent to him, but he had rejected all the others with curses. Now after many black looks he called for the chariot again and drove away toward Jerusalem."

"And the message?"

The servant whimpered that she did not know any more. So I ordered her to leave me.

Dear God! Was I never to be sure of him? Had Salome capitulated? Had her message said that she would marry him? And had this last surrender been too great a temptation?

I had to know. I got my faded cloak from the wardrobe. My silver still was secure in the secret pocket of the lining. Hurrying to the beach, I asked for the former tax gatherer, Matthew.

"He isn't here," a surly old fisherman told me. "He and his crowd have gone to Jerusalem for the Passover. Bad luck to them!"

"Why do you say that? Matthew seemed kind."

"Oh, yes," the fisherman grumbled. "Very kind. I took my son, Reuben, to Capernaum to be cured of blindness. But on the night we went there, this Matthew and his Master came to Tiberias. That was the miracle — the evil miracle! We missed each other — for no reason at all!"

"This may have been meant to test you!" I was saying anything in an effort to influence him. "You should follow these Galileans. Take your son to Jerusalem! By boat you can be there for the holidays!"

"By boat?" Such a journey had not occurred to him. I kept on talking and offered him silver. He took the money, but it was his love for his boy that decided him.

My thoughts raced ahead as we left the clear waters of Galilee and rushed through overhanging jungles, made lush and foul by the recent floods of the Jordan.

Despite the skill of the fisherman, the boat sometimes stuck on a sandbar. When this happened, he and I would go over the side. The sand eddied around our feet as we pushed the boat back into deeper current. At last the boat whirled into the shallows and I saw the crested helmets of the

Romans at the post house. With the last of my silver I bribed an officer to take me up to Jerusalem on the crupper of his horse. We entered the city by the Double Gate. The streets were filled with people shouting hosannahs and waving palm branches. Through the crowd I caught a glimpse of Matthew in a little group of men. They were gathered around a Man wearing a colored robe, who was seated upon a donkey. And for an instant I thought I saw you, Father, standing on the outer stairs of the Temple, smiling approval toward these men.

But this was just a confused impression. Before I could identify you, the cavalryman turned his horse into one of the side streets leading to Herod's palace.

Galba was the officer in charge at the Portal of the Stairs.

"Where is Jason?" I demanded. "Take me to him at once!"

"I'm afraid I can't do that, ladybird. You see, Jason has been arrested — the King caught him in Salome's boudoir."

My heart was leaden with conflicting sorrows. It was quite clear that Jason had betrayed me. He had left me to go to Salome. But hope dies so hard! I still didn't want him to suffer. There must be some explanation for his contradictory behavior.

Late at night I awakened when I heard someone fumbling at the lock on my door. Salome came in. She was flushed and agitated as she blurted: "That swine! That insufferable swine! My stepfather has condemned Jason to the arena! But you, you can save him —"

I mistrusted her and anything she might tell me. It would be best to question her carefully. I asked: "For what has he been condemned?"

"Herod has charged him with violating the sanctity of the women's quarters — with having gone to your room at night in the palace at Tiberias!"

"You know that is a lie!" I cried.

She made no answer. Her shadow fluttered against the walls like a great moth as she strode up and down past the brazier.

"You have brought him to this!" I burst out angrily. "It is all your doing! He didn't leave Tiberias with the court — he stayed with me — until you lured him away with that wretched note you sent by Enid! What did you say in it?"

"I had no pride — only envy," she said finally. "After I'd seen him in your sick room in Tiberias, nursing you, I knew I had to have him even though he didn't love me. So I sent Enid back to tell him that I'd marry him and run away with him to Alexandria."

I spoke harshly to keep back the tears. "Well, you succeeded! Your bargain must have appealed to him — he abandoned me and went to you!"

"He came to me," her face was averted, "to refuse my offer of marriage." She gave me a quick look from the corner of her eyes. "And to tell me he'd never love anyone but you.

That's why he was with me when Herod caught us."

"Then why didn't you intercede for Jason? Why didn't you tell Herod the truth?"

"I did." Her laugh was mirthless. "I begged too hard — I told Herod that I loved Jason and for that I must be humiliated by being forced to sit in the arena and see Jason choose between the tiger and the lady *when he knows that you will be the lady behind one door!*"

"But why will *I* be there?"

"Herod could scarcely accuse the Greek of seducing *me*, his stepdaughter! He has shifted the whole scandal to you. So I shall have to sit there and watch the man I love being married to my rival — to you!"

"But suppose there isn't any marriage?" I could scarcely pronounce the words. "Suppose Jason chooses the door that frees the tiger? There is that terrible chance!"

Salome's smile was sly and determined. "That's why I have come here. Chance is going to be eliminated. You and I are going to cheat Herod. We will save Jason."

"Oh, Salome, how?"

"We will save him because we both love him. I am going to give him to you."

My voice was choking. "Oh, Salome, I have been so wrong about you!"

She brushed my embrace aside. "I'm not doing this for you. I've thought of a way to save him — because I can't see him die."

It was three nights ago that we had this conversation. We talked far into the morning. Before she left, I had forgiven Salome all her former slights and cruelties. For she had shown me how to save Jason. I wonder if I could be as self-sacrificing as she. Her love for him is so great that she is willing that he shall marry me — since she says she knows he loves me and that we will be happy together.

I kissed her as we parted.

Since then I have spent my time writing this long letter to you. I know that it contains many things that ordinarily a daughter would not write to a father. But I have tried to be absolutely truthful, because I want you to know, dearest Father, that in spite of all the doubts and troubles I have gone through, I have done nothing that was wrong.

It is growing late and I am tired. Soon it will be morning. They will come and dress me in a bridal gown. My draperies will be arranged with many golden brooches. They will place flowers in my arms and the flame-colored veil of a Roman bride over my hair. And they will leave me in that little room, next to the room where they will have placed the tiger.

As soon as I am alone, I will take one of the golden brooches from my garment. I will open one of my veins with it and let my blood run from beneath the crack in the door, out onto the stone pavements of the dark corridor beneath the seats of the arena.

Before Salome takes her seat beside

her stepfather, she will slip down into this corridor. She will see the blood and she will know in which room I am waiting. And she will signal to Jason to open my door.

I am happy, Father, despite my dreadful weariness. I hope that you will forgive me everything that has been reckless and foolish. I am a woman now, but still a little girl. How I wish that I could curl up in your lap and go to sleep! I am tired, but so contented and joyful — I must rest and be beautiful for my beloved. All my dreams will come true tomorrow.

Thus ended the letter of Miriam to her father. As I labored over its translation, this Jewish girl of twenty centuries ago became very real to me. I gave all my time to researches concerning Miriam. I had to learn what had happened to her.

The answer was found in the long-sought-for letter of Pontius Pilate to Tiberius. The first paragraph made it obvious that this originally had been dispatched to the Emperor as an explanation of Miriam's manuscript. But during the centuries they had become separated. Pilate's supplement was written in Latin upon two sheets of parchment. The first page read:

"To His Imperial Majesty, Tiberius Caesar, from Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea:

"May the Gods preserve Your Majesty! I forward the enclosed document to the Imperial Archives because it has some bearing upon Imperial policy in the Near East.

"As stated in previous reports, the High Priest (to whom the enclosed letter is addressed) has shown great stubbornness in refusing to cooperate in the matter of disposing of a certain Galilean preacher regarded by Your Majesty's Government as a dangerous malcontent. The High Priest was impervious to bribes, and even threats failed to coerce him into making the desired accusations which would enable Rome to crucify the Galilean and still place responsibility for the deed on the Jews.

"But now I am happy to inform Your Majesty that the whole matter has been satisfactorily resolved. Caiphas is a broken man. His will has been completely shattered (indeed, I doubt if he can any longer be considered sane) and is quite incapable of offering any further resistance.

"His transformation was brought about, quite unexpectedly, yesterday, when the Greek, Jason, was forced to choose between the lady and the tiger in Herod's Arena. I watched Caiphas very closely when he made his appearance, as Herod had ordered, in the royal box. His bearing was dignified and aloof. I almost found myself wishing that this well-controlled man was a Roman.

"One of our secret agents had intercepted a letter which the girl, Miriam, had written to her father; so that Caiphas had no way of knowing that his daughter was guiltless of Herod's implications. His trust in her evi-

dently was based upon blind faith.

"Herod looked a trifle embarrassed as he turned to me and asked if I wanted to double my bet on the Greek's chances for survival. Of course, I did. Since I had read Miriam's letter, I felt I was betting on a sure thing. I even smiled to myself as, from the corner of my eye, I saw the Princess make her signal to the Greek to open the right-hand door.

"But I was a fool to trust Salome. The Greek, with his sense of the dramatic, started to pull back the portal very slowly. When it was open about a foot, we saw the sunlight fall on the striped hide and the blinking eyes of the tiger. The Greek seemed doomed. An automatic device made it impossible to push those doors shut, once either of them had started to open.

"But the Greek acted with the speed of lightning. As soon as he glimpsed the tiger, he stepped back and pulled open *both* doors. Now he was protected — wedged in the small space between the two open portals — as secure as if he had a big oak shield on each arm.

"The tiger, a finer specimen than any you'd see in Rome, advanced through the doorway on the right.

"And almost simultaneously, the girl, Miriam, looking pale but smiling beneath her bridal veil, came through the doorway on the left.

"For a few seconds the beast and the woman looked at each other. There was no sound in the amphitheater, except her father's sobbing.

"It was the fastest thinking I had ever seen. I did well to bet on the Greek."

The paper fell from my hand. All the injustice and cruelty of the world seemed summed up in Jason's contemptible strategem.

I read the second page. Pilate had added the following postscript to his message.

"Despite the Greek's adroitness I'm sure Your Majesty will agree that this Jason was too clever to be permitted to survive. His plot to marry Salome and seize the throne was a definite menace to Roman policy in Palestine and to Your Majesty's security. Since the man was the son of a slave and was not a Roman citizen, it was not difficult to charge him with the theft of the White Syndicate's horses and to condemn him, along with another thief and the Galilean preacher, to be crucified. He admitted under the torture that he had adopted the name of 'Jason' because of its romantic connotations. His real name was Gestos. He was the last of the three to die, and though his sufferings were excruciating, he did not ask for forgiveness."

"Q"

THE PERFECT SECRETARY

by W. T. BRANNON

"WHAT makes you think it's murder?" Tom Wall asked curiously.

Detective Jim Burgess poked at the portable typewriter. "It's too clean for suicide," he drawled. "Not a print in the joint."

"What about the note?"

"Fake," said Burgess. "A big shot like Oehler dictates all his letters. If he was going to write a suicide note, he'd use his fountain pen, not a typewriter."

"Why you think it's the dame?"

"I gotta hunch, is all."

"You can't pin it on her with a hunch," Tom said.

"I can try. Go bring her in."

When Tom came in with the red-haired girl, Burgess was still poking at the typewriter.

"Show the lady to a seat," Jim said.

She wore an off-the-face hat and a mink coat. Pretty expensive for a secretary, Jim thought. And she had on too much make-up. A vain effort to cover a sleepless night, he guessed, looking at the drawn lines in her face.

"You Martha Hawkins?" he asked. "Oehler's personal secretary?"

"Yes."

"Worked for him long?"

"About six months."

"I get it. Saw you around the office and liked your looks."

The girl flushed. "I was under the impression that he liked my work."

"Yeah? Well, skip it. When was the last time you saw him alive?"

"Yesterday afternoon when I took some letters."

"Write a lot of letters for him?"

"Of course. That was my job."

"Yeah, sure." Burgess leaned back in his chair, stuck his thumbs in his vest. "You go out to dinner with him last night?"

"No."

"Another dame, huh?"

"I don't know."

"He took her up to his room, didn't he?"

"I don't know."

"You had a room across the hall, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"See the dame when she left?"

"I told you I didn't see her."

"Oh, all right." Burgess waved an arm. "You didn't go in his room last night, did you?"

"Of course not!"

"You always had a separate room when you went on a business trip with Oehler?"

"Certainly! What do you mean?"

"Nothing. The guy must've reformed."

"I don't understand —"

"Maybe not. But it's something

new for Oehler to have a hall separating him from his woman." He picked up a pencil and began tapping it on the desk. "You know anybody that might want to kill him?"

"Kill him? Why, I thought he. . ."

"Suicide? Naw, murder."

She said nothing, but watched nervously while he tapped the pencil on the desk.

"Funny thing," said Burgess, "but I guess I had you all wrong. I figured you shot him."

The girl bit her lip, as if to keep down the crimson flush of anger. Then she said defiantly, "Why should I murder him?"

Jim Burgess shrugged, reached for a sheet of paper on the desk. "I never could account for all the crazy things a jealous woman will do."

She leaned closer as he laid the sheet of paper on the desk in front of her, began drawing a circle with his pencil.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Oh, that. Wanta see it?" He grinned. "Guess I oughtn't to be drawing pictures on it." He let it slide over where she could see it more closely, continued the circular movement of the pencil.

"Oehler wrote a funny letter, huh?"

She didn't answer. Her face was very pale, as if a ghost had suddenly appeared. Terror was in her eyes.

"You don't know this other woman's name, do you?"

"N-no."

"I don't s'pose *her* initials would be M. H., huh?"

"No!" She reached out suddenly for the letter, but he snatched it from her grasp.

"All right, sister!" he said, with an abrupt change of tone. "Let's quit fooling."

Her gaze was fixed on the letter. She looked at it, shocked, as if she couldn't believe her eyes.

"I shot him," she said, in a tired voice. "I was so mad I couldn't see. I went in and shot him as soon as — as she left. Then I went back to my own room to cool off. I was scared to death. So I tried to make it look like suicide. I put the gun in his hand. I typed the note and wiped off everything with a towel. Then I went back to my room and waited —"

"The perfect secretary," said Burgess, "always puts her initials in the lower left-hand corner of every letter."

Later, after the confession had been signed and the girl had been taken away, Tom Wall said, "Gosh, I didn't see those initials."

"Naw," said Jim Burgess. "Neither did I." He had folded the paper in his hand. He struck a match and held it to a corner of the sheet.

Tom Wall looked on in astonishment. "Jim! You're burning the evidence."

"Naw," said Jim. "This is not evidence." He opened his desk drawer, pulled out a sealed envelope and a box of Benton Oehler's personal stationery. "There's the note she typed." He grinned. "But, hell, I know how to use a typewriter."

Back in 1933–34 we edited an ill-fated magazine called "Mystery League," and in the December 1933 issue we ran a short story by Thomas Walsh. At the time we had reason to believe that this story, "Guns of Gannett," was Thomas Walsh's first published work. That is probably not true, but it was surely one of Mr. Walsh's early appearances in print. Since then a lot of water has flowed down the River of Ratiocination, and in the intervening fifteen years Thomas Walsh has grown mightily in stature. Today he is one of the best known writers for the bigtime slicks.

Old "Mystery League" gave up the ghost after a mere four issues — will we ever forget that sad day? We had undertaken the editorship on sheer speculation, pitting our flaming ambition against the wheel of fortune. For over six months we had devoted all our energies to editing a 150,000-word monthly magazine, without even a copy-reader to help, and one morning we awoke to find ourselves not famous but famished, the whole enterprise defunct and our income from a half-year's struggle exactly zero dollars and no cents. Well, we cleaned up the mess the best we could, returning all manuscripts in work at the time of the decease. One of those manuscripts was a second story by Thomas Walsh — we remember it well after all these years. It was another Gannett yarn, and the main clue was a couple of dozen pencils.

When EQMM started, we tried to locate that second Walsh story — but it had vanished. At least, the author could not find it, nor could his literary agent. So we began to hunt for another Thomas Walsh story of the same period, digging into hundreds of old magazines, many of them as dead and gone and forgotten as "Mystery League." It took years to track down an early Walsh — a hard, tough Walsh of the pre-slick era — a strong-arm, strong-word yarn like the old Gannett story. We finally discovered private dick Hunt Lannin in the January 1935 issue of "Ten Detective Aces." Try this toughie on for size. If you like the style and cut and fabric, we'll keep digging for more early 'tec togs by Thomas Walsh.

HARD GUY

by THOMAS WALSH

MR. SARTOSET said: "Twenty-five thousand dollars," in a soft voice, resting his elbows on the table and placing one palm on each cheek of his delicately shaped face. His eyes, small and black and very shiny, remained fixed on the man across from him as he spoke. "I would pay that

much — in cash, you understand."

Hunt Lannin did not stare back at him. He lit a cigarette and extinguished the match with a long funnel of smoke, his sharp-featured face grave and inscrutable, a little thoughtful, under a spike of blond hair high on his forehead. After a moment, without answering, he put the match in a tray and blew twin streams of smoke from his nostrils down at it.

The silence seemed to affect Mr. Sartoset. He moved in his chair nervously, eagerly, the fingers of his right hand drumming a tattoo on his jawbone.

"That is," he said, in the soft voice that held a thinly playful note, "a good deal of money, Mr. Lannin. It would not be particularly difficult for you to earn. Look at the man — the little man facing you, three tables down on the other side."

Lannin's cold eyes drifted casually down the narrow aisle of the dining car. The man three tables down was neat and slender, rather short, dressed in a blue suit fitting tightly across his narrow chest. He had a smooth, boyish face, brown hair and eyes. There was nothing striking about him.

It puzzled Lannin. He took a deep inhalation on his cigarette and finished his coffee, wiped his lips with a napkin and turned his face to the fixed black stare of Mr. Sartoset. His voice was low, clear, very serious. "Let's get it straight," he said. "You'd pay twenty-five thousand dollars to have him murdered?"

"Mur —" Mr. Sartoset, profoundly shocked, almost strangled on the word. He glanced nervously around, then back to Lannin with an air of reproof. "My dear man, you misunderstand me utterly. I assure you —"

"Don't kid me," Lannin said. "You didn't say it in so many words, sure, but that's what you meant. You don't want him to reach Lake Placid with you tomorrow. There's only one way I can see to make him get off the train now." He made a little motion with one hand, staring at the black eyes until they wavered. "That's to have him carried off."

Mr. Sartoset smiled, took a linen handkerchief from his pocket and mopped it delicately across his brow. "I did not, of course, have any such meaning. For someone in my position, Mr. Lannin, the idea you suggest is manifestly absurd. I trust you see that?"

Lannin shrugged. Three tables down, the little man, who had apparently noticed nothing, went on eating his steak.

The Adirondack Express was an hour out of Grand Central, clicking smoothly beside the broad bosom of the Hudson. The dining car was comfortably filled, pleasant with the odor of food and the clean white sheen of table linen. When Lannin did not speak again, Mr. Sartoset chuckled with an air of being slightly amused, looked down at the menu to choose a dessert. Lannin reached for another cigarette, found his pack was empty, rose with a short word.

Balancing his body against the sway of the train, he moved up the aisle to the platform. The compartment he was sharing with Mr. Sartoset was two cars up, near the front, and when he reached it, a tall woman in a dark-colored dress was just outside the door. It seemed to Lannin, though he was not quite sure, that at the first moment he saw her, she had one hand on the knob.

He frowned a little as she came on swiftly, frowned because he was not sure. She seemed composed enough, coming straight for him; a tall, very graceful woman, white-haired, eyes shadowed by her small, smart hat.

When she had passed him, he pushed on to the compartment, opened the door, and snapped on the light. Dusk was swept out of it instantly at the click, and Hunt Lannin found himself staring at the floor.

Three bags were dumped there — one of his, two of Mr. Sartoset's. They were lying on their sides, empty; scattered around them was a fantastic jumble of shirts, socks, ties. A black leather shaving case had been sliced open, dumped on the seat next to a rumpled gray suit; shoes were piled crazily in the corner near the window.

Hunt Lannin rested his back against the door, eyes moving fast, keen, cold. Nothing at all had been left in the bags. Even his carton of cigarettes had been broken open, the tops torn off the individual packs, the middles squashed ruthlessly as if to make sure they contained nothing.

He made a swift examination, pawing through the clothes. The result of it surprised him, for nothing of his had been taken; about Sartoset, of course, he could not tell. As well as he could, he gathered his own things into his bag, stuffed it shut and returned it to the baggage rack over the seat. Sartoset's things, he left as they were.

Five minutes later, when Mr. Sartoset entered, patting a well-fed mouth gently with the back of one hand, they were still heaped on the floor. Mr. Sartoset stopped very suddenly, the amiable sheen fading from his black eyes.

He said in a high voice: "What's the matter, Lannin? What has happened?"

Sitting by the window, his head clouded by a softly whirling mass of cigarette smoke, Hunt Lannin took a moment to answer. He said after that: "I wish you'd tell me." His cold eyes came around and fastened on the other's. "I don't play unless I know the game, mister. I'm thinking of quitting this. It smells bad."

"But it's perfectly plain," Mr. Sartoset said, something vicious under the words. "You know all you need to know. For reasons which I do not care to disclose, I am threatened with bodily danger. You have a reputation, Lannin. You are hard, tough. Therefore I hired you to protect me on this trip. Tomorrow morning we arrive in Lake Placid; when we do, your job is over and you have earned a good deal of money rather easily. That should satisfy you, I think."

"It doesn't." Lannin lit another cigarette and watched him over the flame. "I don't like the job. It has a smell, and I don't like smells. Not this kind. You hire me as a guard and that's O. K. It's my work. But —"

There was a sound from the corridor above the timed clatter of the wheels. As Lannin turned his head and moved his right hand fast, the door pushed in, and the small, boyish-faced man came in and closed it quietly behind him. Mr. Sartoset drew breath sharply, in a squeak.

Standing against the door, both hands in the outer pockets of his jacket, the small man looked at Lannin, at the disordered bags, at the seat. For quite a long moment he did not look at Mr. Sartoset. When he did, his air was quiet, grave, rather meek.

Mr. Sartoset crouched closer to Lannin, wetting his lips. He made two attempts to speak before words came, before his voice grew audible, shrill with anger — with a touch of fear.

"What do you want? You can't come in here. Lannin —"

The little man smiled at him silently, with his head bent forward, watching him from colorless child's eyes. His voice was level, inflectionless, and he spoke only five words. They were: "Do I get it, mister?"

"Get it?" Sartoset squealed that. There was perspiration on his face and his hands shook. "I don't know what you're talking about. I —" He tried to get a grip on himself, turning to Lannin. "Put this man out of here. He —"

It was hard to say what stopped him, for nothing in the little man's face changed; he was still clear-eyed, boyish, but even Lannin, who was not an imaginative man, tensed his right hand. Lannin said sharply: "Hold it." The little man turned to him, stared at the big automatic in Lannin's right hand expressionlessly. But his own hand stopped moving inside the cloth, grew still without rigidity.

"Take your hands out slow," Lannin told him coldly. "Put them against the wall. Spread your fingers flat."

For another moment the little man stared at him, not moving. The unreadable something that had dropped over his face made it no longer meek, nor boyish: it was carefully veiled now, not excited, the eyes very blank, small — killer's eyes in a boy's face that was withered, drawn in. Lannin said again: "Take your hands out."

The little man obeyed, quite slowly, dead eyes fixed on Lannin. After his arms were spread out against the wall, Lannin rose and went over to him. There was an automatic in his right coat pocket, and holding his own steady, Lannin took it out and tossed it to the seat. He said then: "Scram, punk."

The little man looked up at him, spoke his name twice — spoke it very clearly and earnestly, as if it were something important that he must never forget. "Lannin," he said. "Hunt Lannin. I'll remember you."

He nodded once, his stare fixed, groped behind him for the door handle, and stepped out to the corridor.

Lannin clicked on the catch after him, turned, slipping his automatic in its shoulder holster. On the seat near the window, Mr. Sartoset had collapsed limply. "The man's a maniac," he said. "He's insane. If he —"

Lannin cut him off coldly. "Play out your string alone," he said. "If you don't want me to know what it's all about, that's okay, brother. Me, I'm quitting now. There's nothing —"

"Listen," Mr. Sartoset said, his voice fast, almost breathless, his delicate face twisted insanely. "Kill him, Lannin — yes. Damn him, that's what I want. You're hard. You've killed men before. And you could murder him easily, so that no one would ever suspect you. Twenty-five thousand for that — in advance, in cash. Now." He got up, little eyes feverish, groped in his coat pocket.

Lannin's thin lips grimaced. He said: "You don't understand. You hire me and that's all right. But I thought it was legitimate business. And now I think it isn't. The thing's crooked. You won't explain. You —"

The viciousness crept again into Sartoset's voice. "What is the difference to you? It's twenty-five thousand I'm —"

"Damn you," Lannin said, his voice running low and deep with anger. "I've killed men, sure, but I've never killed them for dough. I've killed them because they wanted to kill me. Because of that, you take me for a cheap hood. You think I'd knock off anybody for money." His face darkened and grew ugly. "To hell with you. You're crooked and yellow. You won't even tell me what this is all about. You heard I was hard. Maybe you heard I was square, too. This thing's rotten and I don't want any part of it. I'm in a legitimate business. If you're not, we split up here, now."

Cold fire shone in his eyes, as Mr. Sartoset said: "No — no — no!" breathlessly, pawing at his arm. "You can't leave me alone, not now. He'd kill me, Lannin, without thinking about it, without —"

"You've got about thirty seconds," Lannin growled. "If you want to talk — talk fast."

Gulping in air, Mr. Sartoset sank back to the seat. Even then he seemed to be undecided, his small, metallic eyes darting anxiously over the compartment. It was not until Lannin gave an impatient snort and reached for his bag that he burst forth in an outrush of words.

"Give me a chance, Lannin. He — his name is Carrow, Baby Face Carrow. Maybe you've heard of him."

Lannin nodded slowly. He had. Baby Face Carrow — a Chicago killer. Bad, very bad. His cold eyes got somber, a bit puzzled. "Go on. What's he got on you?"

Mr. Sartoset smiled, a ghastly twisting of the lips in a pale face shining with perspiration. "He — he wants to steal something I am carrying with me. I was afraid he would try to steal

it here on the train, so I hired you to make the trip with me. This — this object is quite valuable."

Lannin frowned. "Why didn't you tell the police? They could have picked up Carrow on suspicion."

"Police?" The word appeared to startle Mr. Sartoset. "I — I was afraid, Lannin. I knew this Carrow, knew his gang. If they saw me informing police —" He shuddered, twisting his handkerchief into a shapeless ball.

"What's the valuable object?" Lannin asked.

Again Mr. Sartoset hesitated. He continued finally, looking at the floor: "You know my business. I am a jeweler. I have with me a very valuable collection of diamonds — a necklace, in fact. These must be delivered to Mr. Wilson, the senior member of our firm, at his Lake Placid home tomorrow. It was" — he gulped again, looked around as if searching for a word — "necessary for reasons which I am not permitted to divulge to conduct the affair with utter secrecy. You are well-known among the jewel houses, Mr. Lannin. Your work I understand lies almost entirely in that direction. Naturally I thought of you. I engaged you. And just now you saw this Carrow —" He shivered, wiped his face automatically.

Over a cigarette end Lannin considered him for some moments in silence. "Carrow couldn't have gone through your things," he said. "He was in the dining car ahead of us, and he was still there when I left. It is possible he had an accomplice do this. I suppose you were smart enough to carry the necklace on you?"

"Naturally," Mr. Sartoset agreed. He put one hand inside his coat. "So long as you were with me, I thought that safer than —" He stopped suddenly, his expression bewildered, put his hand deeper in the pocket. And then he cried out — shrill, high, anguished, like a woman. "They're gone! Lannin, they're —" He pulled the coat away from him, delved frenziedly into the cloth.

"Easy," Lannin clipped. He gained his feet and crossed the compartment in one long stride. "Where did you have them?"

Mr. Sartoset seemed bereft of voice, of will. He gestured stupidly to his pocket, and Lannin bent, running swift hands over his slight form.

"When was the last time you felt them?"

The jeweler rolled his eyes up wildly. "I don't know. I — in the dining car I remember touching them. When I went to get my wallet to pay the check, I felt the bulge. It —"

Lannin snapped: "Then you lost it between the dining car and here. Did you meet anyone coming back here? Did anyone talk to you?"

Mr. Sartoset was moaning to himself, rocking in his seat, small face the hue of slightly yellowed ivory. "A — a woman," he choked. "I didn't speak to her. She knocked into me when the train lurched."

Lannin's eyes kindled. "A white-haired woman?" he snapped. "Dark dress, small hat?"

"Yes." Sartoset clutched his arm. "Do you think — it was she? She picked my pocket?"

For a moment Hunt Lannin brooded intently at the dark curtain flowing soundlessly by the windows of his compartment, pierced here and there by small yellow globes of light. The woman who had searched their compartment — of course. Meeting Sartoset in the aisle, then lurching against him, picking his pocket. Simple enough.

He shook off the jeweler's arm, snapped curtly: "Stay here. I'll see what I can do."

In the corridor he glanced briefly at his watch. They were still nearly an hour out of Albany; since switching engines at Harmon, the train had not stopped. And no one could leave a train racing along at fifty-five miles an hour, not if they valued their lives. That meant the woman was still on board — the necklace, too.

Lannin's mouth tightened. He pushed forward from the Pullmans to the day coach just behind the engine, then started to work slowly back. The train was a long one, a vacation special. Behind the three day-coaches — which produced no results — there stretched out a seemingly endless string of Pullmans. Lannin eyed the occupants carefully as he passed through, talked to the porters of each one. The one or two women that answered the description vaguely, he passed up after a closer glance.

He came at last to the club car at the end of the train — a comfortable-looking place with writing desks, lamps, easy chairs, strewn invitingly about. In the doorway of this, Lannin paused, cold eyes raking down its length.

There was one middle-aged woman in the car, but she was small and wiry, too short for the woman he had seen. The rest were mostly men, with a younger girl here and there. Lannin's hard glance flicked rapidly over them all, and at last came to rest on a dark-haired girl sitting near the back. She was reading, her head turned away from him, so that she could not see his face.

Lannin frowned at the back of her head. Something vaguely familiar in the half-seen curve of her cheek, the smooth dark sheen of her hair impinged itself on his mind. After a few moments he walked down to the empty seat at her side, dropped into it. She had not moved, had not even looked up, but as his body went back against the cushions, she rose quickly, her face lowered and carefully averted, started up the aisle. When Lannin's lean fingers closed on her wrist, she stopped at once and turned to him.

Looking up at her, his grin was a little bleak. "Carlotta," he said, nodding.

"Hunt Lannin!" She looked perfectly surprised. She spoke in a deep, husky tone, smiled at him, her complexion dark, though very clear. Her face was delicately sculptured, lovely, her body lithe and long limbed. "Fancy seeing you here!"

Hunt Lannin did not answer imme-

diately. When he did, his voice was not amused. "I spotted you back there in the aisle, after you'd gone through our compartment. A wig didn't change you much."

"A wig?" Her slender brows arched. "What are you talking about?"

Lannin glanced around. There was no one very near, and the rhythmic humming of the wheels must have made his voice inaudible more than four feet distant. Nevertheless, he lowered it, leaning forward to her.

"It was smart," he said. "You've got brains, Carlotta. So much brains that I hate to see you wasting them in a racket where you're licked before you start."

Smiling at him, perfectly poised, she shook her head slowly. "It's still crazy, Hunt Lannin."

His lean blond face came closer, sharp, impatient, angry. Outside lights clustered together, ran by more slowly, as they rolled through the Albany yards.

"Have it your way, Carlotta. But it isn't hard to figure. You got on the train with a white wig, carrying a different hat and dress in your bag. After you spotted Sartoset going to dinner, you slipped into a washroom, changed into that rig, went up to our compartment, and searched it. When you didn't find the gems there, you knew he'd be carrying them, so you waited a car or two down until you saw Sartoset come through. You bumped into him there — accidentally, he thought, after a look at your gray wig — and picked his pocket. Then back into the washroom again, out the window with the wig and the dress and the hat, back into your own duds. It was nearly perfect. If Sartoset did suspect the white-haired woman, there'd be no one answering that description when the train was searched. It looked iron fast."

She was still watching him with a small smile, shaking her head pityingly. Hunt Lannin's eyes shone up at her like points of greenish ice. "But you didn't know Sartoset had hired me. That's the thing that ruined you, Carlotta. I'll admit it was a tough break. Everything planned perfectly, going through without a hitch." His bleak smile showed again. "And then you have to meet the one man in the state — in the country — that knows you for what you are. That knows you're a jewel thief, the smartest in the business — a thief who works alone, who's never been caught, having no record."

She shrugged after a moment. "I'm not admitting it, Hunt Lannin." Over her shoulder, in the doorway of the car, the small figure of Baby Face Carrow showed for a moment, then melted almost instantly as his boyish eyes met Lannin's. The girl had not seen him.

She went on: "And unfortunately, if your theory is correct, the wig, the dress, the hat —" She pressed fingers lightly to her lips and then waved them toward the window. "They should be thirty good miles down the line now. I'm afraid there's very little chance that you'd ever find them."

Lannin's jaw muscles twitched. He said: "I bucked you once before and I beat you that time. But I gave you a break then, Carlotta, because I figured you played the game according to your lights." His tone grew sombre, harsh. "I didn't figure you trailed with killers."

"Killers?" The smile vanished from her face. "What do you mean?"

Lannin watched her eyes, said after a moment: "Baby Face Carrow. You been introduced?"

"Carrow? Carrow on board?" She leaned down excitedly, grasping his arm. "And you've left Sartoset alone up there? Get back, Hunt Lannin. Get back fast."

He shook his head slowly. "When you give me the jewels," he said. "Not before."

The train was barely moving now. Lights sprang up in the darkness outside the window; the end of the Albany station crept by them slowly. Carlotta glanced out, then came to her feet, gripping Lannin's arm.

"But you've got to go back. Carrow's a killer." She spoke fast and breathlessly. "And he thinks Sartoset has crossed him. He'll murder him if he gets a chance. Oh, please!"

Lannin frowned. She looked agitated, sincere. He thought of Carrow looking in at him, knowing Sartoset was alone in the compartment, defenseless.

"All right," he said gruffly. "But you'll come, too. You're not dropping off at Albany and leaving me to hold the bag. Come on."

She made a gesture, hesitated, then walked fast ahead of him up the aisle. As they gained the platform, the train shuddered down its long length, stopped with a jerk. Oncoming passengers crowded the aisles with baggage, slowed their progress. Lannin cursed softly, grasped the girl's wrist and barged roughly ahead, not heeding angry looks.

But a step inside the compartment, he stopped, his eyes dark and savage, his mouth ugly. Behind him the girl screamed, a soft, wordless sound of utter terror. Mr. Sartoset lay across the seat, crumpled, still, his delicate face sculptured in terror, and his throat a hideous red gash that caused even Lannin to wince.

Behind them the door to the corridor was closed. No one apparently had heard the girl's soft scream, and for a moment in the narrow compartment, there was no sound but the harsh sound of breath quickly drawn — two breaths, not three. Then far ahead the long, mournful note of a whistle floated out, and the floor under them jerked, began to move. Mr. Sartoset, with his dreadful face, slid gently down.

Lannin did not speak at all. He gripped the girl's arm, drew back the door and raced out to the corridor, to the platform. The conductor stood on the top step, pulling the door to; Lannin lunged by him, swung off the platform, ran along beside the train until the girl jumped into his arms.

He said, digging brutal fingers into her arm: "Pull yourself together.

Baby Face Carrow must have left the train here. That's why I didn't report the killing. That would have held me up for hours, answering police, explaining. It would have given Carrow time to clear. This way we're right behind him. Understand?"

Her voice was a little unsteady, but strong enough. "Yes," she said.

"Good girl," he grunted, moving fast across the station, eyes moving in rapid flickers over the people about him. "I saw Carrow in the club car while I was talking to you. That's why I thought you were playing along with him. And I guess he was only trying to reach the end of the train and slip off before the body was discovered."

They came out to the street, where taxis were drawn up in a long line, honking impatiently. She was hatless, with no luggage, as he was himself, but there was no time to think of that. A Negro porter at the head of the line was opening taxi doors, loading in luggage after the occupants. Lannin collared him, shoving a dollar bill into his hand.

"A little man," he snapped. "Gray suit, gray hat — looked like a kid. Anybody like that take a taxi here in the past three minutes?"

The Negro rolled enormous eye whites up to him, stuttered: "A little man — gray — No, suh. I —"

Swinging away from him, Lannin drew the girl against the station wall, clear of the door. "Wait here," he directed. "I'll call the police on the phone. They can cover the city better than I can — throw out a net for Carrow. I'll be back in a minute or two."

Inside the station again, he slipped through the crowds, hoping for a phone booth, found a line of them in the rear, got inside one, and brought the door to behind him. "Police headquarters," he said, speaking huskily into the transmitter when the operator cut in. "Fast."

There was a wait of perhaps twenty seconds, then a man's voice cut in with an official drone.

Lannin said: "There's a man been murdered on the Adirondack night express that just pulled out of here. His killer's Baby Face Carrow, and he's somewhere in the city now. He'll probably try to head back for New York — maybe he'll steal a car. You've got his description on file. Send it out."

The voice, no longer droning, said: "Wait a —" Lannin hung up.

Back on the sidewalk he swung left of the door, looking for Carlotta. The wall was empty now and he cursed, frowning, swung his glance out over the street. He could not see her anywhere; a thin touch of coldness bit at his stomach.

The porter he had approached before was still at the curb, waving in cabs. "The girl that was with me," Lannin said. "You saw her, didn't you? Where did she go?"

The Negro nodded. "Yassuh. This time I saw her with that man you talked about. They got in a cab. Gray hat, he had, and suit, too. He looked —"

The coldness inside Lannin spread fast, into his chest, his arms. The Negro gawked at him. "She looked funny, mister. I thought she was sick. She —"

Lannin's voice came out distorted and hoarse. "You heard the address?" When the man nodded he got in the next taxi, shoved change at him. "Tell my driver where to go — the same address."

The cab slid away with a crackle of gears. Lannin shifted on the seat, lit a cigarette, edged forward and snarled: "Fast, man! There's five in it for you."

They shot ahead more rapidly, out of a brightly lighted street into one well paved, lined with trees. Lannin's heart beat very fast; he was thinking of the girl, calling himself a fool. Carrow was a killer. Carrow was smart. If he hadn't found the jewels on Sartoset, he knew that either Lannin or the girl must have them, and he'd probably hung around the station, well hidden, waited to find out if they had left the train, too. Then when the girl was left alone . . .

Lannin stared ahead, eyes bleak, jaws jutting like stone. He'd kill the girl, of course, the way he'd killed Sartoset. Or maybe he'd be merciful, use a bullet. But he'd kill her — that was the one sure thing.

And what was it to him, to Hunt Lannin, hunter of men — of women, too, when they were like Carlotta? Hunt Lannin, hard, tough — what the hell was the matter with him now? He was shaking, cold, his hands curiously weak as they gripped each other. Just because the girl had always played the game square. But she hadn't, not tonight. She was a thief, but in a queer way she was honest, according to her lights. He laughed, harsh, short. An honest thief! Queer, that, but it made sense somehow, deep inside. She'd never killed.

The taxi slued in to the curb, stopped with a harsh squeaking of brakes. "Five eighty-two," the driver said. "Here's your address, boss."

Lannin flung him a bill. Across a stretch of lawn he saw a small stucco bungalow, gray paint dying dingily on walls and roof. The one broad window facing him showed a yellow block of light behind a drawn shade, but the door showed dark on a dark porch, and the upper story windows were dark.

Racing across the walk, he saw all that in one brief glance. The porch door opened easily at his shove, and fast, cautious, with one movement he was inside, automatic leveled before him. There was not a sound — outside the taxi whined away, died to silence. Only the room on the left showed light, a thin streak of it slicing through the crack beneath the door.

Lannin went through, fast, crouched, automatic sweeping before him in a circle. The room had a grass rug, wicker furniture, a ceiling cluster of bulbs blazing with light. But it was empty now; nothing moved.

He came out three steps to the center of the room, looked around. Doors opened on either side, both

dark, silent. After a moment's hesitation, he started for the one near the window. But after two steps, he stopped, rigid and tense, for a voice from the door on the left said softly: "Hunt Lannin."

Facing it, he could see nothing. The darkness inside was thick, save for a thin glow of light high up, piercing through a crack. The voice was Baby Face Carrow's voice; it was soft and quiet, and yet in the two words it spoke, it held death.

It said: "I'm going to kill you, Hunt Lannin — kill you like a cheap dick. You followed the girl; I knew you would. I gave the address loud so you'd find the place without any fuss. Because I wanted to croak you, Lannin. You called Johnny Carrow a punk — that's why. You took away his gun. You laughed at him. And now you're going to take it, in the belly, Lannin, where it hurts. And after you" — the chuckle was soft, almost inaudible — "the girl gets it."

In the darkness of the door nothing moved; Lannin strained eyes at it, automatic steady, iron hard. The voice came out of the darkness with a soft murmur. He could place it, but he couldn't shoot, for Carrow might have shielded himself behind the girl. He knew that the killer watched him, secure, savoring the moment of utter power. For Lannin was helpless.

The chuckle came again, floating somewhere in the darkness. "Shoot, Lannin," the voice said. "You got guts — you're tough. You took my gun away."

It heightened then to a thin snarl. "Shoot, damn you."

But Lannin didn't shoot. His eyes were gray stone, clear, shining. In the belly, Carrow said. That meant there'd be time; it meant he would see the flare of Carrow's automatic, that would tell him where the killer stood. It meant he could save the girl, shooting at the flash. And if he went down —

Lannin waited, in a silence that beat on his ears. He could save Carlotta. When the flash came, he'd get in one shot, maybe only one. But that was enough. Lannin knew that, for the coldness was gone from his body, from his hand.

"Yellow?" Another chuckle. "Hard guy. I —"

In the darkness then, there wasn't a flare — there was only a many-colored glitter of light, instantly gone, and the bark of Carrow's voice, snarling. But the snarl choked off, whimpering, for Lannin shot at the glitter, only once, before he dove forward, to the floor. And then he shot again, and Carrow shot, and coughed, choking. Then even the choking stopped, and Carlotta was coming out to him from the darkness.

"The diamonds," she gasped. "I flung them at him. I hoped you'd see. I hit him in the chest. Oh, Lannin!"

"It's all right," Lannin said quietly, taking her arm. There was a light switch just inside the door; and when he turned it on, he saw Baby Face Carrow lying on the floor, on his

stomach, one hand almost touching a glittering string of objects glowing deep like blood, like the dark trickling stream that flowed toward them on the floor.

Clutching his arms tightly, Carlotta said: "They're the Scannett diamonds. Carrow got hold of them last winter, after some friend of his stole them. And he gave them to Sartoset to work over. Sartoset was a fence; he removed hot jewels from their settings, cut them smaller, sold them in his store. Everyone thought Wilson and Sartoset was a respectable firm — that's why it was so easy for them. Only this time he didn't want to cut them up. Some man in Lake Placid would buy them as they were, without asking any questions. And Sartoset wanted that all to himself. That's why —"

Lannin nodded. "Carrow was afraid he wouldn't get his cut. He tried to get them back. When Sartoset wouldn't return them —" He reached forward and picked them off the floor. "How'd he get you here?"

"A gun in my back," she said, shivering. "Then he made me sit against the wall in that dark room, facing him. When I heard you, I thought the diamonds might catch the light, show you where he was. So I threw them at him. I knew he was going to kill me, too."

Lannin growled: "It's no game for a girl. Keep out of it after this."

She said softly: "I can't. And you know why, Hunt Lannin, because the iron is in both our souls. We can't live tame — not you, nor me. Maybe some day I'll get it, but until I do, it will all be worthwhile. I'll live, Hunt Lannin."

He said quite soberly: "You'll die, too. You almost did tonight."

Outside, far distant, sirens screamed, whined rapidly closer, stopped at the curb. Lannin's face twitched a little, and he said hoarsely: "Damn you, Carlotta! I'll cover you again. I owe you that for throwing those diamonds. We can say Carrow stole them from Sartoset. But if there's ever a next time —"

"Let's hope," she said, dark eyes soft. "We'll drink to it tonight. Some day, Hunt Lannin, I am going to beat you. It will make me very happy."

THE UNDERTAKER

by JACK JONAS

INSPECTOR Homer Hawley bounded up the embankment with an agility surprising for his age and bulk. Behind him Amadeo Pasqualez Cortez struggled to keep pace through the uncut grass and weeds of the park bank. At the top Hawley turned to wait for his smaller companion.

"This study with the American police, it is sometimes very strenuous. I will be happy," Cortez said, "to get back to Cuba."

The nattily-dressed Cortez brushed seed from his trousers, straightened, and pushed both hands simultaneously across his heavy black hair. The men looked ahead and saw a small group of people silhouetted in front of the headlights of a police cruiser. They moved forward, and the group parted to allow them to enter the inside of the circle.

The body of an elderly man was lying on its back in the center of a wide gravel path through the high grass. The heels of the neatly-polished shoes were an inch apart, and the toes touching, so that the feet pointed straight upward. The hands were folded across the chest, dropped loosely on the gray striped suit. The gray hair at the right temple was stained with a trickle of dried blood from a small wound.

With the exception of that, and the fact that one eye was open and one closed, the body looked as if it had already been prepared for burial and was lying in a coffin, the grass forming the sides.

"The Undertaker!" Hawley muttered.

"*Eh, amigo?* The undertaker?"

A uniformed patrolman stepped forward and saluted.

"Looks like his work, all right, sir," he said to the Inspector. "Has all the trademarks. Except this one's dead."

"His money's gone, I suppose."

The patrolman nodded.

"Tell me about it," the Inspector ordered.

The patrolman assumed an official voice. "This couple," he pointed to a teen-age pair standing at the inner edge of the circle, "was walking through the park at nine o'clock tonight. They were following this path when they came upon the body.

"He was like that when you saw him?" Hawley asked the girl.

"Yes."

The little Cuban touched Hawley's sleeve. "*Amigo.*"

"Yes, Cortez?"

"This man is an undertaker, perhaps?"

"Oh." Hawley laughed at the puzzled expression on Cortez' face. "No. The Undertaker we're talking about is a footpad. Has a grim sense

of humor. He operates chiefly in the parks of the city, hits people over the head, robs them, then arranges their bodies like this. It's quite surprising to them when they wake up, or when somebody finds them. This looks like his work. And it's the first one he's killed."

"You know this — undertaker?"

"He's Mike Corranzo. A big fellow. Served one term in prison for robbery. Not very bright."

"You will then arrest this Mike Corranzo."

"We'll pick him up," Hawley said. "But I'm worried. I said he wasn't very bright, but he's been bright enough to fool us whenever we try to pin something on him."

He turned again to the patrolman. "Homicide's been here?"

"They're around some place. Looking through the grass, likely."

"Get Creager for me."

The patrolman strode away and Hawley bent to examine the body. Cortez stooped beside him.

"He seems to be having with us the joke, *Senor* Hawley."

"Huh?"

"He is winking at us, no?"

"Oh. Yeah, I guess he is."

Hawley straightened and looked at the people surrounding the area where the police were working.

"Anybody here know him?" he called.

A short, heavy man removed himself from the crowd and answered.

"He's Gregory Easton."

"Who are you?"

"I'm the night clerk at the hotel across the street from the park. That's where Mr. Easton has been living since he retired two years ago."

"The eyes," Cortez said. "They bother me. They should both be open, or both shut, should they not?"

"Mr. Easton has a glass eye," the night clerk replied. "I suppose it must look unusual to you to see him that way, but to us at the hotel . . . well, we're used to it."

"Eh?"

"The eye didn't fit very well," the clerk explained. "He used to sit asleep in the lobby sometimes and and that eye was always open, though the other was closed and he was sound asleep."

Cortez indicated that he understood. The patrolman had returned with Dan Creager, the handsome but gangling head of the homicide squad.

"What's been done?" the Inspector asked Creager.

"The usual things. We've looked for fingerprints. Didn't find any, of course. And on this gravel path, it's going to be hard, if not impossible, to find traces of anything else."

"I was afraid that was the way it would be," Hawley murmured.

Cortez interrrupted. "This Corranzo, *amigo*. He is what kind of *hombre?*"

"I've told you most of what we know about him. They call him The Undertaker because of the way he leaves his robbery victims. He did it before he went to prison. While he was there, we didn't have this

trouble. Now that he's out again, he's been specializing in this type of work, just as all criminals drift into one particular kind of crime."

"But, as you say," Cortez continued, "he has left the trademarks. It should not be difficult to connect with him this crime."

"He'll have an alibi, Cortez. He always does. Pays a couple of bums a dollar or two to tell us he's been with them all evening. And we'll have a tough time proving he was anywhere near Easton when the man was killed."

Cortez glanced again at the body, studied it carefully.

"It may be," Cortez suggested courteously, "that there will be a fingerprint on the glass eye."

"Oh, come now, Cortez!"

"It is but a suggestion," Cortez said meekly.

"But how would a print . . ."

"If you will allow me," Cortez interrrupted, "— as a favor to an eager student — to place the aluminum dust on the artificial eye?"

Hawley considered.

"You through with the body, Creager?" he asked the homicide chief. Creager nodded.

"Okay, Cortez," Hawley said.

The Cuban took from his pocket a small dust-shaker and bent over the body. He sifted the aluminum dust carefully over the glass eye, then leaned closer and blew gently at the dust.

"If you will take a look, *Senor* Hawley."

Hawley kneeled on the gravel path and examined the eye.

"Well, I'll be —" he said. "Hey, Creager! There *is* a fingerprint on that eye!"

Later, in Inspector Hawley's office at police headquarters, Cortez and the Inspector were seated facing each other across the police officer's desk.

"I've got to hand it to you, Cortez," Hawley declared. "That print was Corranzo's, all right."

Cortez smiled.

"A lucky thing, no?"

"Lucky! What did you have up your sleeve when you wanted to take a look at that eye?"

"Up my sleeve, *amigo?*" Cortez was puzzled.

"What were you thinking about?" Hawley amended.

"You yourself referred to him as The Undertaker, *amigo mio*. He had, this man Corranzo, a grim sense of humor, you said."

"We know all that, Cortez," Hawley said.

Cortez continued, "He arranges the feet, so. He crosses the arms, so. He smiles to himself. Then he notices the eyes. One is open or half-closed; the other is open wide. This he does not understand, but it does not fit in with his pattern. He closes the half-closed eye, attempts to close the other. It will not close. The eye, it does not fit. He fusses with it, then he hears the young couple approaching along the path. He runs away, leaving behind him the fingerprint on the glass eye. So!"

DEATH FROM THE SANSKRIT

One day, early in 1941, Lawrence G. Blochman received a 'phone call from Henry LaCossitt, then fiction editor of "American Magazine" and later editor of "Collier's." Mr. LaCossitt asked Mr. Blochman a staggering question: "How would you like to commit murder in the public library?" Mr. Blochman had the presence of mind to reply without hesitation; he said, "I think I'd like it fine." They discussed modus operandi in a general sort of way, and then Mr. LaCossitt warned: "Make it a murder mystery of *the Library, not just* in *the Library." So for the next two weeks Mr. Blochman practically lived in the New York Public Library, Forty-second Street and Fifth Avenue. He informed the staff of his homicidal intentions and found all the members, from the Chief of the Reference Department to the boys who collect books from the reading tables, enthusiastically cooperative. Mr. Blochman was permitted to roam the stacks, inspect the behind-the-scenes machinery which runs the huge organization so efficiently, and ask ten thousand questions. The author-in-search-of-a-plot filled a notebook with sketches, charts, facts, and impressions — until, such is the fruit of first-hand research, he had his background down pat, his characters, clues, motives, even a weapon — and all integral parts of a real-life Library. Only one thing more was necessary: Mr. Blochman had to sit down and write the story.*

Even the long arm of coincidence played its part. The present director of the New York Public Library, Ralph A. Beals, was not in charge of the Library at the time it was desecrated by the Blochman murders; at that time Mr. Beals was Dean of the University of Chicago Library School. But Messrs. Beals and Blochman were well-known to each other: for several years after World War I they were roommates at the University of California. Mr. Blochman is certain, however, that had Mr. Beals been director of the New York Public Library at the time the author was strewing it with corpses, Mr. Beals would not have minded: Mr. Beals is a mystery fan and not the least bit ashamed to admit it.

Perhaps you have wondered why we titled this editorial preface "Death from the Sanskrit." It's really very simple. Mr. Blochman's story first appeared in "American Magazine"; the fiction editor of "American," however, did not like Mr. Blochman's original title — Mr. LaCossitt called the story "Death Walks in Marble Halls." A year later the story was filmed by Twentieth Century-Fox, and they did not like Mr. LaCossitt's

title — they called the movie "Quiet Please, Murder!" Indeed, it can be said without fear of contradiction that despite the fact Twentieth Century-Fox purchased the film rights, they did not like the story either! They completely changed Mr. Blochman's plot, not only abandoning the original sequence of events and the original characters but twisting the story inside out, making it a tale of so-called psychological suspense, with the identity of the murderer known from the beginning, instead of a tale of crime-mystery-and-detection. As a matter of incontrovertible record, the only thing — we repeat, the only thing — *the movie masterminds retained of Mr. Blochman's original story was the locale — a Public Library.*

So, in both its appearances to date — in a national slick magazine and on the screen — Mr. Blochman's story has borne other people's titles. Now, in its initial reprint publication, we are constrained to use the title under which it was first copyrighted. Does this mean that Mr. Blochman's own title will again be lost in the shuffle? No. The least we can do is give Mr. Blochman's own title a sort of afterbirth, a sort of delayed-action début. Hence, we gave this introduction the title Mr. Blochman originally planned for his story and which, by the way, he still considers the best. (In a small voice: we agree.)

MURDER WALKS IN MARBLE HALLS

by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

LONG BEFORE the storm broke, Phil Manning had an uneasy feeling that something unpleasant was about to happen. He had been jumpy ever since reading in the morning papers that Feodor Klawitz, the erudite screwball, was out on bail after having been arrested on charges of criminal libel preferred by H. H. Dorwin, a trustee of the public library. When Dorwin himself telephoned to say he was on his way over to discuss a matter of great importance, Manning's jumpiness increased by at least six latent jumps. And when his phone rang a second time, he winced and hit a handful of wrong typewriter keys.

Phil Manning did not believe in the occult or in premonitions. And as he had neither a hangover nor a guilty conscience, he decided he was suffering from an attack of the Deep-blue Willies (*Melancholia Bibliotecalis*), an occupational disease afflicting the staff of the Public Library on dark Winter days. Even on the sunniest mornings of Spring there was a certain sepulchral chill about the marble grandeur of the library, and when the

weather went into somber mourning for the dying year, the building was a positive mausoleum.

The phone rang again. The shaggy young man with the Willies reached for it apprehensively.

"Press relations. Manning speaking," he said.

"Phil, I've got to see you — right away!" It was Betty Vale's voice, usually guaranteed to restore fallen spirits with its cosmic music. Not today, though. Today it was without a single grace note. Today it was a taut, low-keyed call for help.

"What's happened, Betty?" Manning tried to fight off the sense of impending disaster with a facetious phrase. "Did somebody park a fire hydrant near your car again?"

"Don't joke, Phil." There was anguish in the tone. "Can you cross the street? I'm phoning from the cigar store at the corner."

"Why don't you come over here?" Manning asked. "I've got to wait for one of the trustees. H. H. Dorwin just phoned —"

"Dorwin?" The word was like a cry of pain. "I don't want to see Hugh Dorwin now, Phil. I can't."

"I didn't know he was a friend of yours," Manning said. "How —"

"I can't tell you about it now, Phil. And I'm afraid to come to the library. I'll wait here. You'll come when you can, Phil? Please."

"Of course, darling. Right away — if I can make it."

Manning banged down the phone and glanced at his typewriter, which had been automatically composing a press release on the library's exhibit opening the following week: The History of the Dog in America as Told by Contemporary Prints and Publications. The release could wait.

Uncoiling his long legs from the legs of the chair, Manning rose to his full six-feet-one and smoothed the sedentary wrinkles from his tweeds.

Suddenly Manning sat down again. This was indeed his off day. Dave Benson was flowing through the doorway, his white teeth flashing in an aggressive smile.

Manning never thought of Benson as walking; he moved as though the next step would see his pointed shoes gliding into a tango. The gait matched his double-breasted elegance, with its corner of blue-plaid handkerchief poking from his pocket to harmonize with his blue-plaid tie.

"Hi!" said Benson, turning on all his dark, slick-haired, self-conscious charm. "Where's Betty?"

He would ask that, Manning thought. Benson haunted Betty Vale like an unemployed ghost. He was always in the library if there was a chance of Betty's being there.

"Betty's gone to Bermuda for the onion season," Manning said. "And I'm leaving on the next plane myself. Goodbye, old man."

"Betty told me she was coming to the library this afternoon," Benson insisted through his white grin. "So I was thinking —"

"Stop boasting, Benson. And leave the door open as you go out. Good-

bye." Benson's built-in smile slowly faded.

"Have it your own way," he said, fixing Manning with a curious stare. "But don't think Betty's going to thank you for this." He made his exit in two-four time.

Manning listened to his footsteps retreating down the marble corridor. He waited several minutes to give Benson plenty of chance to get out of range. Then he rose again quickly.

He was buttoning his coat when he heard the shot.

It was not a very loud report — a sharp explosion that made hollow, singing echoes in the halls and galleries — and Manning did not recognize it immediately for what it was. After all, gun fire was not a usual sound in the public library. When the report was followed, however, by a cry, a shout, and the tattoo of running feet, Manning bolted from his office.

Fifty feet down the corridor he saw H. H. Dorwin flattened against the wall. Bullet-chipped flakes of marble from the bust of Sophocles above him were dusted over his well-tailored shoulders. His usually ruddy face was the color of the sculptured poet.

Halfway between Dorwin and the monumental staircase, a small target pistol lay on the floor. It was probably not more than .22 caliber.

Pounding down the stairs was big, white-thatched Tim Cornish, library guard, in pursuit of a shabby little man who had already reached the vast vestibule and was running for the street doors.

"You hurt, Mr. Dorwin?" Manning hesitated between joining the chase and helping the shaken trustee.

"Of course not!" Dorwin barked. "Manning, go after that guard! Don't let him turn the man over to the police!"

"But, Mr. Dorwin —"

"No cops!" Dorwin ordered, walking quickly down the corridor to pick up the pistol. "Bring him back here. Bring them both back here, Manning. And hurry."

Manning hurried. He went down the steps three at a time.

Once outside, he broke into a brisk trot, seeking Cornish and the threadbare fugitive among the throngs of women hurrying along the avenue, round-shouldered with the cold despite their furs.

Manning caught sight of Cornish near the corner. The guard had collared the seedy-looking assailant, apparently without a struggle. When Manning motioned, Cornish started toward him, his captive meekly in tow.

The man who had shot at Dorwin wore no overcoat, and his teeth were chattering. He was an unprepossessing specimen, thin and gray-haired. At first glance he seemed typical of the cold-weather derelicts now deserting the icy streets for the library, the homeless bums whose damp clothing gave off animal odors when it began to steam in the warmth of the reading rooms. When he came closer, however, Manning revised his estimate. The shabby stranger was young, despite the two-day stubble of graying beard

on his tragically lined face; and his eyes were keen and intelligent.

"Maybe I ought to carry him," said the guard. The threadbare captive looked very small beside Tim Cornish. Tim was a big man, almost as big as Manning, with a Mark Twain mustache, hair like silver, and feet like a copper. Tim had in fact been pretty much all copper for most of his twenty-five years as library guard. Only after twenty years had he become aware of the millions of volumes which surrounded him daily. Three years ago he had discovered Shakespeare.

"You don't look like a gunman," Manning said to the seedy man beside him. "Why did you want to shoot H. H. Dorwin?"

There was no reply. They went up the steps to the portico.

"It was just the flash and outbreak of a fiery mind," said Tim. "A savageness in unreclaimed blood. That's from *Macbeth*, Mr. Manning."

The silent little man spoke at last. "It's from *Hamlet*," he said.

"I said *Hamlet*, didn't I?" Tim demanded. He tightened his grip on his captive and pushed him indignantly through the entrance stile. The metal bar came between them and stuck — only for a fraction of a second. In the brief instant the man who had shot at Dorwin wrested himself free and ran.

Tim Cornish ran after him, with Phil Manning one click of the turnstile behind.

They ran past the elevators and up the steep vaulted stairway of the North Wing. On the first landing they stopped to pant in consternation. The seedy little would-be assassin was gone.

The stairways in the North Wing were a complex system of superimposed and parallel X's, a maze of crisscrossing marble tunnels, like false passages to detour ghouls from a Pharaoh's sepulchre. From the landing Manning and Cornish could continue upward by alternate branches of the X, either to the Music Room office, or to the elevators on the second floor; they could go down again by another leg of the stairway to the main floor. There was no way of knowing which of the three the fugitive had taken.

"Look, Tim," Manning said. "You stay on the scent. I'll warn the guards at all the doors."

When he returned to his office, after giving the description of the missing derelict to the guards at all the doors, Manning nearly collided with a young woman who was coming out. She was a sinuous little thing, lusciously proportioned and suspiciously blonde. She was probably pretty, although at the moment her sensuous features were distorted by an expression of dismay — or perhaps it was embarrassment at the brusqueness of the unexpected encounter. Manning did not remember having seen her before, although she was hatless and evidently worked in the library. As she muttered a hasty "Sorry," he thought her lips were white along their cosmetic edges. He was watching her hurry down the corridor, when Dorwin's voice from inside the office called, "Well?"

H. H. Dorwin had recovered his composure — at least outwardly.

"Where's Underwood?" he asked.

"Who's that, sir?"

"Underwood. James Underwood, the man I told you to bring here."

"He's still loose somewhere in the library, Mr. Dorwin. He won't get out of the building, though. Hadn't we better get the police?"

"No," snapped Dorwin. "The poor devil probably's sorry already for what he did."

"I see," said Manning, although he didn't.

"He has a brilliant mind, that Underwood," Dorwin went on. "Used to work for me, in my private library, cataloguing my first editions and incunabula. Resigned about a year ago, for some strange reasons of his own. Had a hard time of it ever since. On W.P.A. for a while, and I don't know what else. Been hanging around my place the last week, but I've been too busy to see him. I suspected he wanted his job back, and sent word I didn't have anything for him. Hard luck went to his head, I guess."

Dorwin paused expectantly. Manning didn't know what comment was expected of him. He said: "That young woman who just left here — was she looking for me?"

"No," said Dorwin quickly. Then he added, "She's a catalogue girl — new here. Doesn't know her way around yet, apparently. By the way, Manning, what happened to your notice on those Russian manuscripts I gave the library? They've been catalogued since Autumn and I haven't seen a word about them anywhere."

"There's a notice in next month's Bulletin, Mr. Dorwin," Manning replied. "Is that what you wanted to see me about?"

"There was something else," said Dorwin. He hesitated, got up, and went to the window. For a minute he seemed intent on the first flakes of snow swirling through the gloom.

His silhouette was slim and clean-lined against the window, particularly for a man in his fifties — the lusty fifties. He was a snappy dresser, too, for a banker and patron of the arts. Or for a collector. Dorwin was very much a collector. He collected interlocking directorates and symphony orchestras, tax-exempt securities and first editions, old masters and young blondes.

An unpleasant thought squirmed through Manning's mind. Betty Vale was on the blonde side. Betty Vale had admitted out of a clear sky that she knew Hugh Dorwin and didn't want to see him. And Betty Vale was scared of something . . .

"You know about my fuss with Feodor Klawitz?" Dorwin demanded suddenly without turning around.

"I know about it roughly," Manning said.

"How well do you know the man?"

"Well . . ." Manning hesitated. He knew Feodor Klawitz as a bald-headed, horse-faced eccentric who spent most of his waking hours in the library, except for three nights a week when he broadcast over a small

local radio station. It was a strange program, part news, part personalities, all lugubriously learned and much of it violently scurrilous. Manning had always thought Klawitz a little mad, an opinion which had been strengthened the day he was arrested. The warrant had been served on Klawitz in the Map Room, and he had immediately gone berserk, throwing maps and charts about, pelting the librarian and the arresting officer with Persia, Baluchistan and Bokhara . . .

"I know him to speak to; that's about all," Manning said. "And of course I know him by sight — if he happens to be wearing a familiar wig."

"Wig?" Dorwin echoed.

"I thought everybody knew Klawitz wears a different toupee to suit his mood," Manning explained. "He wears a dignified gray wig when he's feeling severe and scholarly, a sleek black one for moments of glamor and romance, a reddish thatch when he feels argument and eloquence coming on."

"The fool libeled me again on his broadcast last night," Dorwin said. "Hadn't been out of jail two hours before he was calling me a lecherous plutocrat. Then at midnight I got a special delivery letter — anonymous, of course — saying that Klawitz had barely started on me. Said he'd rip my character completely to shreds, unless I did this or that, libel charge or no libel charge."

Dorwin turned around at last. He turned quickly, savagely. His face had gone white again.

"Damn it, Manning," the trustee said. "Nobody can blackmail me!"

"Do you think he . . . Do you think Klawitz had anything to do with this man Underwood taking a shot at you today?" Manning asked.

"I wouldn't put it past him," Dorwin said. "Klawitz is capable of anything. But I just wanted you to know, Manning, that I'm not backing down. I'm not dropping the libel charges against Klawitz. I'm telling you this, because in trying to get at me again, Klawitz may hurt you, Manning."

Manning moistened his lips. "Betty Vale?" he asked.

"I won't mention names, Manning. I'm a little old-fashioned that way. Whatever my bachelor habits may be, I still observe the old niceties. I just want to tell you that . . . that no matter what Klawitz may say, you mustn't lose your faith in . . . in anyone."

The interview was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Tim Cornish. The guard was panting slightly as he announced: "We haven't found him yet, Mr. Dorwin. But we will. He's still in the library."

"Yes. Well, bring him to the Trustees' Room when you find him." Dorwin picked up a large portfolio which Manning had not noticed before. It was a deep-red portfolio fastened with blue tapes. "I'll be there in half an hour," he added. "There's a Trustees' meeting."

"Don't you think you'd better wait here, Mr. Dorwin?" Tim suggested. "Do you think it's a good idea

to go wandering around while that guy —?"

"I'm not afraid, Tim." Dorwin looked at the red portfolio with a curious expression of alarm in his eyes. He started to say something, then changed his mind. He tucked the portfolio under his left arm — gingerly, as though it contained something highly explosive. "I'm not afraid of *him*," he said, patting his right coat pocket. "I've got the man's gun."

He strode out. Tim watched him admiringly. "He's right," Tim said. "Cowards die many times before their death, Mr. Manning."

Manning smiled. "*Hamlet*, Tim?"

"*Julius Caesar*, Mr. Manning. By the way, I've got a note for you." He fished a folded piece of paper from his pocket.

Manning quickly unfolded the paper. On it, Betty Vale's handwriting said: "Come to the Oriental Room as soon as you can! Please!! I'll wait for you there."

Thrusting the note into his pocket, Manning hurried past the guard without a word. He heard Tim say, "We'll have that guy rounded up in no time, Mr. Manning. Don't worry."

Manning waved an acknowledgement, and strode down the marbled whiteness of the crypt-like corridor. He turned into the long, low hall that housed the Oriental catalogue, passed the doors of the Slavonic and Hebrew rooms. His heart beat faster as he approached the entrance to the Oriental library. Not only was he anxious about Betty Vale's mysterious difficulties, but the Oriental Room was a sentimental symbol to him. It was here that he had rediscovered Betty.

They had been college sweethearts once, before Betty left the co-educational school for a Vermont college where a girl could study not only Greek philosophy and English poetry, but the Dance with a capital D. After that a million dollars and the Atlantic Ocean had come between them. The million was Edward Vale's — Betty's father's — the result of a smart advertising campaign for Vale Headache Powders, while Manning was learning the newspaper business in New York. And a million dollars can change almost anyone's social outlook, particularly in regard to a $60-a-week reporter; at least it would seem so to the reporter. The Atlantic Ocean came in when Manning was awarded a scholarship at Louvain — a year of study cut short by the blitzkrieg which blasted him out of the Louvain Library into the driver's seat of an ambulance — a year in which he and Betty did not even correspond.

Even after he was chased home with a Nazi bullet in his thigh and had settled down to his new job at the public library, he made no effort to get in touch with her. He was afraid of that million dollars.

He thought he had forgotten her, until the day, several months ago, he had found her in the Oriental Room, poring over the words of Kalidasa. He was pleased and puzzled — puzzled that he should be so pleased to learn

that she was not yet married, even more puzzled that a pretty blonde with a rich father should be concerned with a Sanskrit poet fifteen centuries dead.

The answer to the first puzzle was not hard to find. The second, however, was more difficult. Betty Vale could be charmingly secretive. She seemed genuinely glad to pick up their old comradeship where they had left off, but she liked to talk more about the past than about the present.

If there had been any doubt in Manning's mind that she was in trouble, it was disspelled when he saw her face.

"I was scared to death you wouldn't come," she said.

"You're scared to death, all right, but you can't blame it on me, darling." He smiled desperately into her frightened eyes. "What happened?"

"I don't know where to begin."

"An anonymous letter?"

The girl gasped. Her eyes were almost round above her broad, high cheek bones. They were long eyes, normally — almost Oriental, if they hadn't been so blue. "How did you know?" she asked.

"A guess." Manning shrugged. He was not quite sure why he had not told her about H. H. Dorwin's anonymous letter — or the shot that hit Sophocles instead of Dorwin. He said: "Tell me about it."

Betty Vale pushed one hand into her muff, drew out a crumpled piece of paper. "It came in this afternoon's mail," she said.

Manning smoothed out the paper and read:

> "If you don't stop seeing Hugh Dorwin, someone will stop you — and by the most primitive and certain means."

The message was printed in crudely-formed block letters that did not fit the precise phrasing.

"*Have* you been seeing Dorwin?" Manning asked.

"This past week, yes."

"Then I can give you some very simple advice: Don't see him any more."

"But I must see him this afternoon, Phil. I *must*."

"And let him make passes at you?"

"It's . . . it's not that."

The girl moistened her lips. Her long lashes fanned her cheek. She said in a low voice: "I've got to see him, that's all."

"That's a quick switch," Manning said. "When you phoned me, you didn't want to see him at all. You said you were even afraid to come to the library."

"I *was* afraid. Of that man."

"Underwood?"

"I don't know his name. The shabby man who needed a shave — and an overcoat. I was on my way to the library when I saw him go in. So I phoned you instead. But when I saw the guard arrest him, I thought it would be safe to come."

"The guard didn't arrest him," Manning said. "If it's Underwood you're talking about, he's still loose — in the library."

"He's —?" The girl started to rise, but sank back limply in her chair. "Oh, Phil."

Manning reached for her hand. It was cold and trembling.

"Why are you afraid of Underwood?" he asked.

"I think he wrote that letter."

"You don't know his name, but you think he wrote you a threatening letter. Why?"

"I saw him several times loitering outside of Hugh Dorwin's house on Fifth Avenue," Betty said. "Day before yesterday, when I came out, he was standing there, shivering in his thin coat. I almost felt sorry for him — until he looked into my face. Phil, his eyes! They're desperate, terrible eyes! They're — I can't explain, but they frightened me."

"That's the only reason you have for thinking Underwood wrote you an anonymous letter — the expression in his eyes?"

"Who else could it have been, Phil? No one else knew about my going to Dorwin's. And this man waiting outside there . . ."

Manning pulled thoughtfully at the lobe of one ear. It all sounded very strange — yet there were plenty of strange things going on in the library today. Betty was certainly holding something back — perhaps because she was still scared.

"Look, darling," Manning said, squeezing the girl's hand reassuringly. "I'm not going to ask you any more questions until I'm sure your Mr. Underwood is somewhere else. Wait here until I take a quick turn around the plant. The guards have probably rounded him up by this time."

Betty returned the pressure of his hand, but said nothing. . . .

The guard outside the Trustees' Room said: "Tim just went upstairs, Mr. Manning. He heard that man he's looking for is on the third floor."

Manning set out in pursuit.

As he climbed the stairs he noted that the afternoon darkness was as thick as night, and that the snow was falling in earnest outside.

Manning was wondering whether Tim had turned north toward the Music Room or south toward the map room, when he caught sight of Tim's white hair at the far end of the catalogue room, straight ahead. He followed.

He strode through the two-storied hush of the vast nave where men and women moved among high tables, like a swarm of termites boring into the six million listing-cards impaled on metal spindles in the long oak drawers. He lost track of Tim among the people digging out their references to Anaphylaxis, Brazilian Railroads, and Chaucer. When he reached the queue waiting to present call-slips to the pneumatic-tube station at the central desk, he decided that Tim must have disappeared into the great transept of the two reading rooms beyond the catalogue. He would find out which one.

He first circled the North Room, skirting the tall cliffs of encyclopedias and reference books. He saw no trace

of Tim — or of James Underwood.

He passed the delivery desk — a corral of carved oak separating the two reading rooms — with its red lights flashing the numbers of books just arrived from the stacks by tiny elevator. He sidled through a parked caravan of low hand-trucks loaded with volumes returning to the stacks, each ticketed with pink or white slips to announce its destination. He stepped into the South Reading Room and was about to repeat his circular voyage of exploration when two arresting objects sprang simultaneously into his field of vision.

The first, the trim figure of a woman rushing excitedly toward him, he saw only vaguely. Even when she stopped beside him, seized his arm, and made a small, half-strangled sound in her throat, he did not really look at her. His eyes were focused in horrid fascination on the narrow gallery which ran along the entire side of the immense room, halfway up the precipice of books.

H. H. Dorwin was standing unsteadily on the gallery, the door of the spiral staircase open behind him.

Blood was streaming down Dorwin's left cheek, and his face was a ghastly mask. He took two disjointed steps, like a man walking in his sleep, tottered an instant, then collapsed. He toppled over the iron railing, struck the top of the jutting bookcases below, pitched across a dictionary stand, and crashed heavily on a reading table.

Three nuns and half a dozen students arose in shocked surprise, backed away from the sprawled figure on the table, and screamed in unison.

Pandemonium swept through the South Reading Room like a rising wind. The small noises of startled readers pushing back their chairs swelled to a roar. The shrieks of the terrified nuns struck human echoes from the far tables. The august silence shrouding the ornate gilded ceiling was ripped to shreds by a bedlam of voices raised above a murmur for the first time in nearly half a century. There was a movement of vicious curiosity toward the broken form on the reading table, a movement of terror away from it, a surge of panic toward the passage to the Catalogue Room.

Three library guards blocked the exit. One of them was Tim Cornish who had instantly sensed the situation and was lustily engaged in restoring order. His big voice droned through the din, calling: "Everyone be seated, please. Do not try to leave the room."

Tim's metallic monotone roused Phil Manning from his brief stupefaction. Turning his eyes from the man on the table, he realized that the woman who had gripped his arm was Betty Vale. She clutched her muff closely against her breast with tense white fingers, and the hand on his arm shook violently.

"You and your rendezvous," Manning said. "Why didn't you stay put?"

The girl stared at him wordlessly, her lips frozen in a small, scarlet, horrified O.

"Did you get to see Dorwin?" Phil asked.

"No. That is, not until he . . . Not until just now."

"How much of this did you see happen?"

"Just what you saw — and that was too much. I'm all cold and hot inside. I'm afraid I'm going to — "

"Sit down here, darling. No, here. Turn your back. Now listen hard and talk fast, because you'll probably have to be on your own for a while. You can tell me the whole story as soon as I can get you away from here. Meanwhile, tell me this: Why were you meeting Dorwin?"

"Well, Hugh said he wanted to explain about somebody trying to involve me in a scandal — some radio gossip."

"What scandal?"

"There isn't any, Phil. Not really. But I did go to Hugh Dorwin's alone — at night. And there was this awful man, this Underwood, watching me come out. Then there's that letter . . . Phil, I don't know what my father would do if I got mixed up in — "

"In a murder? You're already in it, from all the signs. And you're just afraid of your father?"

The girl shook her head. "Somebody killed Hugh Dorwin," she said. "Suppose it's the person who wrote me that letter? Suppose he thinks I *am* mixed up with Dorwin? Suppose he wants to kill me, too?"

Manning suddenly remembered the curious change in Dorwin's face as he picked up the big portfolio just as he left the office, not long ago. He asked: "Do you know anything about a portfolio — a large red portfolio tied with blue tapes?"

The girl made a queer, moaning sound.

Manning remembered that Dorwin had said: "Klawitz may hurt you. Klawitz may try to use a woman's name." Perhaps the portfolio contained old love letters. Or innocent letters that might be misconstrued. Dorwin had said: "You mustn't lose your faith in anyone." Well, he wouldn't. But he would have to find that red portfolio before the police did. If there was any incriminating evidence in it, anything that might link the girl to Dorwin, he would get rid of it. Meanwhile he would have to keep Betty out of the hands of the police. He wouldn't try to abet a guilty-looking escape, naturally, but he would like to delay the inevitable questioning as long as possible, to give him time to establish her innocence.

"Just remember one thing," he said. "Forget about Dorwin. If anybody asks you, you came here to meet me after work. We were going out for a drink together. Come on."

Manning glanced at the crowd around H. H. Dorwin. The rear ranks parted to let a man come through. The man had a professional air about him and was probably a doctor.

Tim still guarded the only exit from the reading room. He was thoroughly enjoying the exercise of authority, and his Mark Twain mustache seemed

to have assumed a martial twist. It was more like a Marshal Foch mustache, as he gave orders to his constantly arriving reinforcements. Half a dozen of his fellow guards had taken up their posts at strategic points, and several special investigators whose normal duties were to watch for vandals and book thieves had come into the room.

Manning took Betty's arm and guided her toward Tim. Two uniformed policemen from a squad car came up behind the guard as Manning and the girl approached.

"Sorry, Mr. Manning." Tim continued to bar the way. "Nobody's allowed to leave. The police are here."

Another squad of bluecoats came through from the Catalogue Room in single file. Manning watched them out of the corner of his eye as he asked Cornish: "Is he here, Tim?"

"I'm not sure," the guard replied. "Berger thought he saw him come in."

"If he's not here, somebody else had the same idea," Manning said.

"I know," Tim Cornish stepped closer to whisper in Manning's ear: "There's Klawitz, Mr. Manning."

Manning started. "Where, Tim?"

"Over there, halfway across the room — reading just like nothing happened."

Manning looked in the direction indicated by Tim's nod. Eight tables away, apparently oblivious of the hubbub around him, Feodor Klawitz was serenely poring over a book. The burnished curve of his naked pate, gleaming in the light of the overhead fixtures, was the only spot of calm in the room. A beribboned monocle screwed disdainfully into one eye, his ivory jowls devoid of any show of emotion, Klawitz quietly turned a page.

"I think we can leave Mr. Klawitz to the police, Tim. By the way, who called the cops?"

"I did, Mr. Manning."

"I'll be with you in a minute, Tim — if you need me," he said. "Come on, Betty."

The girl came with him silently.

"Listen hard," Manning said, as they walked between the reading tables. "What you have to do now is this: Make yourself as inconspicuous as possible until I find out what happened to that red portfolio of yours. When I locate it, we can discuss future strategy. Yes?"

"Of course — if you say so."

"Then find yourself a seat down at the south end of the room. Slip into the American History Collection if you can do it neatly. Wait until I come for you — and stick to your story."

He gave the girl's arm an affectionate pinch and watched her walk away.

When he turned back to Tim Cornish, the police were arriving in force.

The uniformed detectives were already widely deployed about the reading room, dripping melted snow all over the erudite terrain. A platoon of specialists tramped in, unslinging cameras, tripods, and cases of clue-

gathering apparatus. They were all obviously awaiting instructions from a small, inoffensive-looking man in mufti, who in turn was intently watching a husky, big-boned, bushy-haired medical examiner make a preliminary survey of the Dorwin corpse.

Manning skirted the center of police operations, hoping against hope that he could start his surreptitious search for the red portfolio without attracting attention. He was wrong.

"Hey, you!" The small man in mufti halted him with a slight side motion of his head. "Where do you think you're going?"

"I'm Philip Manning. I'm a member of the library staff. I don't think I got your name."

The small man grunted. "Kenneth Kilkenny, Homicide Squad." The detective did not look at Manning as he talked. The snow-filled crease of his slouch hat fed a rivulet that trickled off the brim to extinguish his cigarette, thus complying with library regulations. He continued to watch the medical examiner. "I don't think we need you, Manning," he said.

"I think you do," Manning contradicted. "I saw the whole show. You'll want me to go over the scene with you."

Kilkenny grunted again. "Wait till Doc Rosenkohl gets through here," he said.

"I'm through, Kenny — and you can turn your bloodhounds loose," the medical examiner said.

"What do I look for, Rosie — swords, pistols, or a blunt instrument?" the detective asked him.

"The man's been stabbed through the left eye," Dr. Rosenkohl replied. "But I can't tell you until after the autopsy if that's what killed him."

A pair of scissors could have done it, Manning thought; or some tool from the bindery downstairs.

"Whatever it was, we'll find it," Kilkenny declared. "How soon can you get into him, Rosie?"

"I'll ride down to Bellevue with him now, if you want," said the medical examiner.

"You'd better, Rosie. I can't keep a thousand bookworms here all week. I never saw so many suspects at one murder since Madcap Maisie Clark got shot on the stage of Bensky's Burlicue Theatre. What's the capacity here?"

"Nearly eight hundred seats in both North and South Reading Rooms," Manning replied. "There are probably about two hundred people in this room."

"Any way to get from one room to the other except through that passage at the end there?"

"A member of the staff could go through the delivery-desk enclosure, but nobody else could," Manning said. "I've been here from the moment Mr. Dorwin toppled off the balcony, and I know Tim Cornish has had the exit blocked from the first, so there's been no chance of anyone leaving the South Room."

"We'll let the folks in the North Room go as soon as I've talked to the staff," Kilkenny said.

"Here's something, Kenny," said Dr. Rosenkohl. He handed over the .22 caliber pistol the late H. H. Dorwin had picked up off the floor while Cornish was pursuing Underwood down the stairs. "Found it in his pocket," the medical examiner added.

Kilkenny sniffed the muzzle. Holding the butt through a handkerchief, he examined the gun. "One shot gone," he said.

"And here's something else." Dr. Rosenkohl made the announcement with the triumphant ring of a prospector pouncing on a nugget. He pried open the dead man's fingers. Dorwin's hand had been clasped upon a roughly-triangular scrap of paper.

The ragged edge of the hypotenuse, which was about four inches long, indicated that the fragment might have been torn from the corner of a heavy sheet of white paper. On it was drawn in light-blue ink a series of curious signs and symbols: Shaded curves, strange curlycues, angles, lines, dots, and tiny circles, all in queer combinations. Manning looked at the paper anxiously over the detective's shoulder.

"Hieroglyphics!" Kilkenny declared. "Maybe I'd better start looking for Egyptians!"

"It could be Sanskrit," said Dr. Rosenkohl.

At the word Sanskrit something cold turned over very slowly inside Phil Manning. He peered more closely at the scrap of paper in the detective's hand. Below the cabalistic symbols something had been written in pencil and then rubbed out. It was a single word, something that might be "Dharini" or "Dhavini" or something equally without sense. Manning was pretty sure the strange characters were not Sanskrit, but the restless lump of cold continued to stir in his viscera. He lifted his gaze, seeking Betty Vale.

He saw her almost at once, and the sight of her gave him another unpleasant turn. She was standing at the far end of the room, where he had told her to go, but she was talking to a dark, slick-haired young man who was quite unessential to Manning's personal happiness: Dave Benson.

"Okay, Manning," said Detective Kilkenny, breaking in on Manning's thoughts, "I'm ready to hear your story of what happened."

Manning took a last look at Betty Vale, at her silken legs extending below her beaver coat. They were pretty legs, exciting legs — but there was no doubt that the muscles of the calves, however graceful, were exceedingly well developed. He wondered whether Kilkenny, after he had followed the inevitable course of his investigation, would recognize them as the legs of a dancer.

The tumult and the shouting in the South Reading Room had long since subsided to an uneasy murmur. The late H. H. Dorwin had departed on a stretcher. Another platoon of police had arrived, headed by several gold badges, and including policewomen for searching female suspects. The

gold badges had already established headquarters at the table nearest the exit and had started their preliminary questioning of the bookish horde before passing them out.

"All right. Spill it," said Kilkenny. "Where were you standing and just what did you see?"

Manning led the detective to the spot from which he had witnessed Dorwin's plunge.

As he listened, Kilkenny seemed to be memorizing the geography of the South Reading Room. His eyes roved over the west wall, which was a mass of books for its entire length and to a height of about twenty feet, where the great arched windows began. There were twelve tiers of bookshelves — the upper six reached from the gallery which jutted out above the lower six. A staff desk and four equally-spaced doors were all that broke the straight sweep of the gallery, which was just wide enough to allow the doors to be swung inward. Under the gallery was a supplemental bank of shelves, a long three-tiered bookcase which stood well out from the wall and ran the entire length of the room like a counter as high as the top button of a man's vest. There was only one door behind this counter, the one which opened into the short spiral staircase leading to the gallery. The detective interrupted Manning to point to this door, which was about thirty feet south of the oak-barred grating that marked the end of the delivery enclosure.

"When Dorwin took his nose-dive, was that door open?" Kilkenny asked.

"It was ajar, as I remember," Manning replied. "It stood open only a foot or so — not enough for me to see into the stairway."

"You didn't see anybody come out?"

"No."

"What are those other doors up there on the gallery? Do they lead to other stairways?"

"No, they just open on little two-by-four balconies on the outside of the building. They're opened in summer for ventilation."

"The outside balconies are big enough for a man to hide on, aren't they?"

"Yes," said Manning, "but the bronze outside doors are kept locked."

"We'll check, anyhow. Is there any other way to reach the gallery except by that spiral staircase?"

"No . . . except for the cat-walk along the top of that wooden colonnade in front of the delivery desk. It connects with the gallery on the other side of the room. But anyone using that would be in plain view, and I can swear that nobody else was in sight on the gallery or the cat-walk when Dorwin toppled over the railing."

"Then how did the murderer get out of the spiral staircase, since nobody saw him?"

"I don't know," said Manning — but he did know. He had figured it out while he was talking to Kilkenny. It was the only way possible. The murderer, bent double, could come out of the half-open door without

being seen, because he — or she — would have been hidden by the parapet of the outer line of bookcases. While all eyes were on the spectacle of Dorwin's plunge from the gallery, he could make his crouching way half the length of the room behind the protection of this low wall of books. When he straightened up, he would be merely someone looking for a book, far from the scene of excitement.

There was no use of giving this theory to Kilkenny now, however. Manning needed an excuse for getting around a bit, to look for that red portfolio.

"I'd better look around on the gallery," he said.

"And what do *you* expect to find on the gallery, Manning?"

"Brain prints." Manning was improvising. "I thought if we looked at the books on this section of the balcony, we might get a line on what sort of man Dorwin was meeting."

Kilkenny pondered briefly. "Can't hurt anything, I guess," he said. "I'll go up with you."

Manning took two steps and then stopped. Halfway across the room he saw the shabby, unshaven little man whom Dorwin had called James Underwood. Underwood looked furtively about him as he talked, scarcely moving his lips, to a young woman in blue — a sinuous, luscious-looking blonde whom Manning recognized with a start as the woman he had nearly bowled over at the door to his office.

"What did you see?" Kilkenny said.

"The murderer," Manning blurted.

"Where?"

Manning hesitated no longer. "Right over here." He wheeled, starting off with long strides.

"Point him out." Kilkenny walked rapidly beside Manning — until Manning stopped again.

"Funny," he said. "He was standing right there a few seconds ago. He's gone now."

"How do you know he's the murderer? Did you see him kill Dorwin?"

"No, but he took a shot at Dorwin this afternoon, so I assume —"

"You don't have to assume. I can call headquarters and get all the details."

"Headquarters won't have the details," Manning said. "The police weren't called."

"Dorwin got shot at, and he didn't call the police? Say, what are you—?"

"I don't know why," Manning said. "But that gun you found in Dorwin's pocket is the one this man shot at him with. I saw Dorwin pick it up."

"But the man who did it disappeared in thin air?"

"He must be here," Manning insisted. "I just saw him."

"You wouldn't be trying to pull a fast one, would you, Manning?"

"Of course not," Manning replied.

"Then come on," said the detective. "If there really is a guy who shot at Dorwin, he won't get out of the room. I'll have time for him later."

The marble steps that spiraled upward about the short twist of alu-

minum-painted frame were densely populated by police technicians. Two men were dusting powdered graphite on the walls, and two others were busy with oblique lighting and a long-nosed fingerprint camera. They stood aside to let Kilkenny and Manning past.

"Getting much?" Kilkenny asked.

"Nothing to speak of," said the man with the camera. "We dusted that bronze outside door on the landing, but it hasn't been opened."

"You didn't find anything that might have been dropped?" Manning asked. "No weapon, for instance?"

"Nope. Nothing."

And there was no place within the staircase that the red portfolio could have been secreted.

Manning and the detective stepped out on the gallery. Manning immediately turned his attention to the six tiers of bookshelves to the right of the door. Ostensibly he was examining the titles of the volumes so that he could tell the detective the sort of man Dorwin had been meeting. Actually he was looking to see if the red portfolio had been concealed among the books, or behind them. He was having no luck.

"Good lord! Indians!"

The exclamation came from Detective Kilkenny, who was on his knees, peering at the bottom row of books on the opposite side of the door.

"There's been a scalping," the detective added, taking a pair of tweezers from his pocket. He removed a handsome thatch of wavy red hair which was caught on the edge of the books and had been half hidden by the open door.

"Klawitz!" declared Manning.

"You mean the guy on the radio?"

"That's right. Klawitz, the Highbrow's Winchell. He has at least a dozen toupees he wears to match his moods. Apparently he's in a naked mood today. That's him down there in Seat 274."

Kilkenny looked over the railing at the polished scalp of Feodor Klawitz, who was still engrossed in his reading.

"Was this baldy-locks a good friend of the deceased?" he asked.

"Friend? I should say not. Dorwin was trying to get Klawitz jugged for libel."

"He was, eh?" Kilkenny pursed his lips reflectively. "I think we better ask him how he came to forget his pretty auburn hair up here. Come along and prompt me, Manning."

Manning followed the detective down the winding stairs, stepping over and around the technicians. The portfolio probably wouldn't be on the gallery anyhow, because the murderer himself had not appeared there. Manning was convinced, however, that the murderer had wrested the portfolio from Dorwin's hands at the time the trustee was killed. There seemed no other explanation for the scrap of paper in the dead man's fingers — unless, of course, it had been placed there deliberately to misdirect suspicion.

The detective marched straight to Klawitz's table.

"You're Feodor Klawitz?" said Kilkenny.

Klawitz looked up haughtily. He adjusted his monocle as though to say: Naturally, everyone knows who I am.

"You act pretty damn cool and collected for a man about to be arrested for murder," Kilkenny continued.

"Murder?" Klawitz echoed coldly.

"Sure, murder. I guess you've been so deep in your books that you don't even know that H. H. Dorwin was just killed here."

"Oh, that!" The corners of Klawitz's mouth turned down in a sarcastic crescent. "Neither the life nor death of H. H. Dorwin is of any particular importance compared to the work I am now doing. I am preparing to deliver the message of Demosthenes to the American people."

Kilkenny turned to Manning. "Who's this guy Demosthenes?"

"A Greek gent who died about two thousand years before the American people were invented," Manning replied. "Mr. Klawitz probably got his message by direct wire from the Hereafter."

"Bosh!" said Klawitz, flipping over a few pages. "Listen to this: 'There is one safeguard known generally to the wise, which is an advantage and security to all, but especially to democracies as against despots. What is it? Distrust!' True, Demosthenes was trying to rouse the Athenians from their supine smugness, trying to warn them against that other treaty-breaker, Philip of Macedon. But his Philippics are just as applicable today to —"

"Hey, wait a minute," Kilkenny cut in. "Don't change the subject. The dead man I'm interested in ain't a Greek. He's H. H. Dorwin. You killed him, Klawitz."

"Bosh! I'm not given to physical violence."

"You were violent enough in the Map Room, Mr. Klawitz," Manning said.

"I'm sorry about that," said Klawitz, without changing his disdainful expression. "I lost my temper. The stupid librarian insisted —"

"Is this yours?" Kilkenny suddenly produced the auburn toupee.

Klawitz again adjusted his monocle. "Yes," he said, extending his hand to take the wig. "Thank you very much."

"Nothing doing." The detective withdrew the toupee. "Know where I found this, Klawitz?"

"No."

"On the gallery — where Dorwin was killed."

"Really?"

"How did it get there?"

"Dropped from my pocket, undoubtedly. It frequently happens when I bend over. I must find a better way of carrying it."

"So you admit you were on the gallery, do you?"

"Yes, of course. I went there to get a book early this afternoon."

"Klawitz, you went there to meet Dorwin."

"Bosh! I should go nowhere on earth to meet Dorwin. I —" He removed his monocle and smiled with great self-satisfaction. "Now I understand," he said. "You're from the police, of course, and you want to know who killed Dorwin. You've come to the right person. I can give you a strong hint: Look for a woman, preferably a blonde woman. Dorwin was death on women so it is poetic justice that the reverse should ultimately prove true."

"You got any particular blonde in mind?" To Kilkenny, Klawitz was at last beginning to talk sense. Blondes were more comprehensible than Demosthenes.

"Yes," said Klawitz. "There was a blonde young woman on the gallery this afternoon shortly before Dorwin's death. I remember seeing her cross on that walk above the delivery desk."

Kilkenny looked at Manning.

"Was she one of the library staff?" Manning asked, feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

"Possibly. I've noticed her about frequently these past few days. A rather pretty girl. . . ."

Manning began to perspire.

"She's small and somewhat plump."

Manning felt better.

"When you arrest her, I shall be glad to identify her," Klawitz said. "But now you really must pardon me. I have a broadcast to prepare."

He was again deep in his Philippics.

Kilkenny's jaw set at a threatening angle. Then he relaxed and wagged his thumb at Manning.

"I'll needle him again later," the detective said as he walked away. "And if he's lying about that blonde on the cat-walk, he'll do his next broadcast from Centre Street."

Manning hoped Klawitz was not lying about the blonde. She might well be the sinuous, sensuous, scared little blonde — "a new catalogue girl," Dorwin had called her — who had nearly collided with him coming out of his office and whom he had seen talking to Underwood.

Inasmuch as Detective Kenneth Kilkenny did not insist on his further collaboration on the problem of the blonde on the cat-walk, Manning returned anxiously to the book shelves at the foot of the spiral stairway. He glanced once toward the south end of the reading room, where he had last seen Betty Vale. She was nowhere in sight, now. There was no one at the south end; the last nervous remnants of the crowd had congregated near the tables where the gold badges were conducting their inquisition, letting the innocents go home. Betty was probably beyond the open doorway which led into the small adjoining room that housed the American History Collection. Just as probably Dave Benson was with her. Manning didn't relish the idea, yet there was still the matter of the red portfolio with the blue tapes. Reluctantly he returned to the Bibliography shelves, began feverishly pulling out books.

He was halfway through the rows of Whitaker's Circulative Book List when he heard a woman scream.

The scream came from the far southern end of the room. It was muffled. All character was wrung from the voice by shrill, dry-throated terror. Yet, though he had never heard Betty scream, Manning was sure it was the voice of Betty Vale.

A crowd began to surge back toward the southwest corner of the Reading Room, where a short, straight stairway led down to the stacks. Manning followed the sudden movement of people toward the corner. His knees were of flabby cardboard, yet he forced them to function. He was only a few steps behind the hurrying Cornish, far ahead of Detective Kilkenny.

A woman was sprawled on the steps, her blonde head near the locked metal-grid door at the bottom. She was lying in a position of final abandon. Her sheer-stockinged legs pointed toward Manning, one knee crooked slightly with tragic jauntiness. The hem of her skirt was lifted diagonally across her bare thighs to spread its blue pleats over the stairs like an open fan. One arm reached back and down, in the direction her ash-blonde hair seemed to flow in silent, motionless ripples; the other arm was bent, with the back of her hand pressed across her forehead as though to ward off a blow. Her sensuous features were frozen in a grimace of dismay — the same expression that Manning had seen on her face when he almost collided with her outside his office door.

Tim Cornish went down the steps and picked up the girl tenderly in his arms.

Manning backed out through the crowd just as he saw Kilkenny edging in from the other side.

Betty Vale, as he had suspected, was just around the corner of the American History Collection partition. She stood very straight and her face was white. Dave Benson had his arm around her.

"You didn't scream," Manning said to her.

"She screamed," Benson volunteered. "She screamed bloody murder."

"She didn't scream," Manning insisted. "Remember that, Betty. You didn't scream. That other girl screamed."

"The other girl couldn't scream," Betty said. "She was already . . . She was lying on the stairs when I saw her."

"Did you see her fall?"

"No. She was just lying there. I started out, looking for you or Dave, when I saw her. I was afraid to stay in here alone any longer. Who is she, Phil?"

"I don't know," Manning said. "Where was Benson? I thought he was with you?"

"I was looking for you, Master Mind," Benson said. "I thought it was time you used your influence to get the little girl out of this place — but you were busy with the boys in blue."

"I'll take care of the little girl," Manning replied.

"If you let the cops start on her, she'll be here all night," Benson said. "They'll find out she knew Dorwin."

"You know a lot about cops for a musician," Manning said.

"Look." Benson turned on his prop smile. "I played the fiddle for pennies when I was eight years old. I got run off of all the good street corners in Manhattan, and half the apartment house courtyards. By the time I was twelve I knew more cops than anybody in a library will ever know. I didn't learn music out of books. I —"

"Did you know the girl on the stairs?" Manning interrupted.

"Never saw her before — until just now with Betty."

Manning saw Tim Cornish motioning to him. He reached out to touch Betty Vale's cold cheek and said: "I'll be right back, darling. And remember — you didn't see anything and you didn't scream."

"Look, Manning, you'd better —"

"I'll take care of her," said Manning. He walked off to join the guard who was hovering at the fringe of the crowd around the figure of the blonde in the blue dress.

"The detective wants to talk to you," Cornish said.

Manning pushed through to Kilkenny who was looking at the body of the blonde in blue, stretched on a table.

Kilkenny summoned Manning with a wag of his thumb. "Broken neck," he said. "The guard here says she worked in the library. What's her name?"

"I don't know her name," Manning replied. "She's new here. I think she was a catalogue girl."

"Get her name for me," Kilkenny demanded. "Maybe when we know her name we'll know whether she fell down the stairs or got pushed down."

Kilkenny was walking toward the delivery enclosure, toward the tables where the gold badges were still questioning people. Manning walked beside him.

"She didn't fall down," Manning said.

"She wore damned high heels."

"Why don't you ask Klawitz if —"

"I'm ahead of you, Manning. Klawitz just looked at her. He says she was the blonde on the cat-walk, all right."

"And you still think she fell down the stairs?"

"Why not? Klawitz thinks she killed Dorwin. She could have been trying to sneak out in a hurry."

"That door at the foot of the stairs is locked," Manning said.

"If she worked in the library, she'd have a key, wouldn't she?" Kilkenny asked.

"She might. Mind if I guess, too?"

"Go on and guess."

"I'll guess you ought to start looking for a thin, shabby-looking man in a shiny blue-serge suit," Manning said. "He's about five-feet-four. He's got prematurely gray hair that needs cutting, and a two-day stubble on his face. His eyes —"

"I was wondering if you were going to bring him up again, Manning." The

detective stopped walking, turned on Manning with bland warning in his grin. "Why didn't you tell me his name was Underwood?"

"How did you know?"

"I get around," said Kilkenny.

"So you've arrested Underwood?"

"Why arrest him? He didn't kill anybody. He couldn't have. He wasn't in the reading room."

"I'm pretty sure I saw him."

"Must of been two other guys," said the detective. "Underwood offered to give himself up to one of our boys in the outside corridor — clear outside the Catalogue Room. Said he knew he'd be suspected eventually so he wanted to tell his story now. They brought him inside and I heard him talking to the lieutenant."

"Underwood is the man who took a shot at Dorwin this afternoon," Manning said, "with that gun you found in Dorwin's pocket."

"You see him shoot?"

"Well, no," Manning admitted. "But I heard the shot. I saw the gun on the floor, where Underwood dropped it, and I saw Underwood running away."

"That's what Underwood said you'd say," Kilkenny observed. "He claims he was coming in the library to get out of the cold, when he heard the shot. He saw Dorwin and he saw the gun on the floor — so he ran. He used to work for Dorwin about a year ago — had some sort of row with him, in fact — so his first impulse was to scram. When he got thinking about it, he came back to tell his story."

"And you let him go — just on his own story?" Manning was incredulous.

"We didn't let him go all the way. He's still in the library. The lieutenant didn't give him a pass for the street door."

"Good," said Manning. "Because that gun —"

"That gun's the reason the lieutenant believes him," Kilkenny broke in. "We're not amateurs, Manning. We traced the number. The gun belongs to a woman. It's covered by a pistol permit issued a year ago to a lady called Viola Smith, who lived with her papa and mama, Mr. and Mrs. H. R. Smith at 120 East 18th Street."

"That's funny," Manning said.

"In case you can't guess," Kilkenny continued, "I'll tell you that some of my boys are digging up the vital statistics on Miss Smith at this very moment. Now what about the blonde in blue?"

"Here's the man who can tell you about her," Manning replied. He indicated a round little man who was approaching with Tim Cornish. "This is Mr. Leonard of the cataloguing department."

Mr. Leonard was slightly green around the gills, and his bulging eyes announced that he had already seen the blonde in the blue dress. He stammered with excitement as he said to the detective:

"It — it's the girl who came to work last week. Mr. Dorwin recommended her. She —"

"What's her name?" snapped Kilkenny.

"W-why her name was Viola Smith," said Mr. Leonard.

Manning chuckled. "Still think Miss Smith fell down the stairs, Kilkenny?" he asked.

Kilkenny did not answer — perhaps because at that moment a plainclothesman handed him a leaf from a notebook.

As Kilkenny glanced at the sheet of paper, the plainclothesman said: "I just come from Dorwin's office, Kenny. I copied this dope off his desk pad. It's his engagements for today."

"Okay, thanks," said Kilkenny. He stuffed the paper into his pocket — but not before Manning, staring over his shoulder, had read the line: "Betty Vale — 4:30 p.m., Library."

Manning moistened his lips. "You don't need me any more now, do you, Kilkenny?"

"You'll stay right with me now," Kilkenny declared. "You've got ideas on this whole business — too many. Come on."

The detective led Manning into the delivery enclosure. The thick, colored trays in which the books came up in the elevators from the stacks were piled on the tables, but the desk staff and the book-laden hand-trucks had been cleared out. The police had evidently shut down the reference department for the night, and Kilkenny was using the delivery desk for his own research.

Three librarians were awaiting Kilkenny, and when Manning saw them, he knew what they had been doing. One of the men was Dr. Flack, whose full black beard was as much an ornament to the Library as his knowledge of Egyptology. The second was Dr. de Winnah, who had only a half-portion of whiskers, but who was a well-known Orientalist. The third was Dr. Bellows, who had no beard and no neck, but had plenty of forehead and oversized eyes which looked even more tremendous through his thick spectacles. Dr. Bellows collected rare dialects of the Near East. Obviously the three experts had been studying the cryptic symbols on the scrap of paper found in the dead hand of H. H. Dorwin.

"Well, gents?" said Kilkenny. "What's the lowdown on the hieroglyphics?"

"They're not hieroglyphs — definitely." Dr. Flack stated.

"And obviously the characters are not cuneiform," added Dr. Bellows.

"There is a slight resemblance to Phoenician in this letter — and this," intoned Dr. de Winnah. "However, I imagine the similarity is purely accidental."

"In other words, you birds are stumped," said Detective Kilkenny. "What do you make of the hen tracks, Manning?"

"Just that," Manning replied. "Phone-booth etchings. Keep-on-ringing-them arabesques."

"I don't quite agree with you, Manning," said Dr. Flack. "There seems to be too much of a plan to allow for a subconscious explanation."

"I suggest the characters may be mathematical or scientific symbols of some sort," said Dr. de Winnah. "Engineering, perhaps."

"Why not try the technical librarians?" said Dr. Bellows.

"I'll try every expert you've got here and then send uptown to Columbia for more if you fellows can't crack it," Kilkenny said.

"I'll crack it," Manning volunteered. He held out his hand. "Let's have the puzzle."

"No soap," said Kilkenny.

"You don't think I can crack it?"

"Sure you can, Manning. But without the diagrams. You'll do it with mirrors."

"Do I get half an hour?"

"I'll give you an hour."

"And the right to circulate?"

"Inside the building. I don't want you to leave the building."

"I just want to get to my office on the second floor. Okay?"

Kilkenny chewed an imaginary toothpick for a few seconds. Then he took a card from his pocket, scribbled on it, and handed it to Manning without a word.

Manning instantly left the oaken corral of the delivery desk and headed south for Betty Vale. He had not taken twenty steps before his path crossed the suavely-gliding course of Dave Benson.

"Hi!" said Benson, with a challenging smile. "Did you fix it for the little girl?"

"She's fixed, all right," Manning replied.

"Then she can leave now with me?"

"She'd better not."

"I expected something like that." Benson expanded his white smile by a full inch. "I'll go to bat for her myself."

"Lay off, will you, Benson?" Manning gripped the musician's arm. "Betty's in a spot. You know that. So don't even call attention to the fact that she's here."

"Betty's old man knows the District Attorney," Benson said. "I'm going out and start the wheels within wheels."

"The hell you're going out."

"Sure I am." Benson flourished a police pass. "I've just been through the works. All tests strictly negative. Goodbye, Manning."

Manning watched Benson's rhythmic exit. Then he resumed his quest for Betty Vale.

The south end of the Reading Room was deserted again. The mortal remains of Viola Smith, the blonde catalogue girl with a pistol permit, had been spirited away by the medical examiner's office. Two moulage men, with their plaster-dusted fingers and shellac sprayers, came out of the stairway to the stackrooms — apparently empty-handed. Manning waited until they sauntered off. Then he found Betty, still waiting anxiously just around the corner in the American History Collection.

She arose eagerly, but before she could speak, he said hurriedly: "Listen hard, because the police will be looking for you in about half a sec. I've

got to know a lot of things before they monopolize you."

"But how —?"

"They've got Dorwin's desk pad. We'll go where we won't be disturbed until I'm good and ready."

"Where, Phil?"

"Take my arm and follow, darling."

Betty obediently hooked her slim fingers about his elbow. They walked to the head of the descending stairs to the stacks. Manning stopped.

"Turn around," he said. "And when I give the word, go down quickly but deliberately."

"Go down — *there?*" Betty's eyes widened. She stared as though she still saw the crumpled body of the blonde in blue sprawled on the steps.

Manning didn't reply at once. He carefully surveyed the room, watching until he thought no one at the other end of the room was looking in his direction. Then he said quietly, "Now."

Betty moved swiftly down the steps. Manning was right behind her, his keys already in his hand. He unlocked the metal-grid door, pushed the girl into the bookstacks ahead of him, closed the door.

He felt Betty recoil against him as though she were shying from the sudden vista of whiteness: the white corridor stretching far between the white end-panels of the steel bookcases, the low white ceiling with its long row of lights, the white marble floor.

"Now," he said. "I want the whole story."

"Of what, Phil?"

"Everything. Let's start with Dhavini."

Betty gasped. "You mean Dharini?"

"All right, Dharini. Who is she?"

"She's King Agnimitra's senior queen. You've been snooping."

"Do you know where I got the name Dharini — even if I got it wrong?"

"Certainly," the girl replied. "From Kalidasa's *Malavika and Agnimitra*."

"No. From a scrap of paper that H. H. Dorwin held in his hand when he was killed. I recognized your writging — the *r* that looks like a *v* — and vice versa. There were hieroglyphics on the paper, too."

Betty paled. She thrust her hands deep into her muff and fixed Manning with round, frightened eyes.

"Did the scrap of paper come from that red portfolio Dorwin was carrying?" Manning continued.

"It — it might have. I guess it did."

"I don't know what happened to the portfolio or when and where it's going to turn up," Manning said. "But sooner or later Detective Kilkenny is going to find out that the hieroglyphics are ballet-dancer's shorthand. Then, when he runs down all the ramifications and finds out that one leads to you, he's going to ask a lot of questions. I want the answers now. Who —?"

"Phil, where in the world did you learn to read choreographic notation?"

"In the Louvain Library. I hap-

pened to have a job there re-cataloguing Feuillet, Magny, Guillemin and the other old masters who invented ways of writing down dance steps with conventional symbols."

"You're wonderful, Phil."

"Save those lovely lapel drawings, darling. So the Kalidasa research was for a ballet?"

"An original oriental ballet — called *Malavika*. I'm going to dance the title role."

"You also did the choreography, apparently. Who did the music?"

The girl lowered her eyes. "Dave," she said.

"Benson!" Manning made an aspirin grimace. "And did Benson by any chance give Dorwin the score of *Malavika* this afternoon?"

"He did not. I did — day before yesterday." Betty looked Manning full in the eyes.

"Why?" Manning demanded.

"Because Hugh Dorwin was going to put up the money to produce the ballet," the girl said. "He was going to put up twenty thousand dollars."

Manning frowned. "That doesn't make sense," he said. "Your Old Man makes a million dollars out of other people's headaches, and still you go to Dorwin for a measly twenty grand. Why?"

"Father doesn't want any ballets in the family," Betty said. "He doesn't approve of careers for women. Not for me, anyhow. He thinks woman's place is on the society page. That's why I haven't even told him I was going to that ballet school in the Village. That's why I didn't even tell you."

"I thought it was because Dave Benson played piano down there," Manning said. "Was it Benson's idea to get Dorwin to angel the ballet?"

"Well, yes. Dave thought if the ballet could be produced and made a hit, Father wouldn't oppose my career any more."

"And might even accept Benson as a son-in-law?"

"Phil, you're being catty. Dave's been terribly sweet."

"All right, he's been terribly sweet," Manning said. "And he went to H. H. Dorwin for the sugar?"

"Yes. He knew Hugh Dorwin was a patron of the arts, but he didn't know he was an old friend of the Vale family. When Hugh heard my name, he immediately offered to put up the money — and I began to get scared. I hurried out to see Hugh, to explain that Father didn't know anything about *Malavika*. I asked Hugh to keep my secret until opening night."

"And H. H. Dorwin made passes at you," Manning suggested.

"Only with his eyes, Phil. But I was afraid of the gleam. I was afraid — well, that his interest wasn't entirely artistic. I told him so. I told him I wanted his help only on a basis of artistic merit. I insisted on bringing him the score, the choreography, the maquettes — in the red portfolio. He was going to give me a decision today. And then I got that anonymous letter . . ."

She looked at Manning with eyes as

big as sapphires in Cartier's window. They had been that way just a few seconds before Dorwin died.

"Did Benson know you were meeting Dorwin here today?" Manning asked.

"I don't think so. . . ." The girl spoke hesitantly. "Dave knew that Hugh was to put up the money today, but I don't think I told him where I was meeting Hugh. Phil! What do you mean?"

"Maybe Dorwin was going to change his mind. Maybe he didn't like Benson's score."

"That's no reason for murder, Phil. Dave and I have confidence in the ballet. We know it will get backing on its own. The music is really superb. Everyone who's heard it is crazy about it."

"Who, for instance?"

"Well, a man from Transcontinental Broadcasting heard Dave run over the score on the piano. You know, Dave won second prize with a quartet in the Transcontinental chamber music competition last week. He's got talent, Phil."

"He's got something, all right," said Manning glumly. "Does the name Viola Smith mean anything to you?"

"Nothing."

"All right. Now I have an idea. You wait for me here in the stacks," said Manning.

The girl looked about her uneasily. "Alone?" she asked.

"You won't be alone. You have all the wisdom of the ages to keep you company — sixty-seven miles of it."

Betty smiled nervously. She looked down through the narrow ventilating slits in the marble floor at the base of each stack — narrow glimpses of more stacks on the floor below in monotonous and diminishing repetition, like reflections in a double mirror.

"The catacombs of learning." She shuddered. "Will you be long?"

"I hope not. I just want you to stay out of sight for a little while longer — and still you can truthfully say you hadn't left the building. If you run into some member of the staff, refer them to me. And don't wander too far, because there are seven floors of these stacks, and I might not find you again for years."

"And what if you *don't* find me?"

"I'll find you, darling."

"Phil . . ." The girl lifted her face. Manning bent quickly and kissed her.

He walked away rapidly, the exciting fragrance of her kiss sweet on his lips, the desperation of her fear cold in his heart.

Manning left the stacks through the second-floor exit which led through the headquarters of the cataloguing staff, where hundreds of new listings were indexed and cross-indexed daily. Viola Smith had been working here, making new cards to be added to the millions already on file, but Manning did not tarry. His own office was just down the corridor.

His office was dark as he entered.

Groping for the light switch, he could see the falling snow turn to flakes of whirling gold in the glow of the windows across the courtyard. He sat at his desk, lost in thought for a moment. Then he picked up the telephone and called a friend of his in the publicity department of Transcontinental Broadcasting.

"Hello, Joe. This is Phil Manning. Did a man named Dave Benson win a prize in your chamber music contest last week?"

"Benson's real enough," the voice replied. "He won the hundred bucks, all right. Only — What's the library want to know about him, Phil?"

"It's not the library. Just personal curiosity. What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong. As a matter of fact, I just got up a release on Benson this afternoon, but I don't know if the front office is ready to put it out yet. Can I call you back, Phil?"

"Do that," said Manning. Instead of waiting, however, he returned to the third floor.

Manning saw Kilkenny and half a dozen other men clustered about a scared, esthetic-looking youth with blue eyes and wavy blond hair.

The detective wagged an imperative thumb at Manning.

"I think we got something here," Kilkenny said. "It says its name is Dexter P. Dexter, Junior. It had a stiletto in its pocket."

"I explained all that," protested the blond young man, pursing his lips. "It's a 15th Century Italian stiletto. There's a coat-of-arms engraved on the hilt. I was doing some heraldic research on the coat-of-arms for a client of mine. I'm a genealogist."

"Mr. Dorwin was stabbed through the left eye with a weapon narrow enough to pierce the —" Kilkenny consulted the back of an envelope. "— the sphenoidal fissure," he continued, "entering the brain to cause death by cerebral hemorrhage. I just got the autopsy report from Dr. Rosenkohl. Dorwin could have lived long enough to stagger up a few stairs and out to the balcony, Rosy says, but he couldn't have yelled, because the motor-speech centers were damaged. This Mr. Dexter with the stiletto knew Dorwin."

"I never saw the man in my life," objected Dexter P. Dexter, Junior in a thin treble.

"You had correspondence with him, Mr. Dexter. You tried to sell him a phoney family tree, complete with coat-of-arms."

"Well, yes," admitted Dexter, blushing. "I did offer to do some genealogical research for him. I thought I had traced his forebears."

"And Dorwin wrote back that he was a self-made man," said Kilkenny. "He said that most of his ancestors never had a decent coat, let alone a coat-of-arms — and that he was going to have you kicked out of the National Genealogical Society and maybe get you jugged for using the mails to defraud. We got copies of the correspondence."

Dexter P. Dexter, Junior lowered

his long lashes and pressed his esthetic fingers nervously against his temples. "Evidently I was working on the wrong Dorwin family," he said. "We all make mistakes."

Kilkenny turned abruptly to Manning. "What about those hen-tracks you were going to translate for me?" he demanded.

"No luck yet," Manning replied.

"Then quit trying. I got the answer right here. Those funny marks are what ballet dancers use to write down their jumps and swan-dives. It's like a code."

"No fooling!" said Manning.

"And that's one reason I'm sort of interested in Mr. Dexter, here. He looks like an adagio dancer to me."

"How did you find out about the code?"

"Your music librarian was up here just now and spotted it."

"Very smart of you to send for him," said Manning.

"Hell, I didn't send for him," the detective admitted. "He really came up to tell us that Dorwin was in the Music Library about five minutes before he was killed."

"What was he doing there?"

"He just walked in, picked up an envelope off the librarian's desk, and walked out again. He was alone, the librarian said, and he had a red portfolio under his arm."

"Where did the envelope come from?" Manning asked.

"Somebody left it on the desk while the librarian was busy somewhere else. He didn't see who it was. It was addressed to Dorwin, and the librarian was going to send it over to the Trustees' Room when Dorwin came in and got it. What was in the red portfolio, Manning?"

"Knowing Dorwin, I'd guess etchings," Manning said.

The telephone on the delivery desk rang. A policeman answered and motioned to Kilkenny.

The detective took the instrument, said "Hello, Brannigan," then, except for an occasional grunt, lapsed into scowling silence. When he came back to Manning his face was grim.

"Did you know Viola Smith was married?"

"No."

"Smith was her maiden name," said Kilkenny. "Legally she was Mrs. James Underwood."

"Good God."

"She and Underwood used to work for Dorwin in his private library up on Fifth Avenue. A year ago Dorwin thought up some cute extra assignments for Mrs. U. to do after hours, and Underwood resigned for both of 'em. Dorwin accepted Underwood's resignation, but kept his wife on the payroll. He just shifted her down here a week ago. I don't know why — yet. But the thing begins to make sense now. The old story: Irate Husband Kills Guilty Pair."

"Any more theories, Kilkenny?" Manning sat down.

"Yes." The detective looked at Manning narrowly. "Where's this Betty Vale?"

Manning made what he thought

was a gesture of astonishment. "Why ask me?"

"Because she's a friend of yours. The Oriental expert with the goat whiskers said you were with her in the Oriental Library this afternoon."

"That was hours ago."

"She was supposed to meet Dorwin at four-thirty. Did she?"

"Not that I know of. Anyhow, why waste your time on Miss Vale, when you let James Underwood roam the library? Haven't you even tried —?"

Manning broke off suddenly. The lights winked out.

Somewhere in the darkness there was a flurry of sound — running feet, something overturned, an avalanche of books falling, an agonized series of gasps. The noises seemed to come from somewhere close by, perhaps the North Reading Room.

Manning sprang up, his scalp tingling. Through the blackness of the Catalogue Room he could see figures hurrying through the oblong of light that was the door to the third-floor atrium. Flashlight beams stabbed the darkness, swinging, darting forward, converging.

When the lights came on again, Detective Kilkenny was wrestling with a man with sleek black hair.

Even before the black hair slid off to reveal a shiny bald pate, Manning recognized Feodor Klawitz and one of his toupees.

"What," demanded the detective, forcing Klawitz into a chair, "do you think you're doing?"

"But I told you I must leave here."

"And I told you you couldn't," countered Kilkenny.

"But my broadcast —"

"Cancelled," said the detective.

From the next room, Manning heard excited voices. He left Klawitz and the detective, rushed through the passageway at the end of the delivery-desk enclosure.

In a corner of the North Reading Room, men were bending over something near the Photostat Desk, their flashlights focused on the floor.

As Manning approached, someone switched on the heavy chandeliers overhead.

There, propped up against the Photostat Desk, his eyes bulging, his uniform coat ripped open, his white hair disheveled, was Tim Cornish.

The motionless figure of the big guard was surrounded by a litter of papers. The Photostat Desk behind him was a picture of disorder. Drawers had been pulled out and obviously ransacked. Filing cards were strewn over the floor.

Kilkenny came in from the South Reading Room, accompanied by another plainclothesman.

"Nobody could of got out, Kenny," the other detective said. "Not even in the dark nobody could of got out. I was right in the doorway all the time."

"People could have gone back and forth between the North and South Rooms in the dark," Manning suggested. "People by the name of Klawitz, for instance."

"Shut up!" said Kilkenny. "Cornish is coming around."

Tim slowly raised his hand to his head. He blinked. Then he tried to get up.

Two uniformed policemen helped him to his feet. He leaned weakly against the desk, looked from one to the other, then grinned at Manning.

"The law hath not been dead, though it hath slept," Tim said, touching the ends of his white mustache.

"All's well that ends well, Tim," said Manning. He was genuinely relieved. He had thought Tim was the third corpse of the day.

"Wrong, Mr. Manning. *Measure for Measure.*"

"What happened, Tim?"

"Nothing," said the guard. "That is, I don't know exactly. I heard somebody in here — prowling around back of the Photostat Desk, I thought. When I started in to investigate, the lights went out. I felt somebody brush past me, and I grabbed him. Then something cracked me in the head, and I guess I was out for a minute. I think he hit me with a book."

"With a complete Shakespeare," Manning smiled.

"Whoever it was practically undressed you, Cornish," said Detective Kilkenny. "Did he steal anything?"

"Probably not." Cornish felt of his pockets. "Who steals my purse steals — Hey! My keys!"

Keys! Manning's glance swept to the northwest corner of the vast room where, within the glass-walled enclosure of the Theatre Collection, a short, straight stairway led steeply downward. Like the parallel staircase in the South Reading Room, these steps ended at a metal-grilled door to the stackrooms. With Tim Cornish's keys, the killer could open this door — and Betty Vale was in the stacks!

Manning felt the cold perspiration beading his forehead. He said: "Maybe you left the keys in your civvies, Tim."

"I don't think so, Mr. Manning."

"I'll run down and take a look. I'll get the super to open your locker for me." Manning turned questioning eyes to Kilkenny. "Or will it menace the public safety, Chief?"

"Okay. Go on." Kilkenny fixed Manning with a curious stare. "But make it snappy."

Manning hurried out through the Catalogue Room, his heart pounding. He did not go directly to the stacks by the stairs in the corner, because he did not want Kilkenny to know where he was going. It was foolish, perhaps, not to make Kilkenny an out-and-out ally. Now that the killer was probably in the stacks, keeping the police out might be exposing Betty Vale to needless danger. Yet Manning was determined to play his hand alone until he had found the red portfolio with the blue tapes — until he was certain that its discovery would not point a guilty finger at Betty Vale. And he knew now where the portfolio was.

It had to be there, he told himself, as he went down the marble stairs to the second floor. The portfolio had to be in the stacks. That was the only explanation of its disappearance — promptly and completely — from the South Reading Room.

Manning swore at himself for not having thought of it sooner. He was so used to seeing book-laden hand-trucks in the delivery enclosure that he had not noted particularly that one of them had been standing against the oak-barred grating that separated the delivery desk from a corner of the South Reading Room. The grating was only a few steps from the door to the spiral stairway, so that the person who killed Dorwin could have reached it, hidden by the parapet of the outer bookshelves, to push the portfolio — and the weapon — through the oaken bars into one of the book trucks. And Kilkenny, considering the delivery enclosure not to be part of the South Reading Room, had allowed the trucks to be removed. They were in the stack rooms now.

And the murderer evidently considered the time had come to retrieve the evidence — or rather to make doubly sure that it would never be found. Why else would he have stolen a guard's keys? Yes, he was certainly in the stacks, although Manning could not see how he hoped to locate the particular truck, once it had left the delivery enclosure. Manning was not sure he himself could find the right truck in all the six floors and many miles of stacks. It would be a hopeless task. Unless —

Yes, Manning remembered seeing pink tickets on at least one book truck that stood near the delivery desk that afternoon. Books tagged with pink slips were duplicates, of which sufficient copies were already in the reference department. Books tagged with pink slips went directly to the Duplicate Cage in Stack Six, to await transfer to other libraries. Books tagged —

Manning broke into a run. Stack Six was where he had left Betty Vale!

His footsteps made rapid, hollow echoes, like frightened heart-beats, as he entered the stacks. He went directly to the Duplicate Cage, glanced through the metal grille, then passed on. He would come back later. First he hurried to the aisle in which he had left Betty.

She was not there.

The familiar whiteness of the stacks suddenly lost its neat impersonality. The row on row of bookcases were grim bastions behind which lurked unknown perils.

"Betty."

Manning called softly. There was no response, but the sound of his own voice steadied him. He walked slowly down the center aisle, stopped, and called again.

Again there was no answer — but this time Manning heard something that made his scalp crawl: a muted footstep.

It was the merest whisper of leather on marble, but it told a story of

stealth. It was not the light, clicking, high-heeled step of a woman, but a broad, solid, full-soled tread. And the sound seemed to come from the stairs which led down to Stack Five on the floor below.

Quietly, quickly, Manning made for the stairway, went down.

There was no one in Stack Five, either — no one in sight, although the rank after rank of bookcases were a maze that might conceal a battalion. He stood a moment looking about him, his spirits oppressed by the lowness of the white ceiling, the danger of ambush in the vast labyrinth of books. Then he heard the scrape of shoe leather again.

This time the sound seemed to come from directly below him. He dropped to his knees, peered through the ventilating slot. He saw a shadow pass — a dark flicker on the floor below that was gone before he could hope to identify it.

He hurried down to Stack Four.

He had never before noticed the peculiar silence of the stack rooms at night. It was a tomb-like hush, and yet it was alive.

Someone seized Manning's arm.

He whirled, his nerves taut, his fists clenched, his free arm drawn back to strike. Then he went limp.

"Betty!" he breathed.

The girl clung to him. "You're just in time," she said. "One more minute and I'd have gone crazy."

"Why didn't you stay in Stack Six where I left you?"

"I was scared, Phil. I heard somebody walking, and I thought it was you coming back. I started out to meet you — and then I discovered that instead of following someone, I was being followed. I couldn't see anyone, but I could hear him walk a little, then stop — walk again and stop. So naturally my only thought was to get away . . ."

"But everything's all right now?"

"Of course."

"Then let's go back upstairs to Six," said Manning. "I think I know what happened to your portfolio."

Betty held tightly to his arm all the way to the Duplicate Cage. Manning opened the metal door. The little room was packed with hand-trucks. The pink dupe clips decorating the volumes gave a flag-bedecked gaiety to the musty place. Manning rolled out the two carts nearest him.

"There it is!" Betty started forward.

"Don't touch it!"

Manning, too, saw the red covers. He spread a handkerchief over his fingers before grasping the portfolio. As he lifted it from the truck, something fell to the floor with a metallic clang.

"I'll be damned!" he exclaimed. "So that's what stabbed Dorwin."

He bent over a long, slender brass rod with a milled knob at one end. The other end bore dark stains, which might be blood.

"What is it?" Betty asked.

"A spindle from a catalogue drawer," Manning replied. "Funny . . ." He frowned. "It's not from

the Public Catalogue Room, either."

"How do you know, Phil?"

"The spindles in the main catalogue drawers aren't like this one," Manning said. "They're smooth all the way up, and you can pull them out by pressing a catch at the end of the drawer. This one is threaded near the knob, so it has to be unscrewed to come out. I wonder —"

Manning interrupted himself to open the portfolio. The blue tapes were untied, so that the red halves fell apart readily — at a torn page of choreographic symbols.

"Dorwin must have just opened it here when he was stabbed," said Manning. Carefully touching only the edges, he flipped over pages of costume sketches, designs for scenery, page after page of cryptic choreographic notation, the ruled sheets of music manuscript . . .

Suddenly he stood up.

"Betty, darling," he said. "I want you to get out of here right away. Do you know where the library printshop is?"

"No."

"It's in the basement. Would you be afraid to go there?"

"Alone?"

"It will be safer than the stacks, unless I miss my guess. And unless the police have shut it up, it will be full of printers working on the next issue of the *Bulletin*."

"All right. I'll go."

"Good. Just ask the foreman for the page proofs on the Dorwin article that I sent him a memo about. Tell him to give you all the pages, including the reproductions of the Russian manuscripts. And don't come back here. Bring them to my office. I'll be there by the time you get there."

He led the girl to the ornate bronze-barred door that led from Stack Six into the vaulted hall of the Oriental catalogue. He watched her walk off toward the arcade of the second floor balcony that looked out on the semicircular abarabesque of the great window of the vestibule.

Then he locked the door and hurried back to the red portfolio. He was looking through its loose pages again when something struck him a crashing blow at the base of his skull.

He pitched forward, sprawled face downward.

Detective Kenneth Kilkenny looked at the crumpled paper the Assistant Medical Examiner placed in front of him. He read the typewritten lines:

> "I received your message, but circumstances which I will explain when I see you make it impossible for me to come to the Music Room at the hour you mentioned. However, I will meet you on the West Balcony of the South Reading Room as soon as you can come."

The signature was a scrawl which Kilkenny could not decipher. Nobody, Kilkenny was convinced, could make anything of the scrawl except Dorwin, who knew the person he had asked to meet him. "Where'd you say this came from, Rosy?" the detective asked.

"Dorwin's trousers pocket," said Dr. Rosenkohl. "Don't know how I missed it the first time over, except it was wadded into a corner. I thought you'd want it, because the typewriter ought to be easy to trace. The second leg of the small *n* is badly nicked."

"I'll say it's going to be easy to trace," Kilkenny agreed. "I got the companion piece to it."

He produced an envelope addressed: "H. H. Dorwin, Esq. To be called for." The second leg of the small *n* in "Dorwin" was nicked.

"One of the boys just dug it out of a wastebasket in this guy Manning's office," Kilkenny added.

"Where's Manning?"

"He don't know it, but he's going to be with us very shortly," said the detective. "I just — Well, well, well, well! Look who's here."

Tim Cornish marched up to the delivery desk, leading a shabby little man in a blue serge suit.

"Here's your James Underwood, Mr. Kilkenny," the guard said. "I caught him in the stacks."

Kilkenny stared at Underwood. The gray-haired derelict was trembling like a man with fever. The tragic lines of his face were etched deeper than ever, and his dark, intelligent eyes were blurred with misery.

"So that's where he was hiding," said Kilkenny.

"I knew he'd be in the stacks as soon as I found my keys were gone," Tim Cornish said. "I couldn't think of any other reason he'd want my keys. So I went clear down and started up from the bottom floor. In Stack Three I discover the king of shreds and patches, just as I'd figured."

"I didn't take your keys," said Underwood at last. "I told you three times that my wife let me into the stacks. I was waiting for her to come and get me."

"He claims he doesn't know his wife is dead," Cornish said.

"I don't believe it. You're telling me this to confuse me . . . to make me give her away. . . ."

"I think you'd better come with me to the morgue, Underwood," said Dr. Rosenkohl.

"Wait a minute, Rosy. I'm not through with him yet," Kilkenny objected. "Why did your wife let you into the stacks, Underwood?"

"I . . . I threatened her," said Underwood. "We were both in the reading room when Dorwin was killed, so I knew that after the shooting of this afternoon, I'd have to get out somehow."

"You told me you had nothing to do with the shooting," Kilkenny said.

"I lied," Underwood admitted. "But I'm not lying now. When Dorwin was killed I told Viola she'd have to get me out through the stacks or I'd —"

Underwood stopped.

"Or you'd tell the police that she was Dorwin's mistress?" Kilkenny prompted.

"Then you knew?"

"We know everything," said Kilkenny. "How long ago did Dorwin

give her the brush-off? Two weeks?"

"He asked her to move out of his house about two weeks ago," Underwood replied. "He got her this job in the library. I swallowed my pride and asked her to come back to me, but she was still crazy about Dorwin. She wrote anonymous letters to some girl she thought was taking her place."

"Was the girl's name Vale?"

"I believe it was. Yes. Betty Vale. And Viola wrote threatening notes to Dorwin, saying she'd give their whole history to Feodor Klawitz, who would broadcast it on the radio. She was really beside herself. That was when I decided that the best thing would be to shoot Dorwin."

"And so when you missed, you stabbed him instead?" Kilkenny suggested.

"I swear I didn't! You can hang me for it, and I suppose I'd deserve it, since I did mean to kill him — but as soon as the gun went off I knew I could never take a man's life."

"What about a woman's? What about Viola Smith?" Tim Cornish demanded.

"Why would I kill Viola?" Underwood's voice was a wail. "I loved her."

"That's why," said Kilkenny. "You were jealous. So you killed her and her lover. How did you happen to have her gun?"

"I took it with me when we separated a year ago," Underwood said. "But I didn't kill her. I didn't kill anybody."

"Did she know you shot at Dorwin with her gun?"

"Yes, I told her. I — I threatened to say she was the one who shot at him — unless she let me through the stacks. I didn't want to be found inside the reading room."

"How'd you get back in the stacks?" Kilkenny interrupted.

"I left a door ajar."

"Sounds to me like the lie direct, or at least the lie with circumstance," volunteered Tim Cornish. "Why would this Viola Smith help you out if she thought you killed the man she loved?"

"She knew I didn't kill Dorwin," said Underwood.

"How did she know that?"

"She saw the man who killed him."

"She — *what?*"

"Viola told me she was on the catwalk above the delivery desk just before Dorwin staggered out on that gallery. From her vantage point she could see down behind that outer row of book shelves — and she saw a man come out of the door to the circular staircase, crouching down so he wouldn't be seen from the floor. She —"

"Who was it?" Kilkenny demanded.

"She didn't know him. He looked up, and she thinks he saw her. But she didn't recognize him. She didn't think she'd ever seen him before."

"Why didn't she tell us all this?" the detective asked.

"She was going to tell you," Underwood said. "She was — God, she *is* dead! I believe it now! She's dead — and that's why."

"Don't let him put on an act for

you, Mr. Kilkenny," Tim Cornish said. "I still think he's got plenty to tell about what he was doing in the stacks. Take him down those steps where Viola Smith got her neck broke. Take him down those steps to the stacks and see how he acts."

"That's an idea," Kilkenny agreed. "I got a good mind to take 'em all down there. Brannigan, herd your people over to the head of those stairs, in the corner there. Come on, Cornish."

Phil Manning was stunned as he fell. Even the painful impact of his face against the marble floor did not rouse him from his dazed moment of paralysis. He felt someone leap astride his back, but he could not summon his muscles to action. Before he could fight his way back to full consciousness, long, hard fingers closed about his throat in a tight, strangling grip.

He struggled, but feebly. He could feel his strength ebbing into the agony of darkness, the emptiness of death seeping into his tortured lungs. The claws tightened on his windpipe, digging into his throat.

With a last desperate effort he squirmed, twisted, jabbed back and upward with his elbow. A grunt told him he had struck home. The crushing pressure on his windpipe relaxed for an instant. Air rushed into his aching lungs.

He heard an echo — or was it an echo? — of his involuntary cry.

A sudden lightness on his back told him his assailant had fled.

He heard the confused tramp of many footsteps.

He breathed again and again, hungrily savoring the delicious air. He got painfully to his feet. When he turned around, he saw what seemed to him a crowd pouring out of the stairway from the South Reading Room.

He recognized Detective Kenneth Kilkenny with his gun drawn. He saw Feodor Klawitz, Dr. Rosenkohl, Dave Benson, Tim Cornish, Underwood, the genealogical Dexter P. Dexter, and half a dozen policemen in and out of uniform.

"I might have known it would be you, Manning," said Kilkenny. "You better have a good story."

"I've been catching up on my reading," said Manning.

"You've been catching hell," said Tim Cornish. "You hurt, Mr. Manning?"

"Ay, beyond all surgery, Tim. Would you mind running down to the print shop to see if Betty Vale is all right? I just sent her —"

"I want to talk to that Vale dame myself," Kilkenny interrupted. "I just found out she's a dancer."

"Forget about the girl, Kilkenny. I've dug up the evidence that's going to crack your case," Manning said. "Here's the weapon that killed Dorwin."

"What is it?"

"The spindle from a catalogue drawer."

"Looks sort of long for a dagger," Kilkenny said. "How about it, Rosie?"

"It could have done the trick, all right," said Dr. Rosenkohl, "particularly if the murderer held it short when he jabbed."

"And here's the rest of the page of hieroglyphics to match the torn handful Dorwin was grabbing when he was killed," Manning said.

Kilkenny squinted at the open portfolio on the floor.

"Maybe," he growled reluctantly. "But before I let you sidetrack me again, Manning, I —"

"I'll need only one word to explain this mess," Manning broke in.

"The next word out of you," said Kilkenny, "is going to be written on a typewriter. Bring 'em along, Brannigan. And you, Cornish, show me how to get out of this place. I want to go to Manning's office."

A few minutes later Manning was seated in front of his own typewriter, taking dictation from Detective Kilkenny.

"I received your message," he wrote, "but circumstances which I will explain when I see you —"

"Well, well, well, well!" crowed Kilkenny over his shoulder. "That's plenty. The letter *n* has a nick in the second leg. What were the circumstances?"

"There weren't any circumstances," Manning replied. "And there was no nick in the second leg. There was a sock in the head."

"The note that decoyed Dorwin to the gallery to be killed was written on your typewriter. Who wrote it?"

"The man who killed Dorwin, obviously."

"In other words, you admit you killed Dorwin," said Kilkenny.

"I admit nothing of the kind. I admit I dawdled somewhat over lunch today, so that someone might have come into my office and used the typewriter while my assistant and I were out."

"But that wouldn't explain why the envelope addressed to Dorwin was found in your wastebasket."

"Wouldn't it?" Manning frowned. He looked at the dozen people the detective had crowded into his little office. He studied the faces of Klawitz, Underwood, Dexter P. Dexter, Tim Cornish, as though seeking the answer to the question uppermost in his mind: What could be keeping Betty Vale?

The telephone rang. Manning reached for it automatically. Kilkenny immediately imprisoned his hand before he could lift the receiver.

The detective nodded to another instrument on the next desk.

"Same circuit?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Okay. Answer."

As Manning said "Hello," the detective took up the second phone.

"Hello, Phil. This is Joe Dollar at Transcontinental Broadcasting," said the voice on the wire. "I called to tell you we're putting out that story after all."

"What story?" Manning asked.

"The one I called you about, half an hour ago."

"You didn't call me, Joe."

"The hell I didn't. Are you swacked, Phil? I told you —"

"You didn't tell me, Joe. Somebody else must have answered my phone. Let's have a repeat."

"Say, now that I think of it, your voice did sound funny," Dollar said. "But after all, I had your number, and whoever answered not only gave a good imitation of your voice, but he seemed to know what I was talking about."

"What were you talking about, Joe?"

"That chamber music competition you asked about. I phoned you that a music professor at some fresh-water college out in Iowa wrote in to say Benson's quartet was a cold steal from an obscure Bohemian composer named Fibich who died in 1900. The front office was going to keep mum about it, which was what I called to tell you. Then the legal department said we'd better confess we were fooled and make another award, otherwise the Iowa professor might raise a stink and then all the other contestants could sue us. So — Hey, what's going on down there? An air raid?"

Manning did not reply. He dropped the phone and sprang up.

Once again the unfamiliar thunder of gunfire echoed through the marble halls of the library. There were two shots — not the sharp crack of a .22 this time, but the deep-throated roar of a .45, followed by the shrill whine of a ricochet.

Almost instantly Betty Vale ran unsteadily into the little office, white faced and round-eyed with terror. She dropped some papers in front of Manning, then collapsed in a chair, buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

Manning was beside her at once. "What happened?" he said.

"I — I stopped at a phone booth downstairs to call my father," the girl said through her fingers.

"And they shot at you, just because you tried to phone?"

"They — they didn't shoot at me. I was coming up the stairs when the shooting started."

At that moment the target of the police guns appeared in the doorway: Feodor Klawitz, flanked by two bluecoats, with Tim Cornish bringing up the rear.

"He was trying to run out on us," Tim announced. "We stopped him."

"It's an outrage!" declared Klawitz. His effort to look imperious was balked by the fact that his toupee was badly askew over one eye. "I was merely on my way to my broadcast," he said. "I told you that I have never missed a broadcast in my life."

"And I told you you were going to miss this one," said Detective Kilkenny. "Sit down there. You're lucky you didn't stop one of those slugs. And you, Manning, get away from that girl. I got things to ask her."

Manning did not move. He turned to Cornish and said: "Tim, I'm not speaking to Mr. Kilkenny since he wounded my feelings by suspecting me unjustly, so will you tell him I

suggest he scurry right out and arrest Mr. David Benson for first-degree murder — if he can catch him."

"Benson, my eye!" said Kilkenny. "I may be dumb, but not that dumb. I don't see how you can fit this guy Benson into the picture."

"I'll draw the diagrams," Manning volunteered. "Open that red portfolio you picked up in the stacks. No, here — to the first page of the music. It's supposed to be an original score that Benson wrote for a ballet that Dorwin was going to finance — $20,000 worth. Now look at this proofsheet. It's a reproduction of the first page of an unpublished manuscript, a tone-poem by the late Russian composer Scriabin, called *Dance*. Except for the title, Benson's music is a note-for-note steal from Scriabin. Benson evidently found the manuscript in the Music Library and had it photostated; that would explain the raid on the photostat desk which Tim Cornish interrupted. Benson was out to destroy the records. He thought he could get away with stealing the music, since it had never been published. Unfortunately he didn't know that the Scriabin manuscript was part of a collection of Russian manuscripts which H. H. Dorwin himself had presented to the library. That fact had not yet been announced. But Dorwin, of course, recognized the music, and was about to expose Benson as a phony."

"You mean he'd kill a man just to save his reputation as a composer?" Kilkenny objected.

"There was the matter of twenty grand."

"Not with Dorwin dead, there wouldn't have been twenty grand," the detective said.

"With Dorwin dead, the ballet might still pass as a Benson original. He could find another sucker to put up the money."

"He'd already found the money," Betty Vale volunteered. "My father had already put up another twenty thousand. He just told me so on the phone. Dave sold him the idea that if the ballet were produced, it would be a flop — and that I would be cured of wanting a career in the ballet. It was a secret, of course — so that I wouldn't know my father was scheming to give me a lesson in failure, supposedly; actually, so that neither my father nor Hugh Dorwin would know that they were both being used. Dave must have planned to clear out with the whole forty thousand, once he got his hands on the money."

"Nice guy," said Kilkenny.

"Dorwin was to give his decision on the money to Miss Vale this afternoon," Manning continued. "He must also have planned to show up Benson as a transposer, rather than a composer. Evidently the rendezvous was in the Music Library, where Dorwin would confront Benson with the original Scriabin manuscript, and his identical copy. However, the choice of the rendezvous was the tip-off to Benson. He knew that if Dorwin exposed him, he would have no chance of getting away with the money he

had already collected from Betty's father. Therefore he wrote that note on my typewriter, and left it on the desk of the music librarian to lure Dorwin into the spiral staircase of the South Reading Room where he could be murdered in privacy."

"Are you sure Dave planned all this in advance, Phil — in cold blood?" Betty Vale asked.

"He must have," Manning replied. "That catalogue spindle he used to stab Dorwin comes from the music catalogue. It's a different type from the spindles in the general catalogue. Therefore Benson must have unscrewed it at the time he delivered the note. He probably carried it under his coat to the spiral staircase, to wait for Dorwin.

"When Dorwin opened the portfolio that contained the plagiarized music — he must have opened it since the tapes were untied when I found it, and since a torn fragment of the portfolio's contents was in his hand when he died — Benson knew the game was up and stabbed Dorwin through the eye.

"Benson ran down the circular stairs, carried the portfolio and the metal spindle to the delivery enclosure, concealed, as he thought, by the outer row of book shelves, and shoved them through the oaken bars into a hand-truck bound for the stacks. A moment later Dorwin staggered out on the gallery and fell dead.

"We know from Klawitz's story that Viola Smith crossed on the raised cat-walk just before Dorwin tumbled off the gallery. We know from Underwood's story that Viola Smith, from her point of vantage, had seen the murderer come out of the staircase — and that he had looked up and seen her looking at him. He would naturally want to get rid of this only witness at the first opportunity, which was when Miss Smith — or Mrs. Underwood — started back up the steps on which she was killed, just after opening the stackroom door for her husband. Benson must have pushed her down the steps."

"That doesn't explain how the envelope addressed to Dorwin was found in your wastebasket, Manning," Detective Kilkenny said.

"I'll have to guess at that one," Manning said. "But it's a reasonable guess. After your people gave Benson a pass to leave the reading room, he must have gone back to the Music Library to make sure he had left no incriminating evidence. He had not been there since Dorwin picked up the note, remember. Suppose Dorwin had opened the note outside the Music Library and dropped the envelope. Probably he did — and probably Benson picked it up and brought it to this office to deposit in my wastebasket, in order to prompt your boys to match the typewriting with my machine. I'm pretty sure of this, because somebody was in this office within the last hour to intercept a call from my friend at Transcontinental Broadcasting."

"And what makes you think it was Benson who took the call?" Kilkenny

demanded, chewing on his imaginary toothpick.

"Two things," said Manning. "First, up to that point, Benson had no reason to think he was suspected. But the call from Joe Dollar would let him know that I was not only on his trail, but also that I'd hit on something that would tie in with his motive for murder: Benson's penchant for stealing other men's music. Second, Benson had a police pass that let him go free of the library. Why would he come back, since the most incriminating piece of evidence seemed well hidden among more than two million books? It must have been that he learned that the evidence contained in the red portfolio was at least suspect. He would have learned by that phone call that I was digging in his garden of plagiarism.

"That's why he came back to ransack the Photostat Desk, to destroy the records of the fact that he had asked for copies of the Scriabin manuscript. That's why he knocked out Tim to steal his keys — to get into the stacks and try to find and obliterate the score for *Malavika*. And that's why, when he found me poring over the red portfolio, he set out to kill me, too. Which reminds me, Kilkenny, that, much as it hurts me, I must thank you for barging in when you did to scare him off. I was a goner. You saved my life."

"Think nothing of it," said Kilkenny. "I guess I'm indebted to you, too, for clearing up a few minor points. There's one more thing, though. Who put out the lights?"

"I did," volunteered Feodor Klawitz. "I wanted to get out for my broadcast. I —" He glanced at his watch. "Ten o'clock! I must get to the studio. Will you permit it, Inspector?"

"Inspector, my eye!" said Detective Kilkenny. "But go ahead. I guess I can always put my hands on you if I need you. Beat it."

Klawitz tucked a book under his arm and left.

"You might even put your hands on Benson, if you hurry," Manning said. "He's probably still hiding in the stacks, after taking a crack at me — although he's had time to get out, thanks to that pass you gave him, Kilkenny."

"He's still in the building, Kenny," Brannigan said. "I just checked with the men on the exits. Nobody's gone out in the last half-hour."

"Then he'll go out wearing bracelets," Kilkenny said. "Brannigan, run up and tell the lieutenant I need fifty more men to comb the building. Meanwhile we'll do a little preliminary combing ourselves. Get moving, men."

"Wait a minute, Kilkenny," Manning said.

"Now what do you want?"

"A pass," said Manning, "for Miss Vale and myself. There's a murderer at large in the library, and he might not like Miss Vale and me any more. I'm taking her out of here."

"Okay," said the detective. He scribbled something on a piece of

paper, handed it to Manning, and went out.

Betty Vale watched him go. She stood silent, as though stunned. There was an expression of deep hurt in her eyes. Manning put his arms around her gently.

"Phil, I feel as though Dave had murdered part of me, too," she said slowly. "Knowing that Dave could kill two people is ghastly, of course, but somehow the thing that hurts most is knowing that he could use my faith in him to . . . to . . . Oh, Phil, I feel — well, empty inside. . . !"

"You're probably hungry," Manning said. "Shall we eat?"

"How can you talk of food now, Phil?"

"We might try a little liquid nourishment. I'd like to drink to *Malavika*."

"Poor Malavika. I'm afraid she won't marry King Agnimitra after all!"

"Why not? Personally I think the recasting will be a great improvement. Music by Alexander Scriabin. Choreography by Elizabeth Vale Manning. It will look fine on the program."

"Phil!"

"I'll get my hat and coat," said Manning.

He opened the door to the coat closet — and took a startled step backward.

Betty Vale gasped.

Dave Benson stood in the closet, his usual smile flashing ominously. His hands were pushed into the pockets of his coat. The right pocket, stiffly distended by something long and cylindrical, pointed at Manning.

"Raise your hands! Both of you!" Benson spoke quickly between his white teeth.

"Dave, you wouldn't dare —"

"Won't I?" said Benson. He stepped from the closet and moved between Manning and the door. Manning recognized his own hat and overcoat on Benson. "What can I lose?" Benson demanded.

"What can you gain, Dave?" The girl stared at him with hard-eyed, tight-lipped fury. Her voice was vibrant with cold, deep rage.

"Freedom," said Benson. "I'm going to get out of here. And you're coming with me, Betty." His left hand pulled the brim of Manning's hat lower over his eyes. "Where's that police pass Kilkenny just gave you, Manning?"

"Wouldn't you like to know," said Manning.

"I'm through talking," Benson said. "I'll count to three. It's your last chance. One!"

"Go to hell," said Manning.

Benson did not hear Feodor Klawitz come in behind him. Neither did he see what it was that Klawitz poked into the small of his back. He felt, however, the hard, sharp pressure. He went suddenly limp.

"Hands up, you plagiaristic swine!" Klawitz roared. "You stealer of golden notes, you despoiler of the dead Scriabin's tomb —"

Benson's arms went up promptly. Klawitz lifted the book, the corner of which he had poked into Benson's back. The book crashed down on Benson's head.

"Grave robber!" said Klawitz.

Silently, neatly, like the cloth figure in a puppet show, Benson folded up. He bent first at the knees, then at the hips — rhythmically, elegantly, as became a Benson.

With a yell Manning sprang on the prostrate Benson. His hand dove into Benson's right pocket — and came out holding a large fountain pen.

"The four-flusher!" he said sheepishly.

The yell brought Kilkenny, Cornish, and three policemen piling into Manning's office. Handcuffs glittered about Benson's wrists almost before Manning had got to his feet again.

"What good angel brought you back, Klawitz?" Manning asked, as he gratefully pumped the hand of the horse-faced radio commentator.

"Angel!" snorted Klawitz. "A stupid policeman. He wouldn't let me out without a pass. He sent me back to get a pass from the Inspector."

"Give him a pass, Kilkenny," Manning said. "Quick — or he'll miss his broadcast."

Once outside the library, Phil Manning and Betty Vale hurried along the street, blinded by the big, wet, stinging snowflakes.

As they sank into curbside drifts and stumbled out again, a tall, familiar figure stalked up beside them.

"What a guy, this Benson, eh, Mr. Manning?" said Tim Cornish. "A man whose blood is very snow-broth; one who never feels the wanton stings and motions of the sense. Know what that's from?"

"No," said Manning. "But I've got one for you, Tim. 'A little warmth, a little light of love's bestowing —' Know the next line, Tim?"

"Gosh, I don't seem to remember. Is that Shakespeare, Mr. Manning?"

"It's George Louis Palmella Busson Du Maurier, and it's from *Trilby*, Tim."

"And the next line, Mr. Manning?"

" 'And so, goodnight,' Tim."

First Prize Winner
in EQMM's Fourth Cover Contest

THE DUMMY MURDER

by CLARKE OLNEY

YES, at one time Morelli was top man in his profession. I used to catch his act at the Palace in the old days. He was really good.

"I wanted to be a ventriloquist myself when I was a kid. I remember spending ten bucks I earned mowing lawns for that course they advertised in *American Boy* — you know, the picture of a trunk with somebody inside yelling, 'Help! Let me out of here!'

"I was never any good, but I could appreciate how good Morelli was.

"His dummy was different from most. It was life-like and life-size, like a clothing store dummy, only it was just the upper half of a body, no legs. He dressed it exactly like himself, except Junior, as he called it, always wore a battered, snap-brim hat. I advised Morelli once to get rid of it because it concealed Junior's eyes, but he didn't.

"I never saw the dummy close-up, but it looked solid and heavy. Anyway, Morelli had no trouble handling it. His act consisted of the usual bickering between the ventriloquist and his boy. The funniest part was when the dummy would rib Morelli about his love affairs. According to Junior's patter, it was money that made Morelli successful with the ladies, not sex appeal or brains. As for brains, Junior would sneer and say that Morelli was the dummy. Then Morelli would crack about Junior having no legs and no girls. The idea was to make like they both hated each other's guts. It was a scream.

"Morelli's control was perfect. I used to watch him like a hawk, but he showed absolutely no lip or throat movements while Junior was supposed to be talking. I don't know how he did it. He was tops, and he got top money.

"Morelli kept strictly to himself. He never let anybody into his dressing room, not even me. I got to know him because after vaudeville died he

needed an agent. That's my racket. Here's one of my cards.

"Like I said, he had a weakness. He was a big, blond, handsome guy. He had plenty of money then and didn't mind spending it — on women. And every time he got a new one, Junior would needle him worse than before. Yes, sir, that Morelli was a great showman.

"Oh, he got into some pretty bad jams, but this time I'm telling about was the worst.

"Two years ago he was working the Arklahoma State Fair. It seems he had been seeing a lot of the wife of one of the stable hands. Well, the afternoon I'm talking about, some of the regular help, including the stable hand, dropped in and caught his act. Morelli had Junior working fine. He talked about Morelli's new girl-friend. No one with the show could misunderstand who he meant. Junior's line was pretty crude, and Morelli made like he was really burning up. It was clever acting, but I could never figure Morelli's angle in playing it like that. Overconfidence, I guess.

"Anyway, this stable guy went right back to his trailer and shot his wife dead. Then he made a break for it.

"They finally chased him up into the high-diving tower, a big open-work steel job the Army had used for training parachute jumpers. He still had five good bullets in his gun and everybody knew it, so nobody wanted to go after him.

"Except Morelli. He sure liked the spotlight even when he wasn't getting paid for it. He borrowed a gun from one of the watchmen and started up the tower. What gave the crowd the biggest kick was that he took Junior with him. It would have made a swell circus act. He had the dummy struggling in his arms like it was scared to death, and cursing Morelli like crazy. Believe me, that Morelli was a showman. Even in a spot like that he was advertising the act.

"It happened quick. Morelli climbed up to the platform below the one where the killer was. He snatched off Junior's hat, then took three steps up the ladder and pushed the dummy, shrieking like a banshee, through the opening in the floor above.

"The stable hand pumped his five slugs into Junior. Then Morelli, still holding the dummy, took one more step, reached through the opening, and emptied his .38.

"When he'd finished, he replaced Junior's hat, scrambled down the ladder holding Junior against his chest, and disappeared into his dressing room. The crowd and the cops surged up to the platform where the dead guy lay. Quite a picnic. Everybody agreed Morelli'd been pretty clever, trapping the killer that way.

"Now here's a funny thing. Morelli never amounted to anything after that. He had to get another dummy, of course, a regular one this time. Junior had been all shot up. In fact, nobody ever saw Junior again, but Morelli told me — one night after a few beers — that he'd buried him in a

grave like a human, he wouldn't say where.

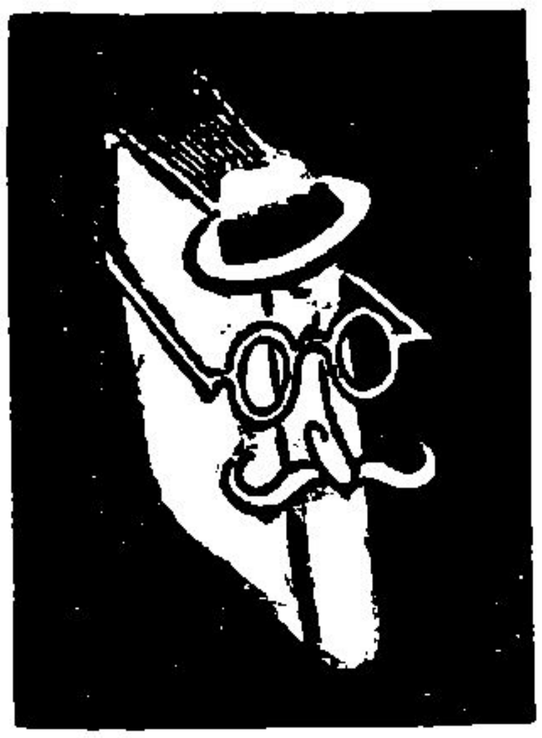
"No, he's never clicked since. I caught his act a few months later at a burlesque in Detroit, and it was bad — real bad. He was nervous and his lips were moving all the time.

"Like I said, it was a funny thing. When Junior died, something seemed to die in Morelli. Or maybe it was something else — I've been thinking about it. Remorse, or what they call conscience. You see, Morelli was a murderer — yes, that's what he was. Three people died account of him. There was the stable hand's wife, and the stable hand himself — and Junior. Yes, Morelli killed Junior, just as if he'd shot him himself. He sure must have hated that dummy."

Honorable Mentions

Murder As a Fine Art by Eleanor Adams, Newport Beach, Calif.
Better Than One by Derek Smith, London, England
"*The Dummy*" by R. L. Quinn, Denver, Colorado
Not Enough Blood by Clarence W. Donnelly, Brooklyn, N. Y.
The Man Who Thought He Was Clever by Augustus Traherne, Northfield, Minn.

HIS NAME IS DEAR TO HIM



Some British publishers have an irresistible urge to change American book titles . . . and to be perfectly fair, vice versa. Not that Queen has much cause for complaint. The only Queen novel which suffered a sea-change as the result of crossing the Atlantic was HALFWAY HOUSE, *and this change was merely one of spelling: the English publisher preferred to spell it* HALF-WAY HOUSE. *Two Queen anthologies, however, did have their titles altered:* SPORTING BLOOD *became* SPORTING DETECTIVE STORIES, *and* THE FEMALE OF THE SPECIES *donned English cloth as* LADIES IN CRIME . . . *The other day we noticed a new Pocket Book reprint of one of Patrick Quentin's books. The title —* SLAY THE LOOSE LADIES *— struck us as completely unfamiliar. Had we missed one of Patrick Quentin's books? No, it was just the American publisher succumbing, this time, to the same irresistible urge:* SLAY THE LOOSE LADIES *is* PUZZLE FOR WANTONS *with its face lifted.*

So we dropped a note to our good friends Patrick Quentin (and Q. Patrick) and asked them how they have fared in the matter of transatlantic title transformations.

Well, the boys have taken quite a beating — in all their pseudonyms. And they wonder why. A book, they say, is after all an international thing. Why, then, should its title be changed? Imagine the confusion if DAVID COPPERFIELD *were published in America as, say,* PEGGOTY'S BOY; *or, the Patricks ask, would any American publisher be so brash as to reprint* GONE WITH THE WIND *under some new title?*

Yet the poor detective story, it cannot even call its original title its own.

Q. Patrick's THE GRINDLE NIGHTMARE *appeared in England as* DARKER GROWS THE VALLEY. MURDER AT THE WOMEN'S CITY CLUB *was Anglicized into* DEATH IN THE DOVECOTE. *And* RETURN TO THE SCENE *became* DEATH IN BERMUDA.

As Jonathan Stagge, the boys just didn't seem to be able to devise a title acceptable to their English publishers. Why? Were the original American titles so unappealing or so inadequate — or what? Judge for yourself. MURDER BY PRESCRIPTION *became* MURDER OR MERCY *in England. Which do you like better?* TURN OF THE TABLE *was changed to* FUNERAL FOR FIVE. THE YELLOW TAXI *retained a means of transportation — English readers knew the book as* CALL A HEARSE. THE SCARLET CIRCLE *lost its detective-mystery connotation altogether: believe it or not, the*

English publisher preferred LIGHT FROM A LANTERN. *One man's poison . . .*

But perhaps we shouldn't talk. The Q. Patrick story we now bring you originally appeared in the United States as "Footlights and Murder." It now appears in EQMM as "Farewell Performance." Oh, yes, we too are guilty of changing titles — but not this time! "Farewell Performance" was the authors' original title, and we liked the authors' own title better. We generally do.

FAREWELL PERFORMANCE

by Q. PATRICK

She stood in the hall of her Park Avenue apartment, watching Lieutenant Trant. On the stage he'd always considered Gay Killian America's best and loveliest actress. Face to face, she looked older, but even lovelier. Maybe the shock of what had happened had something to do with it; her skin was almost translucent, and her green eyes, under the black hair, dark as laurel leaves.

Her hand was resting on the arm of Robert Prentice, her new leading man. The tall young actor with taffy blond hair showed the shock too, but he was playing it tough.

Trant, of the New York Homicide Bureau, nodded toward an inner room, where the bustle of a police investigation was under way.

"This man has been murdered," he said. "You realize that, Miss Killian?"

"Of course I realize it."

"And you and Mr. Prentice were the only people known to be in the apartment — except your maid and secretary. Isn't it rather unorthodox to let you leave without any kind of an examination — a sort of preview?"

"But it's so desperately important to me. It's after seven now. The curtain's at eight-thirty. You can send a policeman with us to the theater. Afterwards, we'll do anything, tell you anything."

"It's Gay's farewell performance," cut in Prentice, glaring at a cut on the knuckles of his right hand. "Everyone will be there. Gay as *Medea*. Gay for the last time."

"And you, Mr. Prentice," asked Trant dryly, "are you playing for the last time too?"

"No understudy. I've got to be there."

"My secretary and maid can tell you everything." Gay Killian laid a persuasive hand on Trant's sleeve. "I've heard about you. Who hasn't? You're not a hardboiled policeman. You're understanding. . . . Please."

Trant looked thoughtful. "I was

hoping to catch that show, myself. I'd hate to disappoint the rest of the audience . . . Bill!"

A plainclothesman appeared at the inner door. "Go with Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice to the theater," said Trant. "Hang around. I'll be down after the show to talk to them. Don't let them leave." He grinned at Gay Killian. "Excuse this Relentless-Arm-of-the-Law routine," he added.

"Of course." A brief smile flickered. "Robert, get Liz." The young actor went away and came back with Miss Killian's secretary.

Gay Killian said: "Lieutenant, this is Miss Elise Dunlop. She and Lucy will tell you anything you want to know." She paused. "I can't say how grateful I am. Isn't there something we can do? . . . Fingerprints? Don't you always want fingerprints?"

"Not a bad idea." Trant turned to the plainclothesman. "Print them first. . . . I hope you're not too broken up to play, Miss Killian."

"Oh, no, no. Actresses are trained to meet anything."

Trant considered her solemnly. "I'm kind of rusty on my Greek Classics. Who was this Medea? Did a lot of murdering, didn't she?"

"She killed her children."

"Unorthodox. . . By the way, who's the dead gentleman in the living room?"

A shadow darkened Gay's eyes. She glanced quickly to Prentice and then on to her secretary. "Tell him, Liz."

"Tell him — everything, Miss Killian?"

"Everything." Gay was tall, but suddenly she looked small and defeated, stretching her hand out in a gesture instinctively theatrical. "Ready now for the fingerprints?". . .

Trant moved through the inner door into Miss Killian's small, charming library. It was empty, but from the overturned chairs and disarranged tables it was obvious that it had recently been occupied with some violence. Trant had already examined it. He went into the large living room beyond, anticipating Captain Dalton's explosive disapproval when he learned that the two chief suspects had been allowed to leave.

The living room was crowded with officials. Little Doc Sanders was stooped over the body, which lay on the rug under the mantel. One of the detectives brought Trant a fancy ostrich skin wallet, holding it by one corner. "Only thing on him, Loot, except a couple of handkerchiefs, small change."

In the dead man's wallet Trant found identification papers showing him to be Henry Walgrove, a commission agent from Boston. Also two round-trip tickets to Boston dated that day, a driver's license, $38 in cash, two tickets for Gay Killian's *Medea* performance that night, and a snapshot of a middle-aged, toothy woman in a swimming suit, inscribed *Lila* at *Narragansett*. Most interesting of all was a typewritten note which read:

"Darling, Darling: It looks as though we'll get it at last — and plenty of it. Gay sees this young

Prentice every night. Night and day he is the one! And she doesn't hide her infatuation from her friends, her dresser, her maid, her secretary — anyone. So hope on, hope ever and I'll soon be your own. —L."

Trant blinked. Why should a lady known as "L," enthusiastically report to the Boston commission agent an affair between Gay and young Prentice? Particularly since Gay Killian's reputation for almost ascetic celibacy was nationally known.

One of the men was examining the murder gun. He called: "Hey, Loot, perfect set of prints here. Looks like this little killing's going to be a cinch to crack."

"It does?" Trant was reflective. "We've got the Killian and Prentice prints already. Better get the secretary and the maid."

Trant moved to the corpse. Henry Walgrove didn't look as if he'd been a pleasant person. He was huge and too well fed. Trant could imagine him buying the right suits, the right hair tonics, exuding specious joviality — and not paying his bills.

Doc Sanders looked up sourly. "Bullet entered just below the heart, Trant. Took an upward course, probably piercing the heart and coming out just below the left shoulder. From the powder marks, I'd say the shot was fired from a distance of three or four feet."

"Very interesting," said Trant.

"What's interesting about it?" snapped Sanders. "Just another bullet, another body."

Trant was glancing round the room. There was something wrong about it. It was so polite and orderly, in contrast to the disorderly library. The cushions on the couch and the overstuffed chairs were plumped out as though no one had ever sat on them.

"Guess he was shot in here, Doc? Wasn't moved?" he asked.

"Moved? Course not. Besides, who'd be able to move a great hulk like that?"

There was another door leading from the room. Trant went through it into a short corridor. The door of the room beyond was open. He saw Gay's secretary sitting behind a desk. She was somewhere in the thirties, small, with a pinched, ladylike look around the nose. Trant grinned at her. "I'd like to see the maid, please, Miss Dunlop," he said.

Miss Elise Dunlop scurried away. There was a blank piece of paper in the typewriter. Trant started idly to tap out: *The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog*. Hearing Miss Dunlop's return, he quickly pulled out the sheet and stuffed it in his pocket.

"This is Lucy," said Miss Dunlop, introducing a blatantly attractive girl with long, overexposed legs below a brief maid's uniform. Lucy grinned at Trant and sat down, crossing her legs. The secretary withdrew.

Lucy burst out: "It's me that —"

"Just a moment, Lucy. When did you tidy the living room last?"

"The living room? Just before the corpse — that is Mr. Walgrove, showed up."

"You haven't tidied since?"

"What d'you think I am? Hiding evidence —"

"What I think you are has nothing to do with the case. Now, Lucy, give."

Lucy gave — enthusiastically. Around a quarter of six she'd answered the front-door buzzer. Mr. Walgrove was there, asking for Miss Killian. . . . No, Lucy didn't know him. She'd only been here a few weeks. She had him wait in the hall and announced his arrival to Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice in the bedroom.

"The bedroom, Lucy?" he queried.

Lucy winked. "The bedroom. Miss Killian was fixing herself to go out."

Miss Killian and Prentice had exchanged what Lucy called "significant" looks. Mr. Prentice had said: "I'll take care of this, Gay." Miss Killian had tried to argue, but Mr. Prentice had hurried out to the hall. Lucy had been sent back to the kitchen — but not before she'd heard loud words from the hall. "Curiosity made me pause," said Lucy.

In a few minutes, sounds of a struggle had come from the library. Lucy tactfully returned to the kitchen. A short time later she heard a shot, and ran to the sound. She reached the living room to find Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice bending over Mr. Walgrove and Miss Killian exclaiming: "He's dead."

Trant said: "You've been shown the gun?"

Lucy nodded. "It's Miss Killian's all right. Keeps it in the drawer of her bed table. Scared of burglars." She gave Trant a smile, luscious and knowing. "One of them did it, Lieutenant. Either him or her and —"

"Thank you, Lucy. Now please call Miss Dunlop." Lucy left reluctantly.

Elise Dunlop came in and sat down with the impersonal quietness of someone about to take dictation. She had little new to offer. From the office where she'd been working on Miss Killian's autobiography, she'd heard a shot. She'd hurried to the living room and discovered Miss Killian, Prentice and Lucy.

Trant asked: "Perhaps you'll explain what Mr. Walgrove was to Miss Killian and why."

Elise Dunlop flushed. "Miss Killian told you to tell all. Remember?" said Trant.

"I know. I . . . This is most embarrassing. Mr. Walgrove was Miss Killian's husband."

Timothy blinked. "But for years Miss Killian has been notoriously unmarried."

"That was publicity. This happened long ago. They've been separated for many years."

"Divorced?"

"Miss Killian does not approve of divorce — on religious grounds."

"Then . . . ?"

"He was not a good man." Miss Dunlop looked bitter. "For years now, he has been living on Miss Killian. Never worked much. Always knew Miss Killian was good for a touch."

"And why was Miss Killian always ready to — be touched?"

"Partly because she's loyal to people who've been close to her. Partly because she didn't want the unpleasant publicity Mr. Walgrove could make for her."

"He came back today for another touch?"

"No. I believe Miss Killian sent for him."

"Why?"

She hesitated. "Miss Killian has not been well. Her heart. Her doctors advised her to give up acting. I believe she planned to tell Mr. Walgrove that there'd be a big drop in her income and she wouldn't be able —"

"You're sure that's the reason, Miss Dunlop? You're sure she didn't send for him because she's fallen in love with Mr. Prentice and finally wants a divorce?"

Her eyes flared. "There's nothing like that between Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice."

"Sure?" Trant handed her the note he'd found in Walgrove's wallet. "This mean anything to you?"

She read it. "The things it says about Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice are lies."

"You don't know who the lady signing herself 'L.' is?"

"I know nothing about Mr. Walgrove's affairs, I'm sure."

Trant handed her the photograph of the toothy woman in the swimming suit. "Know this lady? Lila something?"

Elise Dunlop studied the photograph. "Why, yes, I believe I do. It's Mrs. Lila Ridell."

"Who's she?"

"A woman in Boston. Prominent socially. Wealthy, I believe. A widow. I'm from Boston, myself." She coughed. "Not that I knew her. We never moved in the same circles. But . . ."

"Any connection between her and Walgrove?"

Miss Dunlop said tartly: "I presume so — since you found the photograph in his pocket."

"Touché, Miss Dunlop."

One of the men came in to say that Captain Dalton had arrived. Timothy grinned at Miss Dunlop. "This is it," he said. "The Inspector's going to raise the roof when he finds out I let Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice go."

As he spoke, the phone rang. Trant picked up the receiver. A matronly voice said: "I want to speak to Mr. Walgrove at once."

"Who's calling, please?"

"Mrs. Lila Ridell. Mr. Walgrove is supposed to pick me up here at the Pierre and take me to *Medea*. He hasn't arrived. It's most annoying. What on earth's the matter?"

"I'm afraid," said Trant politely, "Mr. Walgrove won't be able to make *Medea*, Mrs. Ridell. It's most unfortunate, but right now he's not — feeling very well."

Trant was right about Dalton. He exploded when he heard that Miss Killian and Mr. Prentice were not there. He was even angrier when he examined all the evidence and personally interviewed Lucy and Elise.

"You crazy, Trant, trying to get fancy on this case? Straightest sailing I ever saw. Miss Killian wanted to marry this new young actor. Called her husband to tell him he had to get a divorce. He refused, threatened to make a scandal about Prentice, and held her up for plenty of dough. Prentice got mad. When Walgrove arrived, they quarreled. Prentice got the gun. Shot him."

"Yes?" queried Trant meekly.

"If you'd been as efficient as the dumbest leg-man on the force, you'd have had Prentice arrested by now."

"I would?" Trant let his eyes stray to the neatly plumped cushions of the sofa and the chairs. "I suppose you'll be going down to the theater to arrest him right away?"

"That's exactly what I'm going to do."

"There's a perfect set of prints on the gun, know that?"

"All the better."

"Not necessarily — you see, when the report comes through, we'll find the prints are not those belonging to Mr. Prentice."

Dalton was no believer in half-measures. He gathered up a reluctant Miss Dunlop and an eager Lucy as witnesses in his case against Prentice. Trant called headquarters for the fingerprint report to be phoned to the theater. The four drove downtown.

Medea was almost over. While Dalton fussed in Prentice's dressing room, Trant watched the final scene between Jason and Medea. Gay was magnificent. Prentice as Jason was good too. Trant felt sad that their great evening must end so unpleasantly.

As the curtain fell to sweeping applause, he made his way back to Prentice's dressing room and Captain Dalton. Soon the young actor appeared, tall and with a certain splendor, in his Grecian robes. He looked tired and under a terrific strain. His gaze moved cautiously to Dalton and then to Miss Dunlop. "Why, Liz, what . . . ?"

Dalton broke in: "Prentice, this isn't going to take long. I got a couple of witnesses here, so it's no use lying. You met Walgrove in the hall, yes?"

Prentice dropped to a chair. "Yes."

"You both went into the library, started quarreling, fighting. Yes?"

Prentice said quietly: "Yes."

"Then you followed him into the living room. You had Miss Killian's revolver. You shot him."

Prentice shrugged. "Okay. Why string it out? Yes. I shot Walgrove."

Captain Dalton beamed. In his satisfaction he hadn't noticed that the door had opened. Trant had. He turned to see Gay Killian on the threshold. With her dark hair streaming over her Grecian robe, she still brought with her the illusion of Medea — wild, beautiful, with tragic grandeur. But behind the shining façade there was a terrible exhaustion.

She took a step toward them. In a clear, firm voice, she said: "That's a lie! Robert didn't shoot him. He's only saying that to protect me. I killed Henry Walgrove."

Trant said quietly: "Why don't you tell us what happened, Miss Killian?"

She sat down on an old wooden chair, the simple robe swirling around her. "I was always going to tell you the truth. I just wanted this last chance to act tonight. That's why I'm so grateful to you, Lieutenant. Robert quarreled with my husband. There was a stupid fist fight. Robert became ashamed of himself. He came back to me in the bedroom to apologize for such childish behavior. He'd grazed his knuckles. I sent him upstairs to the bathroom for iodine. Then I got my revolver and went into the living room. Henry was standing by the mantel."

"Where did you sit?"

"There on the couch, close to him. I tried to argue. I saw it was no use. He — became impossible. I shot him." Her eyes, poignantly tender, moved to Prentice. "Robert dear, it was foolish to try to protect me. I prefer it this way."

Trant asked: "It's still rather confusing what you and Mr. Walgrove were quarreling about, Miss Killian. Up to now we've been wrong, haven't we? It wasn't you who wanted a divorce to marry Prentice. It was your husband who wanted a divorce to marry this rich and doubtless admirable Mrs. Lila Ridell.

Gay Killian nodded.

"And you, who don't believe in divorce, Miss Killian, were refusing to give it to him?"

"I wouldn't," she flared with sudden passion. "He'd ruined my life. I wasn't going to let him do the same to another woman. He was only after her money, her position, her . . ."

"Exactly," put in Trant. "And when you refused the divorce, he threatened to make a scandal about you and Prentice. Right?"

Gay looked up at him pitifully. "Do we have to go on with this? I'm ready. Please let them take me away."

Prentice's face was white as his robe. He took a step toward her. "Gay . . ."

The phone on the dressing table rang. Trant picked it up. He listened. "Yes," he said. "That's just what I expected."

Dalton snapped: "The fingerprint report?"

"Yes," said Trant, hanging up.

"Whose are they?"

"Miss Killian's, of course." Trant smiled at her almost affectionately. "I always knew they would be."

Things were straightforward enough again for Captain Dalton. He said: "Well, Miss Killian, I guess if you come along with me . . ."

"One moment," put in Trant, "May I ask a few questions?"

Dalton gave a pettish: "Guess so."

Trant watched Gay thoughtfully. "You and Mr. Prentice love each other very much, don't you?"

The actress' gaze flashed to Prentice and then back to Trant. He said: "It's corny, but I'm afraid 'valiant' is the word for you. I was suspicious when you made such a point of being fingerprinted. Just a shade overdone.

I guessed then that you'd deliberately put your prints on the gun to incriminate yourself."

"But . . ."

"Just now you said you were sitting on the couch when you shot Walgrove. I'm afraid you weren't. No one sat on that couch or on any of the chairs after Walgrove arrived."

"Then I was . . ."

"Standing? No, Miss Killian, I'm afraid you weren't standing either."

Gay didn't seem to be listening now. She was watching Prentice with a kind of dread.

"If you like, Miss Killian, I'll tell you the true version of the story you've just given. Prentice *did* come to you in the bedroom after his minor tussle with Walgrove. You *did* send him upstairs for iodine. But after that, you were scared of what he might do, weren't you? You looked in your bedside table, found your gun was gone. A few seconds later you heard the shot. You were sure then that Prentice hadn't gone upstairs. He'd gone into the living room with the gun and . . ."

"No," said Gay fiercely. "No!"

"Yes," replied Trant. "I'm afraid yes." He was still smiling. "But don't let it break your heart, Miss Killian. You see, your little show wasn't necessary — because, believe me, you didn't kill Walgrove. Neither did Prentice."

Dalton's face purpled with exasperation. Trant took from his pocket the photograph of the massive Mrs. Ridell in her swimming suit. "This lady, Mrs. Ridell, is the key to the whole problem. Walgrove wanted a divorce so he could marry her — bless her. You've admitted it yourself, Miss Killian. Our Lila is pleasantly well-heeled, the ideal lady to keep Walgrove in clover. Much better than depending on handouts from you. But he knew how you felt about divorce; his only hope was to catch you in a scandal and divorce you himself for misconduct."

He paused. "Walgrove, being a slick customer, thought out a plan. He wanted evidence of misconduct. How get it better than by suborning a member of your ménage into spying for him? Being also the charmer type, he used the romantic approach. He picked his victim and wooed her with promises of rapture and marriage the moment she could obtain misconduct evidence for the divorce."

He sighed. "It's rather touching, isn't it? He never intended to marry his spy, of course. He was all out for the full-blown Lila. But the spy fell for it. And I guess she did a good job. The note we found on his body indicates that."

Trant brought out the typewritten letter signed "L." "The solution's here, of course. L. was his spy. L. thought he was going to marry her. L. found out about Mrs. Ridell. L. knew there'd be a scene between Miss Killian, Prentice, and Walgrove that afternoon. L. sneaked Miss Killian's gun. L. heard the fight in the library, heard Prentice go, heard Walgrove come alone into the living room. L.

saw her perfect opportunity and took it. One shot. Wipe fingerprints off the gun. Drop it. Slip away. Come back as if rushing to the sound of the shot." He turned to Miss Dunlop. "It's a short distance between your office and the living room, isn't it?"

Gay Killian's secretary glared. "It's preposterous to suppose . . ."

"Your name's Elise, Miss Dunlop. But I've noticed they all call you Liz. L, Miss Dunlop, L."

"You've no proof. It might just as well be . . ."

"Lucy? Oh, no, Miss Dunlop, I don't think it was Lucy. You see, for an efficient secretary, you should have paid more attention to your typewriter. Of course it was most unfortunate, too, that Walgrove kept your note. Even so, if you'd cleaned the machine, it mightn't have been so obvious." He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. "I'm not much of a typist myself, but I used your machine. Here — compare the type of the note and this paper yourself: the blocked-up 'e'? The 't' that's worn at the top? That broken 'w'? You wrote that note."

Trant continued quietly: "Besides, you're the only one who could have shot him, Miss Dunlop. That's where the upholstery comes in again. The bullet hit low, traveling upward at a sharp angle. Any of the others might have shot him if they'd been sitting down. But no one was sitting down. And the rest of them, including Lucy, are too tall. You're the only one short enough to have shot him, standing. He double-crossed you, didn't he? You thought he was going to marry you."

Miss Dunlop's face twisted passionately. "I hated him," she flared. "I hated Henry Walgrove."

Trant said, "I'm sorry, Miss Dunlop. You've had a pretty miserable love life, haven't you?"

He nodded to Dalton. "Take her away, Captain. She's all yours."

Later, Trant was alone in the dressing room with Gay and Robert Prentice. He said: "I always like cases when there's something in them I don't understand."

"What don't you understand?" Gay asked.

"Since you love Prentice so much, why wouldn't you give your husband a divorce?"

A faint flush stained her cheeks. "Now I'm retiring, I suppose it's all right to come out with it. My manager's always made me keep it dark: a question of age."

She smiled up at Robert Prentice, a warm, intimate smile. "He's been hidden away all these years. You see my husband — all the time I was afraid he'd try and claim him —"

Trant understood then. "Your son!" he said. "And Walgrove never knew!"

"My son." Gay laughed. "You see now why I didn't want to marry him?"

Dale Clark's "Crime Lesson" won an Honorable Mention in EQMM's Third Annual Prize Contest. A clever story on all counts, "Crime Lesson" has one feature which your Editor found irresistible — a detective whose conversation is salted with detective-story lore. This background of historical scholarship in no way detracts from the splendid entertainment values — indeed, the story is immeasurably enhanced; and among many other fascinating facts about ferreting you will learn who organized the world's very first detective bureau, when a police force began to use regulation uniforms, who were the earliest scientific criminals, when and where the first police training school came into existence — and how all this knowledge helps Munro, the I.B. man, solve a murder case à la 1948.

CRIME LESSON

by DALE CLARK

"I'M MUNRO," the tired gray man said, "from police headquarters." Mr. Alexander Gowlett, manager of the Parkview Manor Apartments, could not quite restrain a look of astonishment. Indeed, Mr. Gowlett's expression plainly asked, *You a cop?*

Munro's was the spare, stooped, weary figure of a commuting sales clerk, the kind of clerk who'd never make a sales manager.

"Inspector Munro?" said Alexander Gowlett, doubtfully.

"Mister," said Munro. "I'm in I.B. The lab."

"Oh, I suppose they sent you to see the books and cancelled checks and so on. Will you step this way?"

He guided Munro behind the Parkview lobby's mail-and-keys desk, opening a blonde-birch door into a rear office.

"Hayes, this is Mr. Munro from the police." And to Munro: "Mr. Hayes is with Cromwell, Patterson & Patterson, the auditors."

A plump, dark-haired, eye-glassed man looked up from a desk's confusion of ledgers, checks, and bank statements.

"Of course, I haven't tracked it all down yet," Hayes said, "but it's been going on for months, and the Todd woman certainly got away with ten or twelve thousand dollars or more."

Alexander Gowlett's lips visibly winced under his black, toothbrush-trim mustache.

Munro's gray glance ran randomly over the littered desk and the auditor's representative.

"Your name Hay?" he asked.

"Hayes. David A. Hayes."

"Too bad," said Munro regretfully. "If it was Hay, I'd say you could easily be a descendant of the world's first detective."

"Oh?"

"Jacob Hay, that was. High Constable of New York City. 'Way back in 1803, he organized the world's very first detective bureau. He did it twenty-six years before the English started Scotland Yard."

The auditor looked at Alexander Gowlett; Mr. Gowlett looked at the auditor. Presently Hayes said, "Well, now, that's an interesting thing to know."

"It's an amazing thing. New York didn't have a police department in those days. They had a day watch and a night watch, but they didn't get around to installing a unified metropolitan police department until 1844. I'm not criticizing New York, you understand," said Munro reflectively, "because no other city had one, either. Washington, D. C., still had the separate day and night watchmen system when the Civil War broke out. New York was always progressive. Nobody ever thought of dressing up a police force in regulation uniforms until New York did it in 1856."

Alexander Gowlett and Hayes stared at the tired gray man. Munro turned and peered across the room. "That's the door to the storeroom?"

"Yes," said Gowlett, feebly.

"The service elevator runs up from it?"

"That's correct, and Miss Todd's room is next to the service elevator shaft on the third floor."

"She used it this morning?"

"Yes," said Gowlett. "She turned pale as a sheet when Hayes walked in here this morning. Didn't she?"

"Ghastly," said the auditor.

"I didn't dream," Alexander Gowlett resumed. "I asked her what was wrong. She told us she had a splitting headache. I suggested that she go up to her room, take a couple of aspirins, and lie down for a while."

"I thought she'd fall on her face when she got up from the desk here," said Hayes.

The Parkview's manager shook his head. "But we didn't dream. I walked with her to the elevator myself. I told her to take the forenoon off, that I'd find whatever Hayes needed. But inside of half an hour he'd smelled a rat. We started to go up to her room, and found her body in the elevator. She'd gone to her room, written that note, and plunged an ice-pick into her breast. Then I suppose she was frightened by what she'd done. Anyway, she left a trail of blood from her room to the freight elevator, managed to get into the elevator and press the first-floor button, but she probably collapsed on the way down."

Munro looked more gray and tired of face than before. "I saw the note at the lab. It just said she was short in her accounts, but it didn't mention how much."

"I've been in touch with the bank," Hayes explained. "Here's an example that'll show you her method. Three months ago, Mr. Gowlett wrote Charter Linens a check for $623.47. The bank statement for that month shows no such withdrawal; instead there's an item of $523.47, and another of

$100.00: Now, look closely at the check, will you?"

Munro accepted the oblong of perforated paper. "Paste," the man from headquarters said.

"Yes, it's obvious she kept the original check out of the mail. Then she proceeded to trace-forge Gowlett's signature to two more checks, one for $523.47 payable to Charter Linens, and another payable to herself. When the cancelled checks came back from the bank, she simply destroyed the $100.00 one. The other she went to work on with a razor blade and scraped off its face. Similarly, she stripped the back from the original check. By gluing the halves together, she produced what was on the face of it a $623.47 payment to Charter Linens — and on the back of it, their endorsement and the bank's stamp. Of course, that left a hundred dollar debit on Charter Linen's account, but she kept falsifying the records here. Her bank balances always came out properly, and the cancelled checks matched the stubs."

Alexander Gowlett cried, "Isn't it incredible? Who'd ever *dream?*"

"It's an old stunt," Munro said, snapping a fingernail against the check. "Counterfeiters split money, you know. They glue the halves of a twenty and a one, and pass the products as *two* twenty-dollar bills. Counterfeiters were the first scientific criminals, by the way. There's a rather surprising story about that."

"Oh?" said Mr. Gowlett.

Munro smiled, and the smile lifted some of the tiredness from his gray face. "It's fascinating," said he. "The logic of it. The irony, too. You've got Niepce and Daguerre discovering photography. And then in about twenty years, you've got a workable technique of photo-engraving. And you've got your smart, up-to-date crooks photographing banknotes and running off practically perfect counterfeits from their engravings. So — in 1861 — you've got the U. S. Government appropriating money to fight back. Reward money. But it didn't work. You couldn't lick smart, scientific, specialized crime with the old-style methods. It just inevitably led up to the U. S. Secret Service, born July 1, 1865."

Triumphantly, Munro watched his hearers. Alexander Gowlett's bent forefinger mechanically caressed his mustache. Hayes mechanically thumbed a ledger page.

"Don't you *see?*" the man from headquarters urged. "There'd been government sleuths before. The Post Office Department had been hiring inspectors for twenty-five years. And there were all sorts of hit-or-miss secret services — Pinkerton's, Winder's, Baker's so-called National Police Detective Bureau. But this was the Treasury Department's Secret Service — you might say, the original, modern G-Man outfit. I've often thought," continued Munro, chuckling, "counterfeiters ought to be awfully unpopular in the underworld, considering what *they* started."

"I see," said Mr. Gowlett, "you're

one of those college-educated cops."

"Well, I'm not, but that's an interesting subject, too. I don't suppose you know the French had a police training school as early as 1883? We had nothing of the kind in America until 1905, when the Pennsylvania State Constabulary adopted the idea. But if you mean a genuine, full-dress college course, there wasn't such a thing before San Jose in California offered it. In 1930."

Alexander Gowlett and Hayes exchanged glances. The auditor made a determined, throat-clearing sound:

"If there's anything else you'd like to ask about before I go ahead —?"

"Why," said Munro, "I don't think so. I'd better take this phoney check down to the lab. It's a counterfeiter's trick, as I said, and Miss Todd may have needed an accomplice. I'll ask Mr. Gowlett to come along. He can look through the Rogues' Gallery — maybe he'll recognize one of the Todd woman's acquaintances."

"I'd be delighted," said the Parkview's manager.

"I've got a headquarters' car out in front."

Munro led the way through the lobby and to the curb.

"You probably never had a ride in one of these before?" said he.

"No, it's a new experience for me."

"You might be interested to know," said the tired gray man, "about the history of it. The first mechanized police vehicle was a gas buggy patrol-wagon out in Akron, in 1900."

"Really," said Alexander Gowlett.

"And the first cops to use airplanes was a Bergen County, New Jersey, outfit in 1929 — oh-oh!" cried Munro, bending over the wheel. "Did you see that?"

"What?"

"Guy ahead went through a red light. I got his number. Hand me the radio-phone from the glove compartment, and I'll turn him in. Thanks a lot, Mr. Gowlett."

Munro braked for the red light and made his call. "You have to kind of slam the compartment. It sticks. You ever happen to hear where the police started using radio?"

"I didn't, but I expect to now."

"It was Dallas, Texas, around about 1922. By 1925, they had a police teletype set-up in Connecticut."

The light turned green.

"Those lights, now," said Munro. "They put the first ones up on Fifth Avenue right after World War I. Towers, they were, twenty-three feet high. And was that an experiment? A Dr. Harris was Special Deputy Police Commissioner at the time. You know, he dug down in his own pocket and paid for installing those traffic towers."

"You don't say."

"It's a fact. And, why, for a while they had had walking semaphores — traffic cops wearing lights strapped onto their chests, run by electric batteries."

"You astonish me," said Mr. Gowlett.

"It shows you, doesn't it? Nobody

ever heard of firearms identification until thirty years ago. A farmer got sentenced to the chair for a murder, and an ex-Department of Justice dick took an interest in the case. He proved the fatal bullet couldn't have come from the farmer's gun at all. Then he went on and made a science of ballistics."

"Still," said Alexander Gowlett, "a great many crimes go unpunished, don't they?"

"That's what I'm telling you. It's new, but we're learning something newer every day. Anyway, here we are. Let's go in and look over those pictures."

He guided his companion into the Identification Bureau.

"You notice they're all full-face and right profile. Bertillon invented that method of doing it.

"He invented a complicated system of identifying crooks by measuring them. And was he proud? A simple idea of fingerprinting came along, and he opposed it. Were you ever fingerprinted, Mr. Gowlett?"

"What?" said the Parkview's manager. "Oh, no. And I'm afraid I don't recognize any of these faces."

"You're sure?"

"Yes, positive."

"Then," said the tired gray man, "you didn't look very hard. Because as a matter of fact *my* picture is in that lot."

Gowlett's cheeks stained.

"That's hardly very fair, is it? You asked me to associate these faces with Miss Todd's acquaintances! And you kept on talking about fingerprints."

"Uh-huh, I did. Do you know where fingerprints were first used to solve a crime, Mr. Gowlett? Argentina. As a matter of fact, the Latin American police still use a fingerprint classification on the Argentine model, a little different from ours. Were you ever in any of the Latin American countries, Mr. Gowlett?"

"No," said the Parkview's manager crossly, "I never was."

"I see. Mr. Gowlett, do you remember having your blood typed about a year ago?"

"Why, we all did. All of the hotel staff. In case of an emergency, you know, in case some one of us should ever need a transfusion."

"What's your type?" asked the headquarters man.

"It's A, if I recall correctly."

"And Miss Todd?"

"I don't remember. I could look it up for you."

Munro said, "You don't have to. Her blood belonged to the same A group. We looked up something else, too. We checked with the employment agencies. We found you had five different girl bookkeepers in the Parkview, in four months, before you hired the Todd woman. You know what I think, Mr. Gowlett?"

"It's difficult to find satisfactory employees these days."

"Not when you throw in a hotel room with the job. No," said Munro wearily, "I think you left ten dollars where a dishonest girl could keep it. The first five were honest — so you

fired them. Miss Todd was a petty thief. You hired her."

"Good heavens," said the Parkview's manager.

"You let her get away with a hundred, maybe five hundred dollars, Mr. Gowlett. Then you caught her red-handed, but you didn't have her arrested. You let her off, if she'd sign a confession and promise to pay back the money so much a month. Of course she was scared when the auditor walked in this morning. And glad to go, when you sent her upstairs.

"I see it this way," the detective went on. "You walked with her to the elevator — and that's when you did it, stabbed the ice-pick into her. It didn't take half a minute, and you could walk back to Hayes in the office."

"But the note was upstairs! The blood was upstairs! And the ice-pick! Really, Mr. Munro, really!"

"You planted all that ahead of time. Before Hayes walked in this morning. It was a different ice-pick, and it was blood from your own body upstairs, wasn't it?"

Alexander Gowlett laughed, harshly.

"For my money, it was," said the tired gray man. "For my money, we'll prove it. A man who gets away with ten or twelve thousand dollars must have a brokerage account or a bank box somewhere. We'll find it. A man who knows enough about counterfeiting to split checks must have a record. We'll dig it up. Right now, Mr. Gowlett, the boys are taking your fingerprints off the glove compartment."

"This is an outrage!" cried the manager.

"Sit down, Gowlett. I'll show you the medical examiner's report. They don't stop with the four blood groups A, B, AB, and O. Not nowadays. There's four *more* blood types, called M, N, MN, and P, with eight different RH factors involved. The combinations work out in 288 different types of human blood. Look at the report, Mr. Gowlett. Miss Todd's blood analyzed A_1, RH″. But the bloodstains in her room were A_2, RH′RH″. In other words, *the blood upstairs wasn't the victim's — it was the murderer's.* Maybe you'd like to roll up your sleeve and leave us a sample for a lab analysis, Mr. Gowlett?"

The Parkview's manager was a man petrified.

"If you're innocent," Munro said, "it's 16-to-1 a test would prove it. You might be an A_1, or an A_2 with one of the other seven RH factors."

Alexander Gowlett sat speechless, glass-eyed.

And after a moment Munro's stooped, spare figure settled back into a chair. "I told you. It's changing. The cops who don't know it are on their way out. And the crooks who don't know it are like you — they're on their way *in*."

—Continued from other side

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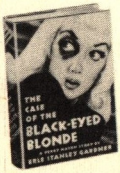

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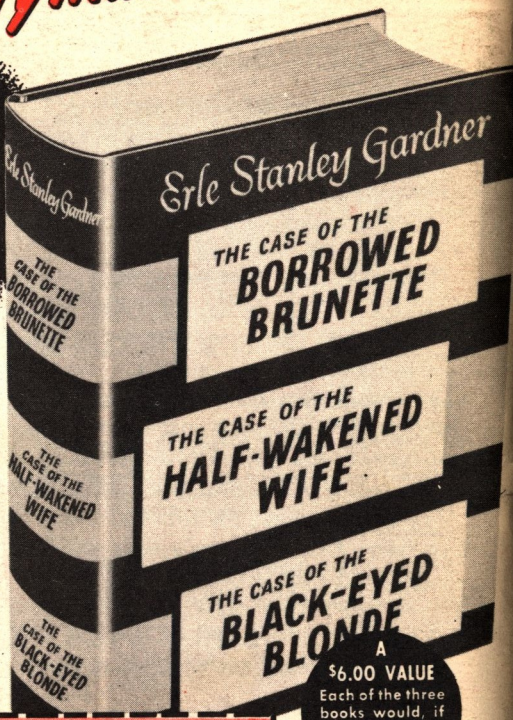

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