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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ONCE IN A LIFETIME

In February 1949 there will be published — simultaneously by Harper & Brothers in New York and John Murray in London — a landmark of the detective story: the authorized biography of an Old Master written by a New Master. The book is THE LIFE OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE *by John Dickson Carr, and nothing like it has ever been done in a field which has too often been libeled as formularized and overproductive. Consider what John Dickson Carr elected to do: he virtually dropped all his regular work — novels, short stories, radio — and devoted two full years to an extracurricular labor of love. He began studying for the biography in the early Spring of 1946. It took nine months to read and soak in the vast amount of material supplied by the Doyle family. This preliminary soaking-in occurred first at Bignell Wood, Adrian Doyle's house in the New Forest, Hampshire, and later in Mr. Carr's former home in Hampstead, London. To the Carr home the Doyle family sent fifteen trunks — metal boxes about five feet long by three feet deep by two-and-a-half feet high — packed tight with records of all kinds: family papers; multitudinous correspondence; more than fifty notebooks and commonplace books containing the Old Master's comments, hitherto unpublished anecdotes, and the extraordinary trivia which reveal the inner meaning of a literary man's life; more than sixty scrapbooks filled to overflowing with generalia and memorabilia; journals and manuscripts and diaries and press clippings and mementoes; mysteriously labeled envelopes and fugitive scraps of writing; documents and drawings and photographs; and above all, letters — letters from A.C.D. (particularly the 1500-odd he wrote to his mother and which by some miracle of fate survived family deaths, family movings, and Nazi bombs) and letters to A.C.D. from every famous man and woman of his time. It took a courageous soul to view this Brobdingnagian treasure trove and still, like a modern Oliver Twist, ask for more. Yet that is what Mr. Carr did: he made a public appeal through the "Daily Telegraph" for further information on Conan Doyle and was swamped with additional letters from A.C.D.'s old friends, passing acquaintances, and others who-knew-him-when.*

John Dickson Carr read and sorted, weeded out and analyzed, selected and correlated and juxtaposed — until the life of Conan Doyle began to assume three dimensions. It was a solid year before Mr. Carr felt ready to insert the first blank sheet of paper in his typewriter. He started writing the

biography in the early Spring of 1947, and he did not finish until December 28, 1947, when almost completely used up from the long ordeal he caught the Mauretania for America to join his wife and children who had come over three weeks before. The writing of the biography had not rolled off Mr. Carr's typewriter — it had been slow and arduous work, as writing goes. Mr. Carr had counted a day well spent creatively if he had 500 words to show for a grueling 12-hour session. To write a single sentence it was usually necessary for Mr. Carr to consult a dozen references and sources, constantly checking and cross-checking the myriad threads of an incredibly active life. (Why, it would take the lifetime of an average man, working fulltime, to write only the letters that Conan Doyle managed to squeeze in between his novels and short stories!) For Conan Doyle lived to the hilt through two teeming eras — the Victorian and the Edwardian — and his multifarious interests were tangled up with all the issues of those momentous days. Mr. Carr's problem was one of colossal integration — the precise interweaving of Doyle's personal and professional lives, in one cohesive tapestry of the man's dreams, ambitions, and accomplishments. And the result is a superb piece of craftsmanship — a biography that lives — a book that recreates — a work that is magnificent in its chronological documentation and detail. Indeed, John Dickson Carr has done for the life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle what he has given Doyle credit for doing in literature: he has proved "that the spinner of fancies could beat the realist all hollow at his own game if only (if only!) he had the knack of inventing just the right detail" — except that Mr. Carr did not invent.

It was our intention, with Mr. Carr's consent, to bring you a lengthy advance-excerpt from the biography — an excerpt from the Sherlock Holmes phase of Conan Doyle's life. But Mr. Carr did his work too well. We found it impossible to separate the Holmesian Doyle from the real-life Doyle without giving you a false impression of Mr. Carr's book. But we can, with Mr. Carr's permission, offer you a few short quotations — to whet your appetite for a reading pleasure which, you will undoubtedly agree, comes once in a lifetime.

Here is a sample of John Dickson Carr's sheer writing skill: he tells how Conan Doyle loved our own New England, and Mr. Carr describes New England as only a truly American writer, his roots still in American soil despite two decades of residence abroad, can evoke its beauty — "The woodsmoke of autumn, the scarlet and brown of the dying leaves, the wigwams of the corn . . ." Here is a sample of John Dickson Carr's insight into the real Conan Doyle: "rather than be judged by professional critics [Doyle] would prefer to be judged by fellow-writers or by schoolboys." Here is a sample of Mr. Carr's astonishing factual data: "If [Doyle]

would restore Sherlock Holmes to life, in some fashion explaining away that matter of the Reichenbach Falls, [the American magazine was] prepared to pay him at the rate of five thousand dollars a story for six short stories or as many more as he cared to write." Think of it: that price was offered back in 1903! Here is a sample of John Dickson Carr's acute perception in matters Sherlockian, and his own mot-juste knack for expressing that sharpness of perception: THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES *had recently been published — in 1905: "Henceforward Holmes could never die again; he could only retire; he was forever condemned to life."*

We had hoped to bring you a biographical "scoop." Having failed, we make amends by bringing you a bloodhound "scoop." Here, then, is a sample of John Dickson Carr's mastery of the detective short story. "The Clue of the Red Wig" is a genuine "scoop" — the tale has never before been published in America in any form whatsoever (including anthologies).

THE CLUE OF THE RED WIG

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

THEY usually put the paper to press at two a.m. MacGrath, the news editor, who was not feeling well after the Christmas celebrations, went home early to his own bed and left things at the office to young Patterson. MacGrath was sleeping a shivering sleep when the telephone at his bedside rang.

MacGrath made unearthly noises, like a ghost roused before midnight. But he answered the 'phone.

"Hazel Loring?" he repeated. "What about her?"

"She's dead," answered Patterson. "Murdered, it's pretty certain. Do you know Victoria Square?"

"No."

"It's a quiet little residential square in Bayswater. Hazel Loring lived there. In the middle of the square there's a garden reserved for the use of residents. About eleven o'clock a policeman on his rounds found Hazel Loring dead in the garden with practically no clothes on —"

"*What?*" shouted MacGrath; and the sleep was struck from his eyes.

"Well, only a brassiere and a pair of step-ins. She was sitting on a bench, dead as Cleopatra, with the rest of her clothes folded up on the bench beside her."

"In *this* weather?"

"Yes. The policeman saw her go into the garden an hour before. Cause of death was a fractured skull, from several blows with a walking-stick whose handle was loaded with lead. Signs of a struggle behind the bench."

"Right!" said MacGrath. "Splash it on the front page. Every woman in the land will want to know what happened to Hazel Loring!"

Everybody knew the name of Hazel Loring, the face of Hazel Loring, the opinions of Hazel Loring. "Smile and Grow Fit" was the title of her weekly column in the *Daily Banner*, a deadly rival of MacGrath's own *Daily Record*. "Smile and Grow Fit" was also the title of the booklets, sold by the thousand, in which she explained to housewives how they might keep slim without anguish. She was no grim task-mistress of health. She did not sternly order them to eat a dry biscuit, and like it.

"I've devised these exercises on the advice of a doctor," she wrote. "Just three minutes each morning; and don't bother any more about it. If you like chocolates, in heaven's name eat chocolates. Only mind you do my exercises: and then eat what you like."

Her chatty, intimate manner warmed their hearts. She became more than an adviser on health. She counselled them about love and hats and husbands. Everybody had seen pictures of the strong, square, pleasant face, showing fine teeth in a smile, and with a dimple at each corner of the mouth. She was slim, with a good figure, and intensely active. She was well dressed, but not offensively so. Her brown hair was bobbed, her brown eyes grave. Her age might have been thirty-five. Thousands felt that they knew her personally, and wrote to tell her so.

Yet somebody killed her, half-dressed, in a public garden on a bitter December night.

If truth must be told, even in MacGrath, hard-boiled as he was, the first reaction was a twinge of pity. His wife was even more emphatic.

"Poor woman!" said Mrs. MacGrath from the opposite bed. "Poor woman!"

"Ho? Is that how it strikes you?" asked MacGrath, his news-sense instantly on the alert.

"Of course it is. Of all the brutal, senseless —!"

"Then that's how we'll play the story. I think I'm getting an inspiration. But Hazel Loring. Oh Lord!"

The next day he carried his inspiration to Houston, the managing editor.

The offices of the *Daily Record* occupy a huge modernistic building, a sort of chromium-plated goldfish bowl. Fleet Street was buzzing with gossip. The murder of Hazel Loring, though they could not yet call it a murder, was considered so important that they held a conference in the managing editor's office. Here, in a cubist-designed room with bright curtains, the stately Houston sat behind a desk topped with black glass, and drew down the corners of his mouth.

"Impossible," Houston said. "We can't do it. Dignity."

"All right. *Be* dignified," said MacGrath. "But don't pass up a thing like this. Now see here, J. H. This is a woman's crime; it oozes feminine interest. It's good for a daily story. Our-Correspondent-Watches-Police; De-

velopments-Day-By-Day. So, with half the women in England crying for news of their favorite, what do we do? Why, we put a woman to cover it."

Houston passed a hand over his thin, high forehead.

"A woman doing police reporting?"

"Why not? She can be dignified, can't she? Womanly and kind, with a touch of sadness? Man, they'll eat it up!"

Houston hunched up his shoulders. "She'd have to be tough," he pointed out. "Covering a war is one thing; covering a murder is another. I don't know who I could assign to it."

"What about that French girl? Jacqueline Dubois. Only been with us a week. Came over when things there went to blazes. But I'll tell you something, J. H. She had the reputation of being the smartest news-hawk in Paris; Richart of *L'Oeil* recommended her in superlatives, and I think he's right."

"She speaks English?"

"She's half English. Her mother was a Cockney. She speaks English all right."

"And she will be — er — dignified?"

"Absolutely. I guarantee it, J. H."

"Get her," said Houston.

Nevertheless, he was uneasy until he actually set eyes on Jacqueline Dubois. Then he drew a breath of relief, and almost beamed.

MacGrath, on the other hand, was jarred. In recommending this girl MacGrath had been acting on a hunch; he knew little about her beyond Richart's word. And, at his first sight of Jacqueline, he had a panicky feeling that Richart must have been indulging in a deplorable Gallic sense of humour.

Jacqueline entered the office so timidly that Houston rose to draw out a chair for her. She was a golden blonde, small and plump, with one of those fair skins which flush easily, and those dark-blue eyes which are either wide open or modestly lowered. Her mouth expressed confusion, but anxiety to please. Her fur coat was good but unobtrusive; from her plain grey dress to her tan stockings and shoes she was trim and yet retiring. She kept her big eyes fixed on Houston except when he looked directly at her. In a soft, sweet voice she hesitantly asked what was wanted.

While MacGrath stood in despair, Houston told her.

"And that's the idea, Miss Dubois. Your purpose is to —"

"To pester the police," groaned MacGrath.

"To print," said Houston sternly, "all desirable news which will be of interest to our public. Would you like the assignment?"

Jacqueline raised her limpid blue eyes.

"Would I like it?" she breathed. "Hot ziggety damn!"

Houston sat back with a start. She was covered in confusion, modesty struggling with gratitude.

"I thank you on my knees," she went on, clasping her hands together. "Miss Loring. The poor lady who has

so unfortunately kicked the ghost. I had wished to cover that story, yes; but, blimey, I never thought I should get it. Oh, you are a dear. Would you like me to kiss you?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Houston.

But Jacqueline was not listening. She was utterly absorbed. The toe of her shoe tapped the carpet. Her eyes were turned inwards, a pucker of concentration between the brows; and, as she reflected, she nodded to herself.

"I am handicap," she confessed. "I am new to England and I do not know the ropes yet. If I get you a scoop, I must get it funny-ways. Who is the head of your whole police department?"

"The Assistant Commissioner for the Criminal Investigation Department," said MacGrath.

"Good!" said Jacqueline briskly. "I make love to him."

Houston gave her a long, slow look.

"No, no, no!" he said.

"Yes, yes, yes!" said Jacqueline, continuing to nod briskly.

"But you can't do that, Miss Dubois!"

"I do not understand," complained Jacqueline, breaking off to look at him with shy astonishment. "You do not wish me to do it? Why?"

"To explain that fully, Miss Dubois, might take a long time. I can sum up by saying that it would hardly be in accord with the policy of this newspaper. Besides, there are — er — practical considerations. In the first place, you'd never get near him. In the second place, even if you did you wouldn't get any story."

A twinkle appeared in Jacqueline's limpid eyes.

"Ha, ha, ha," she said. "That is what they tell me when I make eyes at Mornay, the *juge d'instruction*. He has whiskers this long" — her gesture indicated a beard of improbable dimensions — "but I get from him the official photographs of De La Rive shooting at all the gendarmes in the rue Jean Goujoun, and I scoop the town! Still, if you do not wish it?"

"Definitely not."

Jacqueline sighed. "Orright," she conceded. "Then I must find out the name of the policeman in charge of the case, and make love to *him*. Also, please, I should like a newspaper photographer to go with me all the time."

"A photographer? Why?"

"First because it is practical. I have got some fine pictures when I work for *L'Oeil*. Once I get a picture of a Comtesse de la Tour St. Sulpice, which is a kleptomaniac, pinching a necklace out of Paulier's in the rue de la Paix."

"Is that so?"

"Oo la la, what a sensation!" She gurgled delightedly. "Then too it is useful if you can get a picture of a police-officer doing something he should not. You tell him you will publish the picture unless he gives you a story."

Houston had been listening under a kind of hypnosis. Jacqueline seemed to be surrounded by a rose-leaf cloud of innocence, like a figure on a valen-

tine. He could not have been more startled if the Mona Lisa had suddenly leaned out of her frame and put out her tongue at him. He found his voice.

"We begin with vamping and pass on to blackmail," he said. "MacGrath, I can't do it. Young woman, you're fired! You'd ruin this paper in a week."

"If she's fired," roared MacGrath, "I resign. Splendor of saints, here's a newspaperman at last!"

"Do you want the Home Office to put us out of business?"

"We've got sub-editors to read her copy, haven't we? I tell you, J. H., if—"

"Then there is another thing," pursued Jacqueline timidly. "One of your photographers is called Henry Ashwin. He is a good fellow, though I think he drink too much visky-soda. He is the photographer I want, please."

"Ashwin? Why Ashwin?"

"I find out he is making the goo-goo eyes at Hazel Loring's maidservant. Yes! That is something the others pass up, eh? So I give him visky-soda and I talk to him. Already I get much information, you see."

"Before you were assigned to the story?"

Jacqueline raised her eyebrows.

"But yes, yes, yes! Of course. Listen! This Miss Loring, her age is thirty-five. In private life she is very bad-tempered. Henry Ashwin thinks she is what you call a phoney, somehow, but he is not sure about what. Also she is good-goody, what you call a prude. Is she married? No! But she has a *fiancé*, a lawyer which is called Edward Hoyt; and he hang about her for five years and still it is no soap. Why does she not marry him, eh?"

"Well?"

"I find out," answered Jacqueline simply. "Now I tell you something the police have not told you."

"Go on," muttered Houston, still hypnotized.

"This is what her maid say to Henry Ashwin, and Henry Ashwin say to me. When Miss Loring is found sitting on the bench in that garden, wearing only the brassiere and the step-ins and her shoes, the other clothes are folded up on the bench beside her."

MacGrath was instantly alert. "We know that. It's in all the papers."

"Yes! *But*," said Jacqueline, "there are other things too. Folded up in the clothes (so) there is a red wig and a pair of dark spectacles."

Houston and MacGrath stared at each other, wondering whether this might be some obscure French metaphor. But Jacqueline left them in no doubt.

"A red wig," she insisted, tapping her golden hair. "And the smoky spectacles you look through." She cupped her hands over her eyes in mimicry. "Why should Miss Loring have them, eh? Blimey, but that is not all! It is certain she undressed herself, and was not undressed by anybody. Her maid tells Henry Ashwin that Miss Loring has a special way of folding stockings, like . . . ah, zut!

. . . would you like me to take off mine and show you?"

"No, no!"

"Orright. I only ask. But it is special. Also the way of folding the dress. So she take her own dress off, and she have a wig and spectacles. Please, will you let me find out why?" Her big blue eyes turned reproachfully on Houston. "You say you will fire me, and that is not nice. I know I am a goofy little beasel; that is what they all say in Paris; but if you will please be a nice man and give me a chance I will get you that story, cross my heart. Yes?"

Houston had the darkest misgivings. But he was a journalist.

"Hop to it," he said.

Inspector Adam Bell, Criminal Investigation Department, stood in the prim little front parlor of number 22 Victoria Square. He looked alternately out of the window, towards the garden in the center, and then back to the white-faced man opposite him.

Sedate and dun-colored was Victoria Square, Bayswater, in the bleak winter afternoon. The house-fronts were sealed up. In the garden, surrounded by teeth of spiked iron railings, the branches of trees showed black and knotted against a muddy twilight; its gravel paths wound between iron benches and skeleton bushes, on grass hard with frost.

Inspector Bell, in the white, antiseptic front parlor of the dead woman's house, faced Hazel Loring's *fiancé*. Inspector Bell was a young and very serious-minded product of Hendon, but his sympathetic manner had already done much.

"And you can't tell me anything more, Mr. Hoyt?"

"Nothing!" said Edward Hoyt, and fingered his black tie. "I wanted to take her to a concert last night, but she refused, and I went alone. I — er — don't read the sensational press. So I knew nothing about this business until Hazel's secretary, Miss Alice Farmer, telephoned me this morning."

Inspector Bell shared Hoyt's views about the sensational press: the house was triple-guarded against reporters, though a hundred eyes came to stop and stare in the square.

Edward Hoyt suddenly sat down beside the small fire in the white grate. He was a long, lean, pleasant-faced man of just past forty, with big knuckly hands and a patient manner. He had certainly, Bell reflected, been a patient suitor. His eyes in the firelight were faintly bloodshot, and he turned them often towards a sofa on which lay a neat wig, a pair of dark spectacles, and a heavy blackthorn walking-stick.

"It's fantastic and degrading," he went on, "and I still don't believe it. Can't *you* tell me anything, Inspector? Anything at all?"

Bell was non-committal.

"You've heard the evidence, sir. Miss Farmer, her secretary, testifies that at a few minutes before ten last night Miss Loring left the house, refusing to say where she was going." He paused. "It wasn't the first time

Miss Loring had gone out like that: always about ten o'clock, and usually staying out two or three hours."

Hoyt did not comment.

"From here," said Bell, "she must have gone straight across to the garden —"

"But why, in heaven's name," Hoyt burst out, "the *garden?*"

Bell ignored this. "A policeman on his rounds heard someone fumbling at the gate of the garden. He flashed his light, and saw Miss Loring opening the gate with a key. He questioned her, but she explained that she lived in the square and had a right to use the garden, even on a blacked-out December night.

"The constable let her go. But he was worried. About an hour later, his beat brought him round to the garden again. The gate was still open: he heard it creak. He went in, and found Miss Loring sitting on a bench . . . there . . . at the first turn of the gravel path, about fifteen feet from the gate."

Bell paused.

He visualized the scene, sharp in its loneliness. The gate squeaking in a raw wind; the brief, probing light on icy flesh and white silk underclothing; the head hanging down over the back of the bench; and the high-heeled shoes with button-fastenings undone.

"The rest of her clothing — fur coat, dress, suspender-belt, and stockings — lay beside her: folded in such a way that her maid, Henrietta Simms, swears she took off the clothes herself. Her handbag was untouched. The key to the garden gate, with a large cardboard label attached, lay on the path."

Each time Bell made a statement, Edward Hoyt nodded at the fire.

Bell went over to the sofa and picked up the walking-stick. It was top-heavy, because its nickel-plated head contained half a pound of lead.

"She'd been killed," Bell went on, "behind that bench. The ground was hard, but there were prints of those high heels of hers all over the place. There'd been a struggle: she wasn't any weakling."

"No," agreed Hoyt.

"Her skull was fractured over the left temple with this stick." Bell weighed it in his hand. "No doubt about this as the weapon. Microscopic traces of blood, and a hair, on the handle: though the wound hardly bled at all outwardly. Our laboratory identifies —"

He broke off apologetically.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I'm not trying to give you the third degree with this. I only brought it along to see whether anybody could identify it."

Hoyt spoke with old-fashioned courtesy.

"And I beg *your* pardon, Inspector. It is a pleasure to deal with a gentleman." He got to his feet, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth. "I'm glad there was no blood," he added. "I'm glad she wasn't — knocked about."

"Yes."

"But is that reasonable, Inspector? A fatal injury, with so little blood?"

"Oh yes. It's the rupture of brain-tissues that counts. A friend of mine got concussion from being struck by the door of a railway carriage and never knew there was anything wrong with him until he collapsed." Bell's tone changed; he spoke sharply. "Now, sir, I've spoken my piece. Have you anything to tell me?"

"Nothing. Except —"

"Well?"

Hoyt hesitated. "I'd been a bit worried about her. She hasn't been looking at all well lately. I'm afraid she had a tendency to over-eat." There was the ghost of a smile on his face, contradicted by the bloodshot eyes. "But she said, 'So long as I do my exercises every morning, as thousands of my followers are doing' — she was very proud of her position, Inspector —"

This was hardly what Bell wanted.

"I mean, do you know any reason why anybody should have wanted to kill her?"

"None. I swear!"

"Or why she should have undressed herself in order to get killed?"

Hoyt's mouth tightened. But he was prevented from answering by the entrance of a soft, quiet, but quick-moving woman in horn-rimmed spectacles. Miss Alice Farmer, the perfect secretary, resembled the old-time notion of a school-mistress. Her face, though not unattractive, was suggestive of a buttered bun; her brown hair was dressed untidily; she wore paper cuffs and flat-heeled shoes.

Miss Farmer had many times shown her devotion to Hazel Loring during six years' service. Now her eyelids looked pink and sanded, and occasionally she reached under the spectacles to dab at them with the tip of a handkerchief.

"Ghouls!" she said, gripping the handkerchief hard. "Ghouls! Inspector, I — I know poor Hazel's body has been taken away. But didn't you give orders that *none* of those horrible reporters were to be admitted to the square over there?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Well," said Miss Farmer, putting out her chin bravely, "they're there now. You can see them from my window upstairs. Two of them. One is a man taking pictures; and the other, if you please, is a *woman*. How any *decent* woman could lower herself to write for the —" She stopped, and her face grew scarlet. "I mean *report*, of course; not write *nice* things; that's altogether different. Oh, dear. You do see what I mean, don't you?"

Inspector Bell saw only that his orders had been disobeyed. He stiffened.

"You're sure they're reporters?"

"Just *look* for yourself!"

Bell's pleasant face grew sinister. He drew a deep breath. He picked up his overcoat and his bowler hat from a chair.

"Excuse me just one moment," he said formally. "I'll attend to them."

By the time he left the house, Bell was running. The garden gate, on the west side of the square, was almost opposite Hazel Loring's house. The

iron bench — once green, but now of a rust-color — itself faced due west, where the gravel path curved in front of it.

Round it prowled a small golden-haired figure in a fur coat, and a large untidy figure with a mackintosh and a camera. Inspector Bell "Oi'd" at them; then he squared himself in front of them and began to talk.

Henry Ashwin, the photographer, took it stolidly. All he did was to pull his hat further on a pair of large projecting ears, and shrug his shoulders in an apologetic way. But Jacqueline, between indignation and utter astonishment, was struck dumb. She sincerely felt that she was helping in the investigation, and she could not understand what this man was going on about.

"You must not be such a grimy camel!" she cried, reasoning with him kindly. "You do not understand at all. I am Dubois of the *Record*. This is Mr. Ashwin of the *Record*."

"I know Mr. Ashwin," said Bell grimly. "Now, for the last time, madam: will you get out of here, or must you be taken out by main force?"

"But you do not mean that!"

Bell stared at her.

"What makes you think so?"

"And you should not talk so to the Press. It is not nice and you get yourself into trouble. Henry, I do not like this man. Kick him out of here and then we get on with our work."

"Ashwin," said Bell, "is this girl completely off her head?"

Ashwin intervened in a protesting rumble. "Sorry, Inspector; I'll fix it. Look here, Jackie, things aren't the same here as they are in France. That's what I've been trying to tell you. In England, reporters aren't allowed to —"

"You will not do it?"

"I can't, Jackie!"

"Now I am mad," said Jackie, folding her arms with an air of cold grandeur. "Blimey, now I am good and mad; and just for that I do not tell you anything about the clue I have discovered."

"Clue?" said Bell sharply.

"Ha, *now* you are interested, eh?" cried Jacqueline, wagging her head. Her tone changed: it became timid and pleading. "Please, I like to be nice, and I like you to be nice too. I could help you if you would let me. I think I know what happen here last night. As soon as I hear about Miss Loring's shoes being unbuttoned, and hear about the wig and spectacles —"

Bell whirled round on her.

"How do you know her shoes were unbuttoned? And about any wig and spectacles? That wasn't given out to the Press!"

Twilight was deepening over the spiky trees of the garden. Not a gleam showed in Victoria Square except the hooded side-lights of a taxi, which circled the square with its engine clanking noisily. Jacqueline opened her handbag, and drew out a large oblong of glazed paper.

It was a photograph of Hazel Loring's body, taken from in front

and some dozen feet away. The shadows were behind it, so that every detail showed with crude realism: the upright posture but limp arms, the head thrown back, the slim muscular legs and shoes whose open fastenings were visible at a glance.

"Where," Bell shouted, "did you get this?"

"*I* got it, Inspector," Ashwin admitted. "I climbed over the fence this morning, before they'd moved anything. If I'd used a flash-bulb your men would have spotted me straightaway; but there was a good strong sun up to ten o'clock, so I just took a snap and hared off."

Ashwin's little eyes blinked out of the shadow of his shabby hat. It had grown so dark in the garden that little more could be seen of him except the shift and shine of his eyes, and the fact that he needed a shave. If ordinarily he might have been something of a swaggerer, he was subdued now. He also had found Jacqueline a handful.

"I wasn't even going to use the picture, I swear!" he went on, and stated his real grievance. "This girl pinched it from me, when I wasn't even going to show —"

"Shoes!" insisted Jacqueline.

Bell swung round again. "What about the shoes?"

"They is clues," said Jacqueline simply. "You must not ask me how I get my information. The wig and the spectacles I learn about from Miss Loring's maid, in a way. But I do not mind telling you what will solve your case for you, strike me pink."

Bell hesitated.

"If this is some sort of game," he snapped, "there's going to be a lot of trouble in store for certain people I could mention. Now, I warn you! But if you've got anything to tell me, let's hear it."

Jacqueline was complacent.

"You do not see that the shoes show what has happen here?"

"Frankly, I don't."

"Ah! That is why you need a woman to detect for you when a woman is murdered. Now I show you. You see in the picture that the shoes have very high heels. Yes?"

"Yes."

"And they fasten only with one strap and one button across the . . . the . . . ah, zut!"

"Instep?"

"I am spikking the English very well, thank you," said Jacqueline, drawing herself up coldly. "I do not need your help to be pure. And I have already think to say instep. But you still do not tumble? No?" She sidled closer. Coaxing and honey-sweet, her voice caressed him out of the twilight. "If I tell you, then you do something for me? You will be a nice man and let me print what I like?"

"I most certainly will not."

"Orright. Then I will not tell you."

Adam Bell's wrath boiled clear to the top. Never in his career had he met anyone quite like this. It is true that his career had not been a long one; but then Jacqueline's could not have been so very long either. Now he meant to have no more nonsense.

He would put her in her place, and with no uncertain adjectives.

He had opened his mouth to do this, when there was a flicker of a shrouded light across the square. The door of number 22 opened and closed.

Bell had a sharp premonition of disaster as soon as he heard the flat-heeled footsteps rapping and ringing on frosty pavements. A squat little figure, coatless and with wisps of hair flying, hurried across the street into the garden.

When the figure came closer, Bell saw that tears were trickling down Miss Alice Farmer's face.

"It's all your fault," she said accusingly to Bell. "Oh dear, if only you hadn't left! If only you'd stayed with him!"

"Easy now. What is it? Steady, Miss Farmer!"

"Your sergeant's 'phoned for the ambulance; and he says they may pull him through, but oh dear, if they don't I don't know what I shall do. Oh dear, it's even more dreadful than —"

Then she pulled herself together.

"I'm sorry. It's poor Mr. Hoyt. He's taken poison. You'd better come over to the house at once."

Adam Bell was not able to interview Hoyt until the following day. That morning's edition of the *Daily Record* was in Bell's pocket: he wondered what the Assistant Commissioner would have to say about Jacqueline Dubois' story.

A nurse conducted him to a small private room, where Edward Hoyt lay propped up among the pillows of a white iron bed. Alice Farmer sat in a squeaky rocking-chair by the window, looking out at the snow-flakes that had begun to thicken over Kensington Gardens.

"Rather a foolish thing to do, wasn't it, sir?" Bell asked quietly.

"I recognize that, Inspector."

"Why did you do it?"

"Can't you guess?"

Hoyt even managed a sour smile. His hands, snake-veined, lay listless on the coverlet; his gaze wandered over the ceiling without curiosity. Yesterday he had seemed in his middle forties: now he looked ten years older.

"The curious thing is," he went on, frowning, "that I had no intention of doing it. That's a fact, Inspector. I hadn't realized — by George, I hadn't! — how terrible and irresistible a mere *impulse* can be."

He paused, as though to get his breath.

"I went upstairs," he said, "to have a look at Hazel's room. That's all. It honestly is all. I glanced into the bathroom. I saw the medicine cabinet open, and a bottle of morphine tablets inside. Before I had any notion of what I meant, I had filled a glass of water, and swallowed seven or eight of the tablets as fast as I could get them down. At that time, I admit, I didn't want to live any longer."

"No, sir?"

"No. But I have changed my mind now. I am sorry: it was, as you say, a very foolish thing to do."

Always the gentleman, thought Inspector Bell.

From the direction of the window came a sharp, almost malignant squeak from the rocking-chair. Alice Farmer glanced over her shoulder, and back again quickly. The snow shed shifting lights into the warm, close room.

"Of course I realize," Bell said awkwardly, "that as Miss Loring's *fiancé* —"

"It is not quite accurate to call me her *fiancé*," returned Hoyt, with detached calmness.

His tone made Inspector Bell sit up sharply.

"Meaning, sir?"

"Hazel never intended to get married, to me or anybody else."

"How do you know that?"

"She told me so. But I kept on patiently waiting. I have always had a fancy for the senseless role of the *preux chevalier*. God knows I'm cured of that now." Hoyt closed his eyes, and opened them again. "You see that I am being frank."

"You mean she didn't love you?"

Hoyt smiled faintly. "I doubt if Hazel was ever in love with anybody. No: I wasn't referring to that."

"Well?"

"I think she was married already. One moment!" The weak voice sharpened and grew firm. "I have absolutely no evidence for saying that. It's a guess. An impression. A — well, Inspector, I haven't known Hazel Loring for five years without learning something about her beyond those famous eyebrows and dimples. I knew her moods. And her heart. And her mind: which was, after all, a second-rate mind. Lord forgive me, what am I saying?"

He broke off, looking still more ill. There was another squeak from the rocking-chair as Alice Farmer got up to pour him a glass of water from the bedside-table.

Hoyt thanked her with a grateful nod; and she hardly glanced at him. But to Inspector Bell, watching every turn of lip or hand, that glance meant much. Bell thought to himself, with a rush of realization: if Hazel Loring wasn't in love with Edward Hoyt, I know who else is.

Miss Farmer fluttered back to her chair.

"I tell you that," pursued Hoyt, setting down the glass, "because I want to see this mess cleared up. If Hazel *had* a husband tucked away somewhere in secret, she could hardly divorce him. She had set herself up in too pious a position before the world."

Drawing up the collar of his overcoat, Bell went out of the nursing-home into the falling snow. Jacqueline Dubois, wearing a fur coat and a hat with an outrageous veil, was waiting for him at the foot of the steps.

Inspector Bell took one look at her, and then began to run.

His excuse for this was a bus, which would set him down beside a hotel in a side street only a few yards away from Victoria Square. The bus was already some distance away, and lum-

bering fast. Bell sprinted hard after it, sprang aboard, and climbed up to a deserted top deck. He had no sooner settled back than Jacqueline, flushed and panting, was beside him.

The girl was almost in tears.

"You are not genteel!" she wailed. "I have twist my ankle. Would you like it that I should hurt myself bad?"

"Candidly," said Bell, "yes."

"You do not like me at *all*?"

"No. Remember, I've read your story in the *Record* this morning."

"You do not like it? But, *chéri*, I wrote it to please you!"

"In the course of that story," said Bell, "you four times described me as 'handsome.' How I'm going to dare show my face back at Scotland Yard again I don't know. What is more important, you headlined —"

"You are not angry?"

"Oh, no. Not at all."

"Besides, I have a clue."

Despite everything, Bell suddenly found himself chuckling. Rules were rules; but still, he reflected, he had been behaving like a good deal of a stuffed shirt. This girl need give him no trouble. And in her way Jacqueline was rather attractive.

"Not again?" he said.

"No, no, no! It is the same clue. You will not let me explain. You will not let me explain how I know that Miss Loring was not killed in the garden at all, but that the assassin kill her somewhere else and carry her to the garden afterwards."

The bus lurched round a snow-rutted curve.

Bell, taking two tickets from the conductor, almost dropped both of them.

"Is this," he demanded, "another stunt?"

"It is the truth! I know it by the shoes. The shoes have very high heels, and their straps are not buttoned."

"Well?"

"She could not have walked in them. Yes, I tell you so! She could not have walked a step in them. It is impossible. Either the shoes fall off, or *she* fall off.

"Listen! You say to yourself, 'Miss Loring has entered the garden; she has started to undress herself.' So? Then why does she take off her stockings and put her shoes back on? You say, 'While she is like this, the assassin catch her; there is a struggle; she is hit; the assassin pick her up and put her on the bench.' I say, no, no, no! She could not have walk in those shoes. It is jolly sure she could not have *fight* in them. They would just fall off, and then there would be marks on her feet. And there were no marks, eh?"

"Go on," said Bell, after a pause.

"It jumps to the eyes that the assassin has put the shoes on Miss Loring after she is dead."

"But —"

"Now I tell you something else. What is it that puzzle you so much, *chéri*? What is the big headache? It is the reason why Miss Loring should have undress herself in the open with the weather freezing zero. Yes? But she did not.

"She has gone first to the garden. Then she has left the garden, and gone somewhere else which is indoors; and there she has undressed herself. There the assassin catch her and kill her. Then he take her back to the garden in the black-out, to make you think she was killed there. He is just starting to dress her fully when he is interrupted, and has to run. Yes?"

Their bus had gone clanking up Gloucester Terrace, and was turning into Hargreaves Street, which led to Victoria Square. Already Bell could see the square ahead. Bell smote his hand against the top of the seat in front of them.

"By all the —" he burst out, and stopped. "I wonder if it could be?"

"I do not wonder," said Jacqueline. "I am sure it is true. For any woman to take off her clothes outdoors in such weather is not practical; and even if I am a goofy little beasel I see that straightaway, gorblimey!"

"Just a minute. What about the heel-marks of the struggle in the earth behind the bench?"

"They is phoney," returned Jacqueline calmly. "I do not think there be any marks with the ground so hard. The assassin has made them too."

Stopping with a jolt, the bus threw them against the bench ahead. They climbed down to the pavement beside the quiet hotel only a few steps from Victoria Square. Though Jacqueline was dancing round him, Bell would not be hurried either mentally or physically.

"It's nonsense," he decided.

"You are a nasty man and I do not like you. Why is it nonsense?"

"Well, where did the woman go? You say Miss Loring went somewhere and 'undressed.' Where? Apparently she didn't go back home. Where could any woman go at that hour of the night in order to undr —?"

He checked himself, and raised his eyes. A raw wind shouted down Hargreaves Street, whipping the snow to powder. The grimy red-brick building in front of them had two entrances. Across the top of one was blazoned in gilt letters the name of the hotel. On the glass doors of the other were smaller letters in white enamel, but they were letters which made Bell jump. They said:

LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S
TURKISH BATHS.
OPEN DAY AND NIGHT.

The woman behind the counter was scandalized. When she first caught a glimpse of them, coming down in the automatic lift into the warm, dim basement-foyer, she threw up the flap of the counter and ran out.

"You, sir!" she cried. "You can't come in here!"

"I am a police-officer —" Bell began.

The woman hesitated only a second. "Sorry, sir, but you still aren't allowed here. This is Wednesday. It's Ladies' Day. Didn't you see the notice upstairs?"

"*I* can come in?" cooed Jacqueline.

"Yes, madam, of course."

" 'Ow much?" asked Jacqueline, opening her handbag.

Taking hold of Jacqueline's arm in a grip that made her squeal, Bell drove the other woman before him until she retreated behind the counter. First he showed his warrant-card. Then he drew out a large close-up photograph of Hazel Loring's face.

"Did you ever see this lady before?"

"I — I don't know. There are so many people here. What do you want?"

On the counter lay a tray of pens and pencils. With a coloured pencil Bell drew on the photograph a crude representation of an auburn wig. To this he added a pair of dark spectacles.

"Did you ever see *this* lady before?"

"I did and all!" admitted the woman. "Of course I did. She was always coming here at night. If you'd just tell me what you —"

"Was she here on Monday night?"

The attendant, who seemed less frightened than anxious that Bell should not get beyond the doors at the left, admitted this too.

"Yes, she was. She came in about a quarter past ten, a little later than usual. I noticed because she looked awfully groggy; sick-like; and her hands were shaky and she didn't leave any valuables here at the desk."

"What time did she leave?"

"I don't know. I — I don't remember." A puzzled look, a kind of spasm, flickered across the attendant's face. "Here's Mrs. Bradford," she added. "She'll give you what-for if you don't get out of here!"

It was very warm and faintly damp in the tiled basement. A dim humming noise throbbed beyond it. Soft lights shone on the counter, on the wall of steel boxes behind it; and, towards the left, on leather-covered swing-doors studded with brass nail-heads.

One of these doors was pushed open. A stocky, medium-sized woman, with dark hair drawn behind her ears and eyebrows that met over the top of her nose, first jerked back as though for flight, and then stood solidly. Her face was impassive and rather sinister. She wore a white-duck coat and skirt; her bare feet were thrust into beach-sandals.

"Mrs. Bradford —" the attendant began.

Mrs. Bradford gave the newcomers a long, slow look. Emotion, harsh and pressed to bursting, filled that foyer as thickly as the damp. Voices, faint laughter, made a ghostly background beyond.

"You'd better come in here," she told them. Opening a door which led into a small office, she nodded at them to precede her. When they were inside, she closed and locked the door. Then she flopped down in an office-chair and presently began to cry.

"I knew I couldn't get away with it," she said.

"So that's it," Bell muttered ten minutes later. "Hoyt told me that Miss Loring was fond of overeating."

Mrs. Bradford uttered a contemptuous snort. She was sitting forward,

her elbows carelessly on her knees; she seemed to feel better now that she had been given a cigarette.

"Overeating!" she growled. "She'd have been as big as a barrage-balloon if she hadn't nearly killed herself with more Turkish baths than any human being ought to take. Yes, and keeping a medicine-cabinet full of slimming drugs that were downright dangerous. I warned her. But, oh, no! She wouldn't listen. She was making too much money out of this slimming campaign of hers."

"You knew her?"

"I've known Hazel Loring for twenty years. We were kids together in the north. She was always the lady. Not like me. And she was clever: I give her that."

Bell was putting many facts together now.

"Then the simple-exercises-and-keep-fit campaign —?"

"It was all," said Mrs. Bradford, wagging her head and blowing out smoke contemptuously, "a fake. Mind, her exercises maybe did do some people good. There's some women could hypnotize themselves into believing anything. And, if they thought it kept 'em slim . . . why, perhaps it did. But not little Hazel. That's why she had to sneak over here in a damn silly disguise, like a film star or something. She was desperately frightened somebody'd spot her."

"And yet," said Bell, "somebody murdered her. It was you, I suppose?"

The cigarette dropped out of Mrs. Bradford's hand.

"Murdered!" she whispered; and missed the cigarette altogether when she tried to stamp it out with her foot. Then her voice rose to a screech. "Man, what's the matter with you? Are you clean daft? Murdered?"

"Sh-h!"

"*Murdered?*" said Mrs. Bradford. "She fell down and died in the steam-room. I had to get her out of here on the q.t., or the scandal would have ruined us."

"She died from concussion of the brain."

Mrs. Bradford's eyes seemed to turn inwards.

"Ah? So that was it! I noticed she'd got a kind of red mark on her temple, half under the wig. I supposed she had hit her head on the edge of the marble bench when she collapsed —"

"No," said Bell. "She was beaten to death with a lead-loaded walking-stick. The laboratory can prove that."

Distant fans whirred and hummed: the air was astir. Mrs. Bradford slid up from her chair, with a lithe motion for a woman so stocky, and began to back away.

"Don't you try to bluff a woman that's always been honest," she said, in a thin unnatural voice. "It was an accident, I tell you! Either heart-failure, or hitting her head when she fell. It's happened before, when people can't stand the heat. And now you come and tell me —"

"Just a moment," said Bell quietly.

The tone of his voice made Mrs. Bradford pause, her hand half-lifted as though to take an oath.

"Now tell me," Bell continued, "did you see Miss Loring arrive here on Monday night?"

"Yes."

"How did she look? Ill, for instance?"

"Very ill. Lucy at the desk can tell you that. All shaky and funny. That's why I kept an eye on her."

"What happened then? No, I'm not accusing you of lying! Just tell me what happened."

Mrs. Bradford stared at him.

"Well . . . she went to one of the booths, and took off her clothes, and wrapped herself up in that cotton robe they wear, and went on to the hot rooms. I'm manager here: I don't act as masseuse usually, but I did it for her so that nobody shouldn't discover about the wig. I was nervous because she looked so ill. Afterwards I went up to the steam-room, and there she was lying on the floor. Alone. Dead. I thought: Holy mother, I knew something would happen, and now —!"

"Go on."

"Well, what could I do? I couldn't carry her down to where her clothes were, because there were ten or a dozen other women here and they'd know what had happened."

"Go on."

"I had to get rid of her. I *had* to! I ran down and rolled her clothes and handbag up into a bundle and ran back up to the steam-room. But I couldn't dress her there, because somebody might have walked in any minute. Don't you see?"

"Go on."

Mrs. Bradford moistened her lips. "Upstairs there's a door that leads out into an alley by the hotel. I slung her over my shoulder, and carried her out into the black-out wrapped in that cotton robe.

"I knew where to put her, too. Beside her handbag there'd been a big key, with a cardboard label saying it was the key to the garden in Victoria Square. I got her into the garden and sat her down on the first bench I came to. Then I started to dress her properly so nobody shouldn't know she'd ever been at the baths. I'd just got the underclothes on, and slipped the shoes on her feet so they'd be handy, when I heard a noise. I slipped back a little; and it's a good thing I did, for there was a great big blazing light —"

"Did I not say it?" murmured Jacqueline softly. "Did I not say the policeman has come in and interrupted her?"

"So I hopped it," concluded Mrs. Bradford, wiping her eyes. "I still had the cotton robe in my hand; but I forgot the wig and spectacles." Her face grew harsh and ugly. "That's what I did. I admit it. But that's all I did. She wasn't murdered in these baths!"

"As a matter of fact," replied Bell calmly, "I don't think she was. For all practical purposes, I think she was dead before she got here."

It was not easy to frighten Jacqueline Dubois. Only her imagination could do this. Her imagination conjured up wild visions of a dead woman in a red wig, the face already blood-

less, walking into the foyer and confronting the attendant with blind black spectacles. It unnerved her. Even the humming of the fans unnerved her.

She cried out at Bell, but he silenced her.

"Queer thing," Bell mused. "I was telling Mr. Hoyt yesterday about a friend of mine. He was struck by the door of a railway carriage. He got up, brushed himself, assured everybody he wasn't hurt, went home, and collapsed an hour later with concussion of the brain. Such cases are common enough. You'll find plenty of them in Taylor's *Medical Jurisprudence*. That's what happened to Hazel Loring, in my opinion."

"You mean . . ."

"Mind!" Bell held hard to his caution. "Mind, I don't promise anything. Whether they'll want to hold you as accessory after the fact, Mrs. Bradford, I can't say. But, just between ourselves, I don't think you've got a lot to worry about.

"As I read it, Hazel Loring met the murderer in the garden at ten o'clock. There was a fight. The murderer struck her down and left her for dead. She got to her feet, thought she was all right, and came over here to the baths. In the steam-room she collapsed and died. And you, finding the key to the garden, carried her body straight back to the real scene of the crime."

Bell drew a deep breath and his forehead wrinkled in thought.

"Talk about the wheel revolving!" he added. "All we want now is the murderer."

Edward Hoyt, released from the nursing-home on Friday morning, took a taxi to Victoria Square under a bright, watery sun which was turning the snow to slush.

The exposure of Hazel Loring's racket, appearing in Thursday's *Daily Record*, was both a revelation and a revolution. It was a real scoop for the paper.

MacGrath, the news editor, danced the saraband. Henry Ashwin, the photographer, swallowed three quick whiskies and went out to find Jacqueline. Sir Claude Champion, owner of the *Daily Banner*, swallowed aspirins and vowed vengeance. All over the country it made wives pause in the very act of the patent exercises. Yet nobody was satisfied. Through the excitement ran a bitter flavor: however much of a fake the dead woman might have been, still she was dead by a brutal attack and her murderer still walked and talked in the town.

Edward Hoyt's face seemed to express this as he went up the steps of number 22. The door was opened for him by Alice Farmer, whose face brightened with joy. And this performance was watched with interest by Jacqueline Dubois and Henry Ashwin, the photographer, lurking behind the railings in the garden opposite.

"The point is," insisted Ashwin, giving her a sideways glance, "what is Bell doing? He now seems to think you're a kind of mascot —"

Jacqueline was not without modest pride.

"He think I am pretty good," she admitted. "I just try to give him ideas, that is all. But between you and me and the pikestaff, I do not know *what* he is doing. He is very mysterious."

"Beaten, eh? Shame on you!"

Jacqueline's color went up like a flag.

"I am not beaten either! But maybe perhaps I am wrong about him. First I think he is only a stupid Englishman, all dumb and polite, and now I think his mind may work funnier than I expect. He keep talking about lights."

"Lights?"

"Big lights. Oi! Look!"

She pointed. There was another visitor for number 22. Mrs. Eunice Bradford, almost unrecognizable in an over-smart outfit and a saucer hat, strode briskly along the street. The morning sun streamed full on the doorway; they saw Mrs. Bradford punching the doorbell with assurance. She was admitted by Miss Farmer.

"Got 'em taped," said the voice of Inspector Bell.

Jacqueline felt a shock. Bell, followed by Sergeant Rankin and a uniformed constable, was coming across the slush-marshy garden with the sun behind him.

"Don't sneak up like that, Inspector!" protested Ashwin. He nodded towards the house across the way. "So it's a gathering of the suspects, eh?"

"It is."

"And you're going to nab somebody over there?"

"I am."

Jacqueline began to shiver, though the air held an almost spring-like thaw. Bell's expression was guileless.

"You can come along, if you like," he said to Jacqueline. "In fact, I might say you've got to come along. A good deal of my evidence depends on you, though you may not know it. I'll give you some poetic justice too. You've spent half your time in this business worming things out of people or pinching things from people. I've taken the liberty of pinching something from you."

"You go away!" said Jacqueline. "Please, what is this? I do not understand."

Bell opened the brief-case he was carrying. "You remember," he said, "how you solved your part of the problem by deducing something from the unbuttoned shoes in a photograph taken the morning after the murder?"

"Yes."

Bell drew a large glazed oblong of paper from the brief-case. It was the picture they had all seen: Hazel Loring's body on the bench, every detail sharp-etched with the shadows behind.

"Is this the same photograph?"

"Ah, zut! Of course it is."

Bell glanced inquiringly at Ashwin.

"You confirm that? This is the same photograph you took at about ten o'clock on Tuesday morning?"

Ashwin, with a face of hideous per-

plexity, merely nodded. Sergeant Rankin suddenly guffawed: a sharp sound which he covered up with a cough.

"Then it's very curious," said Bell. He held up the photograph. "It's the most curious thing we've come across yet. Look at it. Every shadow in this picture, as we see, falls straight behind bench and body. Yet the bench, as we've known from the start, faces due west and has its back to the east.

"Look at the bench now. See how the shadows fall in front of it along the path. In other words, this photograph couldn't possibly have been taken in the morning. It couldn't have been taken at any time during the day, because the sun was gone in the afternoon. That bright light and those dead-black shadows could have been made in only one way. The photograph must have been taken, after dark, by the glare of a flash-bulb: which was the 'great big blazing light' Mrs. Bradford saw when she —"

Jacqueline screamed.

One face in the group altered and squeezed up as though it were crumpling like a wet paper mask. A pair of hands flung forward to grab the photograph from Bell and rend it in pieces; but Sergeant Rankin's arm was round the man's throat and the two of them went over backwards in a crashing cartwheel on the path.

Bell's voice remained level.

"Henry Ashwin, I arrest you for the murder of your wife, Hazel Loring. I have to warn you that anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used as evidence against you at your trial."

To Jacqueline, that night, Bell was a little more communicative.

"There's nothing much to tell," he said off-handedly. "Once I got Hoyt's tip, and we put the organization to work, it didn't take long to discover that one Hazel Ann Loring and one Henry Fielding Ashwin had been married at the Hampstead Registry Office in 1933." He grinned. "That's where the official police will always score over you amateurs."

Jacqueline was agog.

"He try the blackmail on her. Yes?"

"Yes, in a small way. A nasty bit of work is Ashwin. In the first place, he was a no-good who would take some explaining; in the second place, she couldn't afford to have the gaff blown about her racket. That was why Ashwin was pretending to make what you call goo-goo eyes at Hazel Loring's maid: he had to have some excuse for hanging round the house so constantly.

"But Hazel was getting fed up with it. She issued an ultimatum, and arranged to meet him in the garden. There was a wild, blind row: both of them, we know, had ugly tempers. Ashwin laid her out, and then ran. It wasn't a planned crime: he just ran.

"After he'd had a couple of drinks, he began to get scared. He'd left that stick behind. He didn't *think* they could trace it to him; but suppose they did? So he went back to the square — and must have thought he was losing his mind. For he saw Eunice

Bradford bringing the body back.

"In any case, he thought it was a gift from heaven. If he could frame any evidence against her, Mrs. Bradford would swing for the crime as sure as eggs. He set his flash-bulb and fired blindly for a picture. But in the dark his aim was bad; Mrs. Bradford had jumped back; and he didn't get her in the picture at all. He saw that when he developed the picture. Of course he'd never have shown that photograph to anyone. He'd have torn up the pictures and destroyed the negative. Only —"

Jacqueline nodded radiantly.

"I pinch it from him," she declared, with pride. "And then he have to stew up some explanation for it."

"Yes. Of course, I saw that the dim, paper-covered torch of the policeman who discovered the body could never have produced that 'great big blazing light' described by Mrs. Bradford. Then, once you looked closely at the photograph and noticed the fall of the shadows, that tore it. I gathered the obvious suspects in one house to throw Ashwin off his guard; and got him to confirm his previous story before police witnesses. That's all."

He chuckled.

"There's one good result from it, anyway," he added. "Edward Hoyt and Alice Farmer should be extremely comfortable with each other."

But Jacqueline was not listening. Her eyes were shining and absorbed. She put her hand with innocent fervor on his arm.

"If I had not pinch the picture," she said, "and if I had not deduce those things, maybe you would not have solved the case. Eh?"

"Maybe not."

"You do not think I am such a goofy little beasel. No?"

"No."

"In fact, day by day in every way I am becoming indispensable to you. Yes?"

The hair froze on Bell's head. "Hold on! Take it easy! I didn't say that!"

"But *I* say it," declared Jacqueline, with fiery earnestness. "I think we go well together, yes? I pinch things for you; and if you like you can be my Conscience and go gobble-gobble at me, but you do not be too mad when I help you. Then each day I get an exclusive inter — inter —"

"Interview," suggested Bell.

"O.K., if you say so, though my knowledge of English is formidable and you do not have to tell me. If I like you very much and am a good girl, will you let me help with the detecting when I ask to?"

Bell looked down at the flushed, lovely face.

"I will," he said, "*ou je serai l'oncle d'un singe!* My knowledge of French is formidable too."

More good news for Simenon fans: You will remember that we told you of discovering a book of Inspector Maigret shorts — LES NOUVELLES ENQUÊTES DE MAIGRET — *and how we have already arranged to have at least three of these Maigret short stories translated for exclusive publication in EQMM. Now we learn from one of our good friends in Paris — a detective-story editor himself — that he has located three more volumes of Simenon shorts and is forwarding them to us posthaste. Two of the three books also concern that great sleuth, Inspector Maigret — witness the titles:* LA PIPE DE MAIGRET *and* LE COMMISSAIRE MAIGRET ET L'INSPECTEUR MALCHANCEUX. *The third title is equally provocative:* LA FOLLE D'ITTEVILLE — *an "unknown" exploit of G. 7 . . . It looks as if we are going to keep our favorite French translator, Anthony Boucher, mighty busy this coming year. In the meantime, until the first Maigret short is ready to go to press, here is another case from the notebook of Monsieur Froget, Simenon's pithy, precise examining magistrate.*

NOUCHI

by GEORGES SIMENON

(Translated by Anthony Boucher)

MONSIEUR FROGET'S conduct of this case was adroit, to be sure; but it was an adroitness that did not fail to provoke certain smiles in the department.

If Nouchi was not precisely pretty, she was provocative and above all extremely young — nineteen, with a long firm body and little high breasts sharply molded by her silk dress (as much, that is, as a dress can be said to mold anything when it is so light that it could be crumpled within one closed fist). Her forehead was narrow; her head seemed even smaller than it was, with her black hair neatly parted and slicked down to her skull.

Nouchi was Hungarian. But she had lived in Paris for many years, with her mother and her sister, and she spoke an easy French just barely spiced with accent.

Her attitude was one of quiet bravado. During the first examination she had interrupted the magistrate only once, to ask, "You wouldn't have a cigaret?"

Eleven examinations in six days, and only one — the first — based on the case itself. Nouchi stood accused of having entered the rooms of a Mrs. Crosby, an American with whom she had certain connections, in the owner's absence and of having stolen a pearl necklace worth half a million francs.

On the desk in which the pearls were kept Nouchi had left a superb set of fingerprints. M. Froget kept the enlarged photographs before him. Each of the fingers stood out clearly, without a flaw — long fingers, with the last joint oddly bent.

Mrs. Crosby and the insurance company were growing impatient. They kept telephoning the Parquet as often as three times a day. But M. Froget, who seemed to have lost a little of his habitual stiffness, gave the impression of pursuing his path almost childishly, with a naïve appreciation of the charms of the landscape.

If the telephonic insistences did not disturb him, neither did Nouchi's occasional attempts at a more daring coquetry, as when she would openly adjust a garter or casually lean her whole young body against the magistrate. Without a trace of annoyance he would simply smile so disarmingly as to send the girl back to her chair with reddened cheeks.

What most exasperated Nouchi was that he kept returning relentlessly to the same questions — and that she could not see what trap might be concealed in them.

This eleventh examination, for instance, began:

"At Budapest, I believe, you lived in a fine large house?"

"Oh, yes, a fine house. With lots of servants. And my father was a State Counselor — I told you that already. What am I supposed to do? Spend every day repeating yesterday's lesson, like in school? All right: My father died right after the war, when I was still very little. My mother sold everything. And since we were ruined, she preferred to hide herself away in Paris. You can't have forgotten our address? 23 Rue des Saints-Pères. Two hotel rooms with a communicating door . . ." Exasperatedly, she imitated a star pupil reciting.

"Your mother speaks no French?"

"All right; if you're going to bring up Mama, I know the routine you want: She knows fifty words of French which she learned thirty years ago in school. Just the same, she used to insist on talking French with Papa, because that was the smart thing to do. Now you want me to go on and say that she's rather ridiculous — dresses like a young girl — dyes her hair Venetian blonde — gives receptions in our two rooms with as much formality as though we lived in a chateau . . . My friends all say she's a little touched."

"And your sister?"

"Pocket edition of my mother. In forty years she'll be Mama. She embroiders, she weeps, she studies the piano, and she reads poetry . . ."

"So that the entire household exists on your work?"

"And a very small income, yes."

"Who gave you the idea of making fashion sketches for the papers?"

"I did!"

"How much do you earn?"

"The months when they're showing the new lines, I make anywhere from two to four thousand francs. The other months — practically nothing."

"Your mother allowed you a great deal of freedom?"

"Of course! I used to hang around the Montparnasse bars. I had friends. And I used to go out a lot with Siveschi — you know him; he's a salesman in a record shop in the Avenue Montaigne."

"Where did you meet Mrs. Crosby?"

"At fashion shows. She'd be there as a customer, I as a designer. One day we got to talking — later we had tea together . . ."

"But she is a good deal older than you?"

"Thirty-five years! You must have that in your papers. Her husband's a multi-millionaire — and an old bore. So she leaves him in Chicago and takes a trip to Europe."

"You were a frequent guest in her apartment in the Rue François-Ier?"

"Almost every day. But don't go getting any wrong ideas. Mrs. Crosby — Ellen, I finally came to call her — Ellen likes men, I can swear to that."

"Precisely! It seems that you used to perform certain trifling services for her when she was embarked on an adventure."

"Trifling, yes."

"She frequently gave you money?"

"Sometimes. She's awfully generous. She leaves her money lying around . . . And if she's had a couple of cocktails, she'd as soon give you a thousand francs as a hundred — unless she gets mad for no good reason and decides to insult you instead! This ring is a present from her."

She displayed her left hand. The prints on the desk had revealed not only the tips but the whole length of the fingers; this ring had caused the sole blemish visible in the enlargements.

"Your mother entertained Mrs. Crosby in her home?"

"Once! It didn't make her eager to visit us again. Mrs. Crosby was drinking champagne. My mother decided to do the same and she got sick. She kept crying and telling her woes in Hungarian. Nice cheerful party, I can assure you!"

"Mrs. Crosby herself showed you her necklace?"

"Yes. With the comment that her husband wasn't trying to be nice when he gave it to her; he was just being a good businessman. In America you don't take any chances; even supposing you do have ten million or twenty, you remember maybe you'll be ruined. This necklace was just for a rainy day."

"The theft took place on Tuesday, June 11, did it not?"

"Could be. I don't keep track of days any more."

"That morning you went to the Rue François-Ier and had lunch with Mrs. Crosby. Then you accompanied her to the Saint-Lazare station, since she was leaving for Deauville for two days. Is that correct?"

"Absolutely."

"What did you do next?"

"I went home and tried to work. My mother had gone out with my sister."

"So that no one saw you?"

"I beg your pardon! While I was sharpening a pencil, I cut my hand. It bled so much that I got scared and called a bellboy. He helped me make a bandage. I'm still wearing it." She showed her right index finger, wrapped in pink rubber.

"This was at what time?"

"Four o'clock. Then I noticed I'd left one of my sketchbooks at Mrs. Crosby's. I couldn't work without the papers I had in it. I went over there and the maid let me in."

"She followed you into the apartment?"

"No. She knew that Mrs. Crosby trusted me."

"You went into the bedroom where the desk is?"

"Yes. But I didn't stay there because I remembered I hadn't set foot in that room when I was there in the morning. I found my sketchbook in the dressing-room."

"You did not touch the desk?"

"No . . ."

"And yet we found your prints there!"

She merely shrugged her shoulders.

"How long did you stay in the apartment?"

"Half an hour . . ."

"That agrees with the maid's statement. All of half an hour merely to search for a sketchbook?"

"I was tired and I sat down on a sofa . . . I read a novelette in an English magazine that was lying around . . ."

"You went home immediately?"

"You know I didn't. It was the time when Siveschi gets off work. I waited for him outside. We went and had a drink in Montparnasse."

"You did not go to his rooms?"

"No . . ."

"You did not arrive at your home until nine o'clock. What were you doing until then?"

Silence.

"How much does Siveschi make a month?"

"A thousand francs."

"And he spends fifteen to sixteen hundred . . ."

"That's his business . . . Arrest him!"

M. Froget lifted the receiver of his telephone. "Hello! Give me Elysée 37-07, please. . . . Yes. Ask Mrs. Crosby to come to the phone."

Nouchi was frowning — which was enough to lend to her face an unexpected toughness. "What are you up to?"

"One more question. You are sure that you did not injure your hand while forcing the lock on the desk? It has bronze trimmings; one false movement would suffice to —"

"I told you I hurt myself with my penknife at home in the Rue des Saints-Pères. The bellboy's my witness. Just call him in . . ."

The phone rang.

"Hello! . . . Mrs. Crosby? . . . Will you please take a cab and come to my office at once? . . . No; not anything new, strictly speaking. Just a mere formality . . ."

And Nouchi, suddenly voluble, be-

gan demanding, "What formality? What did I say? Why not admit you don't know anything and you're only —"

M. Froget, barely smiling, pushed an object toward her.

What M. Froget slipped into the girl's hand was the photograph of the prints of her ten fingers, where the only irregularity was produced by the ring on the third finger of her left hand.

"There is my proof," he said with a sort of benevolence; "the prints the police found on the desk show no trace of an injured finger. Therefore you had *not* cut yourself when you voluntarily placed your prints there. Therefore that operation took place, *not* in the afternoon when either the bandage or the cut would have left its mark, but *in the morning*. Therefore, *in the presence* of Mrs. Crosby. Therefore . . . How much did she promise you to let yourself be suspected for a few days?"

Nouchi tossed him a spiteful glance. M. Froget, with that force of habit which was almost a mania, had already opened his ten-sous notebook and was writing on a fresh page:

Presumptions:

1: If Nouchi had stolen, knowing that she would be suspected, she would not have waited openly for Siveschi at the door of the shop where he worked;

2: She would have arranged a plausible and indisputable account of her actions throughout the day and evening;

3: She has behaved and answered questions as though she *wanted* to be accused.

Mrs. Crosby arrived in a flutter of silk and perfume and preoccupation.

"You need my signature?"

"Shortly, madame, yes. On the booking register. . . . I have the honor to charge you with an attempted fraud against the company which insured your jewels."

And as the American stiffened and turned furiously toward Nouchi, M. Froget added calmly, "She has played her role through to the end, honestly. You must admit that she cannot be blamed for having cut her hand. Will you answer two questions? First: What did you do with the imitation pearls which had replaced the real ones sold so long ago?"

"I threw them in the ocean at Deauville . . ."

"Thank you! How much did you offer Mlle. Nouchi for distracting the attention of the law for some time and thus preventing a suspicion of the truth?"

"Fifty thousand . . ." Mrs. Crosby muttered unwillingly.

And M. Froget impassively watched Nouchi rise, her fists clenched, her lips trembling.

"Fifty thousand? *Five* thousand, M. Froget! And — look! — the stone in this ring is a fake too!"

If M. Froget's bell had not brought an officer promptly, the case would have ended in a contest of fists, or, more probably, fingernails.

Tall oaks from little acorns grow: tall books from little stories grow. . . . About ten years ago Cornell Woolrich got an idea — a little acorn of an idea. Why not write a series of detective short stories, he said to himself, in which murders are committed at famous sites? The little acorn of an idea clutched his imagination, sprouted, and grew. One day he took a notebook and pencil and visited the Statue of Liberty. Like most native New Yorkers he had never seemed to find time for Gotham's celebrated landmarks — but now he had reason to act like a tourist. He went from famous site to famous site, always making sketches, jotting down notes, and tying in the real-life backgrounds with murderous memoranda. And as time went by, the stories grew . . .

In the Spring of 1949, or a little later, Mr. Woolrich's acorn of an idea will reach its full stature as a tall oak. Under his pseudonym of William Irish, the firm of Lippincott's will publish a book of short stories in which crime will take a Crook's Tour. Mr. Woolrich plans to include the Statue of Liberty story, a tale of murder in a New York subway, a homicide on the Albany Night Boat, a killing at the Planetarium, death in the Holland Tunnel. He may even go abroad — the Eiffel Tower in Paris, London Bridge, a famous site in Barcelona. The title of the book has not yet been decided on, but you can trust Woolrich-Irish to come up with one that sings — CROOK'S TOUR?

It's a book of detective short stories to look forward to, isn't it? You almost wish it were already published, don't you? Well, EQMM anticipates its readers' literary longings. Here is a preview of the coming book; here is one of the short stories Woolrich-Irish wrote while the idea was still a-growing . . .

THE BODY IN GRANT'S TOMB

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

HOWIE was waiting for me at the station with that pained, dutiful expression young nephews have when they're meeting elderly maiden aunts from the country. For my part, I'd half hoped we'd miss each other, but no such luck. I hadn't been to the city since 1907, and there were a few things I'd wanted to get out of my system. Oh, nothing very scandalous, but I did have a sneaking desire to ride a ferris-wheel at Luna Park, maybe go exploring in Chinatown to see if it was as wicked as they said it was in my day, and it would have been a relief to smoke a cigarette

openly for a change, instead of having to go up in the attic and turn on the electric fan so the rest of the family wouldn't catch on. Back home I was just everyone's old maid aunt, but I *had* wanted to blow off a little steam. But now if Howie was going to take me in tow, I might just as well have stayed home. I could see right away he was going to be just as bad as the folks back home, as far as I was concerned. He took me by the arm as if I were old and feeble and carefully steered me up the ramp.

"I've got everything planned to make your visit enjoyable, Auntie," he promised. "You're going to have the time of your life."

"I bet," I echoed silently.

"The first night we'll spend a nice quiet evening at home, so you can rest up from your trip."

"Ugh," I grimaced to myself.

"And then tomorrow I've got a treat for you. I'm going to take you to the Art Museum."

"Ugh," I writhed helplessly in his toils.

He went ahead giving me the rest of the program. Just as I'd feared there wasn't a shooting-gallery or roller-coaster or even a good bloody prize-fight anywhere in it. "Don't you have to work?" I suggested despairingly.

"I got a leave of absence so I could devote my whole time to you."

"Thoughtful of you," I moaned, stricken.

He took me back to his flat. He had real nice bachelor-quarters, but they seemed to have experienced a reform-wave recently. I couldn't tell if it was on my account or not. Blue and red poker-chips kept turning up under the rug and between the sofa-cushions. He said he couldn't understand how they got in there. The phone rang a couple of times during the evening, but it was always some girl who seemed to have the wrong number, and the back of his neck would get all red while he tried to explain the mistake to her.

We played parchesi until 9:45.

The next day I learned something about myself I hadn't suspected until then. I'd never known what consuming animosity a suit of armor could arouse in me until after we'd finished making the rounds of a whole wing of them at the museum. I've never been able to look a visor in the face since then without bristling and gnashing my teeth.

I thought that was enough punishment for one day, but Howie wasn't through yet. He was going to do this thing right. He looked at his watch when we came out and remarked, "I think we'll have time enough to take in Grant's Tomb before it closes. You can't go back without seeing that." I was in pretty much of a numbed state by this time, beyond caring, so I let him shove me into a taxi without offering any active resistance.

"To tell the truth," he confessed when we got out in front of the place, "I've never been inside it before myself."

I could have gone one better on him than that. "And if they'd never built it in the first place," I felt like saying, "that would be all right with me too."

We went up the steps and in under the portico, between two of the massive columns. There was a guard or caretaker on the inside of the little boxed entrance, in the kepi of a Union soldier. Not that he was an authentic vet himself, he looked about ten years too young for that.

It was circular on the inside, with an arcade running around it. Nine windows, three on each side, admitted a sort of smoky amber light. In the center there was a sunken amphitheater that contained the two coffins, Grant's and his wife's, but well below main floor level. A balustrade protected it. There was a stone staircase, chained-off against the general public, leading down to it from under the arcade. It had a bend in it, out of sight. You could see the head of it, where it left the rotunda floor, and you could see the foot of it, where it emerged onto the amphitheater-floor, but you couldn't see the part in between, it was walled off. You weren't allowed below anyway, you had to stay up above and just look down over the parapet.

Which we did for a minute-or two. A minute or two was about all that was needed. There really wasn't much to see, except the tops of the two sarcophagi, one engraved "Ulysses S. Grant," the other "Julia S. Grant."

Then Howie strolled off toward one of the two niches in the corners that held battle-flags and circular racks of interesting scenes from Grant's career and documents bearing on it, that you could turn by hand like when you're picking out a picture-postcard. Only they weren't for sale, of course. I was about to go after him, when suddenly my handbag, which I had placed on the flat-topped balustrade, tipped off and smacked down right on top of one of the two coffins. I looked around guiltily, but the caretaker had strolled out in front of the entrance for a breath of air just then, so I sneaked around to the stairs to go down and get it myself. I hitched up the heavy chain and squirmed under it. Howie turned his head just in time to catch me at it. "Hey, you're not supposed to go down there!" he whispered.

"Fiddlesticks!" I said, and tiptoed down the steps out of sight for a moment. I wasn't leaving my handbag in any tomb, regulations or no regulations.

I suppose he wondered what took me so long to show up below, in the bowl with the coffins. I could have made ten round-trips up and down, before I finally flitted scarily out into the circular opening, snatched up my bag, and darted back again. He was looking down at me from over the balustrade. I just shot a white-faced look up at him, without saying anything. I came back up again much quicker than I'd gone down.

"Oh my goodness!" I panted.

He came over to me anxiously. "What's the matter, what were you

doing down there so long?" he asked.

"You better call him in here quick," I said. "There's a girl lying on those stairs, halfway down where you can't see her from up here." I got in more breath. "A *dead* girl."

"Are you sure she's dead? Maybe she just fainted."

"What do you suppose I was doing down there? She's as dead as Grant himself," I told him firmly. "I ought to know. I just got through taking a first-aid course back home."

He stopped arguing about it and chased out to call in the disappearing caretaker. The latter flashed past us and down the stairs — and by the speed he made, alone, I could tell he was no Civil War vet, the kepi was just for stage-effect — and after taking a quick look he came hustling up again. He had to go outside to the lower reaches of the tiered approach and stand there wig-wagging both arms until he'd attracted the attention of a police-car cruising along Riverside Drive, as there was no telephone in the place. After all, you don't usually need one in a tomb.

Within a few moments after that the place was humming with uniformed policemen, and then a plain-clothesman showed up and took charge. I heard them call him Rafferty. He went down, stayed awhile, then came up again and came over to us, where we were being kept waiting. I could see Howie didn't like the idea of our being detained like that, probably on my account — but for the first time all day I was finally beginning to get some kick out of his sight-seeing tour, wild horses couldn't have dragged me away.

"How long had you been in here when you first noticed her?" this Rafferty asked us.

"Not more than a minute or two," I contributed. I told him about dropping my handbag and going down the stairs after it.

"It's probably a good thing you happened to drop it, at that," he nodded, "otherwise she might have stayed in here all night without being found. They would have closed the place in a few more minutes." He turned to the caretaker. "About how long ago did she come in, did you notice?"

I thought he acted a little embarrassed. Evidently Rafferty did too. "What's the matter, didn't you see her?" he prodded.

"To tell you the truth, I guess I missed her," the man faltered. "I can't recall seeing her go in. See, there was a large party of students from one of these Columbia University extension courses came in, one time, and the only thing I can figure is, she musta slipped in along with them, without my noticing. They ganged up around me, asking all kind of questions, and —"

Rafferty said: "But after they left again, didn't you notice that she'd stayed behind?"

"No, I — I — She musta been down on the stairs then already. In fact, that's the only place she could have been, for me not to see her."

"You didn't leave the door at all?"

The caretaker moistened his lips uncomfortably. "Well, I didn't go out of sight of it, no. But there was a car down there on the southbound lane of the Drive, its horn started to sound off and the guy couldn't stop it. I remember I did stroll over toward the curb, stood watching him a minute or two, while he lifted up the hood and tried to — But I was still in full sight of the door the whole time. Nobody coulda come in or out without my seeing them, so I know it wasn't then she entered."

Some sort of a medical man carrying a black bag, who had been busy down below, came up and stopped and spoke to Rafferty. I was close enough to overhear what he said. "Swallowed some cyanide," he said. "Musta come in here intending to do it. She had it with her in one of those little vials they sell with a dime's worth of perfume in them, that women carry around in their pocketbooks." He showed him an envelope that tinkled faintly. "Here are the pieces here. It broke after she'd emptied it." He gave him a wave of the hand and went on outside.

Rafferty took out a notebook and started jotting stuff down. "I guess that's it," he said to one of the cops. "Came in along with the students, and hid on the stairs. Then later, the sounding-off of that horn the guy mentioned covered up the sound of her fall and her death-groans. Suicide." He gave his pencil a flourish up into the air, and closed the notebook.

"Hmph!" I sniffed loud enough for him to hear. He turned to look at me.

"She didn't swallow that stuff of her own free will at all!" I butted in vehemently. "It was forced down her throat, that's as plain as the nose on your face! I thought you city-officers were smarter than that! Why, even Constable Guffy back home would be able to —"

"Shh, Auntie," Howie remonstrated under his breath.

This Rafferty tried to give me a withering look, but I stayed unwithered. "It was forced down her throat," he said sarcastically. "She couldn't scream out for help, or anything, while it was being done!"

"Maybe she did, but if the caretaker was down at the curb, listening to a car-horn out of control, like he admits he was, what good would it do her?" I snapped. "Or maybe once it was in, the murderer held some sort of a gag over her mouth, until the quick poison got its work in, and she dropped. That needn't have taken more than —"

"Sorry to disappoint you," he said patronizingly. "It's a typical suicide, one of the most obvious I've come across yet. Here's the motive right here, she had it on her." He took out a crumpled note, opened it to show us. It had a couple of pencilled lines on it. "No use of our seeing each other any more. Better find somebody else and forget me. Joe."

"She had it tucked in the opening of her glove," Rafferty said. "This guy jilted her, whoever he was, and

she done the Dutch. Now you satisfied, madam?"

"Don't call me madam, I'm still single," I bridled. "If you'd only use your eyes, you'd see that poison was forced on her against her will! Her lower lip was cut, from the vial being rammed against it so hard. My lands, a body don't have to be a detective to —"

"Doesn't mean a thing," he squelched me. "She bit her own lip, in her death-throes. I've seen it happen many times. That stuff is agonizing, you know. Maybe her teeth even crunched the top of the vial a little." He turned away, figuring he'd wasted enough time on me, I guess, and went out to the entrance of the Tomb to give a statement to a couple of reporters who had already got wind of the affair and were hanging around out there.

"Come on, Auntie, let's get out of here, they're through with us now," Howie urged. He had to lead me away almost by main force; my dander was up now, and whenever my dander's up I like to stay and see a thing through.

We came out on the doorstep just in time for me to overhear Rafferty saying to the two reporters: "Crossed in love, and couldn't take it. Happens every day in the year. Don't know her identity yet, but we'll have that by tonight —"

"Murder," I slurred audibly out of the corner of my mouth.

Rafferty snapped his head around to stare after me. "Lady, why don't *you* try working at my job?" he asked sarcastically.

"Why don't you try working at it yourself?" I snapped back before Howie could stop me.

After dinner back at the flat, Howie said to me: "I did have tickets for a nice lecture on the cultural history of the Mayas for tonight, but after that upsetting experience you went through this afternoon, I'm afraid it might be too much for you."

"Yes," I agreed, "a lecture might be just a little more than my strength could bear." But we didn't play any more parchesi, because some of the pieces were missing. I'd thrown them down the mail-chute in the hall myself, to make sure they'd stay missing.

Another of those wrong numbers rang up, and this time he had quite a hard time convincing whoever it was that he wasn't himself. I even overheard him say something about he'd try to make it later if he could — I suppose to show her to her face that she'd gotten the wrong number.

I said goodnight and went to my own room, and sure enough, I no sooner closed the door than I heard him pick up his things and ease out the front way. I smiled a little to myself, and I went over to pick up my own handbag and do a little stepping out myself. Then I froze, staring at it, and a sort of creepy feeling ran up and down my spine —

It was plain black leather on the outside, just like a thousand others, but it seemed to have shrunk a little

in size, and as soon as I had got it open, I saw what had happened. I'd picked up hers by mistake, and left my own down there beside her body on the steps. I'd been excited and that amber light hadn't been any too reliable. No wonder they hadn't been able to identify her yet!

For a minute I hated to think what folks back home were going to say when they heard I'd been jilted by a man at my age and swallowed poison in Grant's Tomb. Then I breathed easier, I remembered there were no marks of identification in mine, just a package of hairpins and about a dollar in change.

I emptied it out with shaking hands and looked over what was in it. It did seem a little bit like robbing a grave, but it wasn't my fault the bags had been switched. There was a lipstick, and a package of mints, and a little change. Then there was a printed fortune from a weighing machine. I shivered a little when I read what was on it. "You are about to make a long journey." She had, all right — a long journey from which there was no returning, poor child.

Then there was a handkerchief with the initials "L W" on it, and a room-key, and that seemed to be about all. I was disappointed, I'd been hoping to find something that would tell me who she was and where she lived.

I didn't give up. I felt around the lining, and one of these little metal slide-fasteners struck my hand. It had a trick compartment in it, like lots of bags do. Only a woman would have known where to look for one. I zipped it open, and I had better luck. There was a receipt for one week's room-rent in it, made out to "Mary Anderson" and signed "Anna Murphy — La Salle Street." Then there was also a letter in it, from a soldier somewhere overseas. This was addressed to Lana Wright, at the Lester Hotel. It was heavily censored, but there was enough left in it to show that they'd been engaged to each other. It was signed "Bob."

For a minute this had me puzzled. Which one was she, Mary Anderson or Lana Wright? I called up the Lester Hotel then and there, and they told me Miss Wright was no longer there, had left about three weeks ago. In fact, they were still holding most of her belongings, she'd never come back for them.

It was easy to see she must have been hiding out at this La Salle Street place under an assumed name. The odds on Lana Wright being her own name were two to one: the letter and the handkerchief against just the room-rent receipt.

That settled it. If she'd been engaged to someone named Bob, I told myself, she certainly didn't swallow poison over someone named Joe. I'd felt all along that that note was just a bush — I mean a plant, or whatever they call it, put there purposely to mislead the police when they found it. Which was just what it had done. They'd never find out who "Joe" was, because there wasn't any Joe. After the first few tries at locating him they'd

let it ride and close the case, it wouldn't seem important enough to them to keep on at it. Just another lovers' quarrel.

Well, Agatha Appleby was one person who knew better. Before I knew it I was getting ready to go around to where she had lived, myself in person, just to look the place over, see if it could tell me anything. I put on my bonnet and my knitted gloves, and buttoned up the top three or four buttons of my high shoes, which I always leave undone around the house for the sake of freer-wheeling.

The doorman downstairs acted kind of surprised when he saw me come sailing out all by myself at that hour — it was all of ten by then — so I stopped a minute and put a flea in his ear. "In case my nephew — er, that is, Mr. Griffith, should return before I do, you needn't mention you saw me go out." And to make it more binding I dug up a nice, shiny buffalo nickel dated 1919, which I'd had by me for quite some time, and gave it to him. He was so stunned by such generosity that his uniform cap fell off and rolled all the way across the lobby, and by the time he'd gone after it I'd continued on my way without waiting to be thanked.

The city streets were dark and spooky in the dim-out, and I didn't know my way around them very well, but I didn't let that stop me for a single minute. I didn't rightfully know what was making me do this — I suppose it was about one-eighth natural-born nosiness and seven-eighths stubborn determination to prove I was right — but all I knew was I just had to go over there and poke around. If she had been killed, and I was positive she had been, then somebody should certainly be punished for it. No use trying to tell me it was none of my business. Murder is everybody's business. And if that big blundering know-it-all who'd been sent there this afternoon didn't know enough to recognize it when he saw it, then Agatha Appleby would open his eyes for him.

I had to ask my way to La Salle Street, of course. The numbered city streets didn't give me much trouble, but the ones with names on them were a different matter. I could have stepped into a taxicab and been driven straight to it, but if you think Agatha Appleby is the kind to throw money away on foolishness like that, when there's a bus handy, you don't know her.

To my surprise, when I'd finally gotten the right directions and reached the vicinity, I discovered it to be not very far from the Tomb itself, in the same immediate neighborhood only a few blocks further in from the river. She'd lived nearer to the place of her death than I'd supposed at the time. If anything, that convinced me she hadn't gone there of her own accord, just to take in the place, to sight-see. I don't know why, but people never do go to the points of interest that are nearest to them, for some reason.

Then in that case, if she hadn't gone

there of her own free will, what had taken her into the place? Well as I saw it, since it was unlikely that she'd been dragged in there by main force in broad daylight, with all those students around and droves of cars passing up and down the Drive, the only alternative explanation was that she'd been driven in there to seek refuge from somebody, had been trying to hide from them, hoping she hadn't been seen. But she had been seen, and the killer had followed her in, cornered her halfway down those stairs after everyone else had left, and done — exactly what he'd come in there to do.

That took care of How. Now there still remained Who and Why, and here I was on a La Salle Street, at ten thirty of a blurred, sooty New York night, inching along toward the last earthly dwelling-place of a dead girl, to see if I couldn't get an inkling of either one or both of those factors.

The street couldn't have been very prepossessing even in normal times. It was a cut-off that continued the line of direction of 125th Street after the latter had swung over on a diagonal toward the Fort Lee ferry. It had sort of a forgotten look to it, as if the city had passed it by. There are certain streets like that, that are "dead" streets, mouldering away, crumbling in the shadows. This was one, and under the conditions of the war-time dim-out, with just a tiny glint from a hooded light-pole here and there, it became something even worse. It was positively eerie and actively evil, like a trap that closes up and swallows you after you're once in it.

That went for the particular house whose number I had obtained from her pocketbook even more so. A dim tawny-orange glimmer peered through drawn shades in one or two places, the rest of its tall shabby face was dark, dreary and forbidding. I stood awhile looking over at it from the other side of the way, after I'd once singled it out, trying to get up my courage, I suppose. She hadn't seemed to me — even in death — like the sort of girl who would ordinarily be living in such a place, and again I was driven to the conclusion that she had been hiding out in it. That she'd been in deadly fear of something or someone, and had burrowed herself away here in hopes of being undiscovered.

Who had she been hiding from? Who had she been so mortally afraid of?

And above all, was the element of danger exorcised, gone for good, now that she had met the fate she had been trying too hard to avoid? Probably, but only as long as you kept clear of her affairs. If I mixed into them, maybe it would be attracted to me in turn. It seemed the best possible excuse for staying out of there. But no one's ever accused Agatha Appleby of not carrying a thing through once her mind's been made up.

I gulped in a deep breath, crossed over to the side the house was on, and marched straight in at the doorway. The street door was free of access, you just swung in at will, and behind it

rose a flight of battered, time-blackened stairs covered with a worn-out strip of linoleum. I went up soft as I could, but a regular orchestra of creaks and grunts seemed to accompany me.

There was a grimy pasteboard disc attached to the key I had taken from her. It was so soiled by the fingers of its many successive users you could barely make it out any more, but the number "5" had been etched on it once long ago. I found a door marked 5 on the second floor at the back, listened first, and then tried the key out on it. The door growled, but it swung open, so this was where it was.

Darkness, at first. And what made it more frightening was that I knew this belonged to someone dead. It was like visiting a grave. It seemed to chill the air. I felt along the inside of the door-frame on both sides, and couldn't find anything that would make the light go on. The place was so poor it wasn't even provided with a remote-control switch.

I was afraid to stand there like that too long, half in and half out, someone might have come along at any minute, so I took my courage in both hands, went in, and closed the door behind me. Then I started to grope my way forward inch by inch through the sea of enshrouding blackness, my arms stretched out full length in front of me like a sleepwalker. That didn't prevent the very thing I had wanted to avoid at all costs from happening. My side grazed something. Before I could tell what it was or catch it to keep it from going over, there was a smash and something shattered on the floor.

My heart jumped up in my mouth and I stood stock still, for the crash seemed to echo abnormally in the stillness of the house, and I didn't know who it might bring in on me. After a moment or two, no investigating footsteps having approached outside, I calmed down by reminding myself that nobody in this house was supposed to know she was dead yet, so even if the sound had been heard, they would think she had made it herself. Or might there be somebody who did know?

Finally, after I had started creeping forward again, a dangling string brushed lightly against my forehead, I twitched it, and the room lit up. I blew out my breath and fanned myself with relief, before I did anything else.

It wasn't much of a place. All she had wanted it for was to try and keep death out, and it hadn't even been any good for that, in the end. There was a bureau in it, an iron-framed bed, a chair with its seat caved in, and that was about all. I looked around on the floor, and the thing I had smashed before had been her drinking glass, perched on the edge of the cracked washstand.

My face drained of color for a minute as I prodded at the pieces with the toe of my shoe. I knew what that meant. You can call it country superstition, but I'd never seen it to fail yet in all my born days. Break a

glass, and it means "Company coming."

My eye traveled further along the floor, and there was a white oblong lying just to one side of the door. A letter slipped under it for her. I must have swept it aside by opening the door myself just now. And if it were still lying there unopened, that meant it had arrived after she'd already left here to go to her death, and she'd never read it.

I picked it up. The envelope had no name on it, nothing. And when a letter without a name is left under somebody's door like that, it means the writer is pretty sure of who it is that's on the inside to receive it.

I opened it forthwith. It really didn't matter now, it wasn't like opening someone's mail while they're still alive. The flap hadn't been glued down anyway. In it, when I'd looked, was something that at first sight didn't make sense at all. Littering the bottom seam of the envelope were a lot of little scraps of colored paper, like confetti. And then there was a scrap of notepaper stuck in with them. I drew this out, and there was nothing written on it, it was blank like the envelope.

When I turned it over and glanced at the other side, there were three little dabs of newspaper stuck to it. Each one held a single word, snipped by itself from the body of the printed text. They looked like pieces of gray macaroni. The three words were "silence," "is," and "golden."

Silence is golden.

I still couldn't understand what it meant, what message it was intended to convey.

Before I could proceed any further with my post-mortem investigation, there was a light tap on the door without any warning. My blood curdled, and I stood there frozen. Who'd be knocking on the door of a dead girl's room? I wouldn't have had the nerve to stay there and find out, especially since I had no business being there in the first place, but I had to, there was no way of getting out again now that I was in. There was a skinny slit of window, but it was too narrow to climb through, and there was probably no way of getting down on the outside. I was there and I had to stay there. The tap came again, louder than the first time.

I snapped open my handbag, which was really hers, and quickly emptied the contents of the envelope into it. I wanted more time to puzzle out the meaning of those three words and the little scraps of colored paper. I hastily ran my tongue across the flap of the empty envelope and put it back on the floor, where it had been lying the first time, just on the chance that whoever this was might have already known about its being there. They might have come back for the answer.

In my first sketchy rummaging around I'd noticed a bunch of unfinished knitting, with the needles still in it, in one of the bureau drawers. I jumped over and hauled it out, tucked it under my arm as though I'd been working on it, and got back to

the door just as the knob was starting to turn.

"Who is it?" I called out calmly, as though I was the lawful occupant.

"It's the landlady," a woman's voice said. She went ahead and pushed the door open. She was a tall, bony individual. Then when she saw me, smiling there sweetly at her while I went ahead busily knitting, her jaw dropped. "Who're you?" she said. "Where's Miss Anderson?"

That must have been the name she'd been living here under, to try to conceal her identity.

"I'm her aunt from upstate," I purred. "I just dropped down on a little surprise visit. She gave me the key and told me to come on up and wait here for her. She ought to be in any minute now."

"Oh," she said doubtfully. She looked me over, and I suppose I looked enough like somebody's aunt to pass muster. "I guess it's all right. I only wanted to ask her if she's keeping the room another week. Her week's up tomorrow, and I like to know about it ahead of time."

"I'll find out for you as soon as she comes back," I said. I knew she wasn't ever coming back again, and it gave me another of those creepy chills for a minute, like when I'd first found her handbag in my possession. I was treading awfully close on the heels of death all the way along the line, wearing its clothes, intruding into its lodgings, and I had an uneasy premonition that if I kept it up too long death might get tired of being tracked down like this, might suddenly turn around in its tracks and snap at me.

But in herself this woman seemed harmless enough, so I thought I might as well try to extract a little useful information out of her while I had the chance. "How long has my niece lived here?"

"Three weeks now."

Whatever she'd been afraid of was at least three weeks old, then.

"Does she go out much?"

"Never budges, sometimes whole days at a time."

Too frightened, poor thing, I said to myself.

"Has she had any callers?"

"Not a soul."

Well, she'd had death for a caller, if no one else, I thought with a shudder.

That seemed to be all she could tell me, a little background fill-in. I closed the door on her, and as soon as I had heard her tread safely recede, went back to my problem of all the little colored pieces of paper, which she had interrupted. I dumped them out and stared intently at them under the light, to try and see if I could make out what they were.

In a minute I got it. I came across one that happened to have the numeral "1" on it, pretty much intact. That, and the color, and the amount of engraving on all of them told me. Somebody had torn up a one-dollar bill into tiny pieces.

As I continued to pick them over with the tip of one finger, all at once a piece with a "0" turned up. It

hadn't been a one-dollar bill, it must have been a ten. A minute later a second "o" had shown up. I warned myself not to get excited, it was simply from one of the other corners. Those bills have numbers in all four corners.

Just the same I quit pecking at them in the hollow of my hand and went about assorting them in a more businesslike way, reconstructing the entire piece of currency against a flat surface, piece by piece, like you do a picture-puzzle.

A third "o" suddenly appeared and took my breath away. And it wasn't a duplicate from one of the other corners, it fitted in next to the first two ciphers. This was a thousand-dollar bill! In my excitement I failed to notice that I was running peculiarly short of tiny pieces of paper long before I should have. As I rapidly built out the note from its two left hand corners, upper and lower, suddenly a clean-edged marginal line had cut across it before it had any right to, stopping it short. I glanced over to the side, and I was all out of little fragments, I'd used up the last of them. I looked back at my work, and every piece was where it belonged, there hadn't been any slip-up there. It was a halved one-thousand-dollar bill, that was what the trouble was! A bill that had been clipped neatly in half, most likely by a pair of long shears.

Well, I had it, and yet I still didn't. It was more than a clue. It was a mallet, that hit you on the head. But mallet or not, the meaning still didn't penetrate. She'd been warned to keep quiet, that much was clear. "Silence is golden." But then why the torn *half* of a thousand-dollar bill, where did that come in?

And then, by the mere process of marshalling the facts as I already had them in my own mind, lining them up and going over them, not once but many times, I finally hammered the real meaning out of them. I saw that I'd had it the wrong way around at first, it was not a message that had arrived *after* she had left, but *before* she left.

Also, she had not received a torn up half-bill, as it had first appeared to me, but an intact one. An intact half-one, that is to say. She was the one who had torn it up, put the pieces back into the envelope, and that was her answer. Then she'd fled from here, knowing now that her hiding-place had been discovered, but it was already too late.

Now, why a severed thousand-dollar bill, a thing that was useless in itself? Obviously that was bait, a lure. Its meaning was: there was a second half waiting for her somewhere, somewhere that she knew. All she had to do was go there, wherever it was, and it would be given to her. One half was no good. Put the two halves together, with a strip of gummed paper, and she had a thousand dollars. In other words, come and get it. A decoy. All they wanted to do was get their hands on her. Once she'd shown up there, wherever this place was, she

probably would never have gotten out alive again.

To stay away hadn't saved her anyway, of course, because they'd already been watching her here at this end, and when they saw her try to bolt for it, they'd run her down — into the Tomb — and done it there, giving it the guise of a suicide.

Where was this place she was supposed to go? If I only knew, I would have gone there myself. For there lay the crux of the *who* and the *why*, not up here or at the Tomb. That was where the mystery lay, and it had to be solved there. But where was it?

I began to hunt high and low around the room, looking for some clue, some sign that would tell me. I couldn't find one anywhere. It hadn't been mentioned in the message, because she was supposed to know where it was by heart. She undoubtedly did know, but it had been in her own mind, and when death had taken her, it had gone with her. That was no good to me now.

I was standing there frustratedly before the dresser, one hand that I'd been pawing the drawers with still dangling uselessly down into one of them, when I thought I saw something move, via the surface of the mirror in front of my face. It was taking place in the room behind me, I was getting it indirectly.

I'd thought I'd heard a faint creak a short time before, somewhere outside the door, as though someone were treading softly, but at the time I'd been too absorbed in my mental calisthenics to pay much attention. It hadn't come again, so I'd taken it to be one of the other roomers on his way past to his own room. I hadn't heard the sound of any other door closing, but that hadn't occurred to me at the time, it only did now, when it was too late. The pieces of the shattered water tumbler still lay ominously around on the floor, there before my eyes: company coming. My heart missed a beat.

The flurry of motion came again. It was very subtle, very hard to detect, and I had to stare before I could grasp what was causing it. It was the blank envelope that I'd left lying with one corner touching the under door-seam, the way it had been when I first came in. Only now, of course, it was empty, its message had been taken out. As I centered my gaze on it in the mirror, the white splotch it made was slowly growing smaller. Every minute some more of it was gone. It was being stealthily drawn out under the door, right under my very eyes! Somebody, who didn't know it had been seen yet, regretted sending it and wanted it back before it was seen, particularly before the long-delayed police got here.

I stood there rigid, watching it as if hypnotized, unwilling to turn around and face it directly, continuing to sight it by way of the glass. There was a very good reason for this. A funny prickling sensation that flitted up and down my spine and scalp and the back of my neck, told me I was being watched through the keyhole. I didn't

want to turn around and give my face away. Standing the way I was, it couldn't be seen.

The keyhole was just a black three-leaf clover all the way across the room, but I knew there was an eye behind it, sighted on me. I could *feel* it, don't ask me how. There was an active intelligence radiating through it.

I had to stand there quietly like that. If I jumped or made a quick move they'd know I'd seen them. They probably took me for just some relative or even neighbor, harmless as long as I didn't know what that message had contained. If they could get it away from me without my seeing them do it, they were willing to leave me alone. Within a moment or two, by the time they got downstairs to the street with it, if not sooner, they would find out that I *did* know what the message contained, the envelope was empty. That would put a different face on the matter. I would have to be removed, in that case. They'd probably come straight back upstairs again to attend to it then and there. It would be easy enough, here in this room. A vial of poison, like with her, or a knife, or a quick, clean-cut garrotting.

I'd only have a minute or two at the most, between the time the envelope was dredged out and the time the discovery of its worthlessness was made, and I'd have to move fast. Of course, if my luck was unusually bad, they'd examine the envelope right outside the door, and I'd be cooked in here. But I thought it was far likelier they'd at least take it as far as downstairs with them before giving it its first looking-over, and I was counting on that.

I kept my eye on the receding wedge of white under the door, formed by the last remaining corner of the envelope. It snuffed out, it was gone now. Wasn't it likely, that at the same time the eye was removed from the keyhole? I had to take a chance on that being the case. Still without turning, I clawed at the air a couple of times, contacted the light cord, tweaked it, plunged the room in darkness. A moment later, ear to door-seam, I heard the sound I'd hoped to hear: the soft scrape of a shoe going away.

I counted ten, gave him time to put half a flight between us,-not more, then I eased the door open and came out myself. I listened carefully. He was still on the last few steps, going down. Just as I identified him, he got off them, coursed the short straight-away to the street, and was out of the house.

I started down in turn. My original purpose was to get to the ground floor, if I could, before they came in a second time. Not attempt to emerge from the front door, they would almost certainly see me, but ensconce myself somewhere at the back of the ground-floor hallway, wait until they went by on their way up, and then tiptoe out behind their backs.

Something went wrong with my timing. They must have been closer to the front door than I'd bargained

on, waiting in a car or something. Or else they'd looked at the envelope quicker than I'd thought they would. I myself was going down as rapidly as was consistent with comparative soundlessness, and yet before I was halfway to the bottom, the flooring vibrated at the front of the lower hall, and they were on their way in again, this time two of them, not just one. I heard the thick growl that was their voices in angered undertones. Something about: "Some old dame was standing there perfectly still when I cased the room just now, must be a relative of the girl's, she musta been the one —"

"Well if she did, she already knows too much, and we're taking care of that right now!" was the chilling answer.

There wasn't any time to get down and around to the back any more — there was only one way to go, and that was up. I turned and scuttled up fast, praying the creaking wouldn't betray me. They were causing so much heavier creaking themselves that it drowned out mine.

I knew enough not to go back in there again. That was where they were heading for themselves. I went on up past the second floor without stopping, around the turn and out of sight. Then I stopped and crouched there against the wall, listening and trying to keep my harried breathing down.

They flung off the staircase at the second floor, right under me, and went back to the room. There was a split second's pause, and then they crashed it. I heard the door fling back, and their onrushing footsteps take a swing around the empty room. Then they came out again, baffled.

"Lammed!" one of them grunted. "That proves that she lamped what was in the envelope and was hep to it!"

"Well, we gotta stop her before she passes it on to anyone else." They were back at the stairs again. "She musta gone up this way. Nobody come out the door since we been down there. We can get her, she's too old to make much speed."

I'd made a horrifying discovery, meanwhile, in my belated attempts to get higher up the stairs, away from them. They ended just above where I was. The house itself didn't but the stairs did. The three upper floors were boarded up and no longer in use. There was a barrier across the stairs just short of the third floor to keep you from going any higher. That explained why so many of the windows had been unlighted, why the whole front of the building had had that barren, forlorn look before, when I'd first seen it from the street.

I hadn't realized the predicament I was in, the neat cul-de-sac or dead end I'd sewn myself up in, until the barrier hit me across the wishbone as I threaded my way up, but with my head turned to look down toward where they were, across my shoulder. The light was coming from below, there wasn't any around the turn up here, that was why I'd failed to see it

any sooner. Now I was worse off than if I'd stayed in the room, for in the room I might have at least pretended ignorance of what was in the envelope, and just possibly gotten away with it. By running out here the moment their backs were turned, I'd only given myself away. They knew that I knew, now.

On the panel of light that crept a little way up the wall, from around and below the turn where the light was, a horrifying silhouette began to climb slowly upward now, toward where I sat crouched, my back pressed in helpless terror against the barricade that wouldn't let me past. Step by step it came on, sort of swelling as it came, for the further away from the light it got the bigger it seemed to swell. First it was just the crown of a hat. Then the brim. Then the profile of the face under it. Then, out a little ways in front, a raised hand showed up on the wall, tightened around a short, stubby outline that I knew was the shadow of a gun. They both came up together, head and gun hand, step by step, nearer and nearer. I whimpered deep in my throat, and stuck the back of my hand in my mouth to keep the sound in, and groveled there as flat back against the barrier as I could.

The silhouette had reached the turn now. That meant that in another second the cause of it would catch up with it, it would turn into flesh and blood, on the last lap up toward me. I would not only see him, but he would see me, huddled there just ahead of him. I squeezed my eyes tightly shut and thought, "Here I go!"

Suddenly a car-horn gave a couple of quick beeps, down on the street in front of the door. It must have had some special meaning to them. The silhouette in the lead froze, and the second one that had begun to show up behind it likewise halted. The beep-beep came again, staccato. The two silhouettes reversed, started down fast. "Cops!" I heard one mutter. "They musta finally traced her to where she lived! Come on, let's scram!"

In another moment the staircase was empty and they'd both gone. I was too prostrated by the narrow escape I'd just had to do anything but sit there and fan myself limply. Then by the time I was ready to stand up and go, there were other feet trampling up the stairs from below. Cops, this time. Although I knew my life wasn't actually in any danger from them, the way it had been from those other two just now, I thought it might be just as well not to let them see me. I'd only get tangled up with them, delayed, asked all sorts of questions.

So I sat tight for a minute or two, until I thought they'd all safely turned aside and gone into the room. Then I stood up, crept down as far as the landing, whisked around it without being seen, and pussyfooted the rest of the way down toward the street. I'd timed myself wrong or something. One last one came bouncing in unexpectedly at the tail-end of

the others, after I thought they were all safely up there already. This time I was caught red-handed — or should I say red-footed? — at the very foot of the stairs, with no time even to jump back up them again the way I had with the first two. And to make it worse, to my horror I recognized the belated arrival as none other than Rafferty, my *bête noire* of that afternoon at the Tomb. There was nothing surprising in this, after all he'd been assigned to the case. There'd been a timelag before they found the room, that was all, due to the switch of handbags between the corpse and myself. The thing was, he was going to have to pass me on the stairs, and if I'd recognized him, what chance was there that he, a professional detective, wouldn't recognize me?

I yanked out a strand of hair from under my bonnet so that it fell untidily down in front of my face, and then I puckered up my face as much as possible like a bleary old hag, and went tottering down past him. He stopped as I went by, and turned to send a long, uncertain look after me. "Say," he demanded finally, "haven't I seen you someplace before?"

"Ye did not, because I don't go to places like that!" I snapped haughtily, without deviating in my progress toward the street. I sallied forth, mumbling, "Getting so a body can't step out for a drop of beer at three in the morning, without being questioned by flatfeet!"

As soon as I was outside in the clear, I hurried away, in case he should change his mind and come out after me, and reluctantly wended my way back to Howie's flat.

When I got back, I had to call on the night doorman to let me in, because there was only one latchkey to the place and Howie had that. But then when I was getting ready to give him another nickel for his trouble, he quickly forestalled me. "Please, no, Miss Appleby," he begged me earnestly. "Mr. Griffiths takes care of all that, and I'm — I'm really not a well man, a shock like I already had once tonight isn't any too good for me."

I needn't have worried about Howie hearing me sneak in. He was dead to the world on the living-room sofa, with his mouth wide open. He had brought in a red excavation lantern with him, for what purpose I couldn't imagine, and I noticed a douse, or whatever the singular of dice is, lying on the floor near him, so this time it must have been some of the boys who had gotten the wrong number, earlier in the evening.

We were both quite sleepy the next morning, and got up later than usual. I noticed he drank a lot of water and kept rubbing the top of his head with an ice-cube wrapped in a handkerchief.

"I'm afraid I'm not being very attentive to you, Auntie," he said half-heartedly. "I was thinking of taking you to a picture-gallery this morning —"

"Wouldn't tomorrow do just as well?" I said quarter-heartedly.

We both perked right up after that. It was surprising how enthusiastic just staying *away* from places like that could make us both feel. One sure thing, I knew I couldn't stay up all night working on a murder-case and stay up all day going around to foolish points of interest, very long, without having a collapse. And of the two I'd much liefer stay up all night working on a murder-case, so that was that.

One point of interest I did go to the next day, though, was the public library. I went there strictly for some private research work of my own. Having to do with the word Why. I had How, you remember, and now all I needed was Why and Who.

The landlady at the La Salle Street place had said she'd been there three weeks. It was the third week in September now, so that would make it about the end of August, beginning of September. I went up to the desk in the reading room and I asked for back numbers of all the newspapers they had on file, one after the other, beginning with the 27th of August. They'd only give me one paper at a time, so I kept making round-trips back and forth between the reading-table and desk.

September fourth, fifth, sixth — nothing. Finally I'd used up the first week in September, and still no sign of anything. I said to myself firmly, "You never were a quitter, Aggie. Don't be one now." Right away a guard stopped beside me, tapped me on the shoulder, and said: "Sh! No talking in here."

I ignored him and went back to the desk. I turned in my paper and got the one for the following day, the seventh of September. It was a good thing I'd kept on. I'd almost no sooner settled down with it, than I hit something. It was on the second page, and it wasn't very large, but somehow the minute my eyes came across it, I knew it was it. Before I went any further, I reached down under the table and unbuttoned my shoes, to make me think clearer.

It was headed simply "Disappearance Reported." And then underneath was a story of a man named Tim Daly, apparently some sort of a gambler or racetrack man who was a well-known figure in night-life circles, who'd been missing for a week past. The last time he'd been seen alive was in the early morning hours of August thirty-first. Someone who knew him had met him on the street, and Daly had mentioned he was on his way to visit a certain hot spot known as "The Last Port of Call." There hadn't been a sign of him since. On checking up, the police learned he had never reached it. As a matter of fact, they established it was already closed down for the night by the time he would have arrived if he *had* gone there. They did learn that there had been a large sum of money owed to him just previous to this, a gambling or racetrack debt, but on investigating his quarters they found an unopened envelope had been waiting for him in the mailbox of his hotel-desk ever since the night he had disappeared,

containing thirty one-thousand-dollar bills.

I was sure this was it. Two items tied it in with the one I was working on: that matter of thousand-dollar bills, and also the time-element of the two was synchronized. Tim Daly had disappeared on the last day of August, even though the matter hadn't been brought to the attention of the police until a week later, and Lana Wright had been hiding-out up on La Salle Street since just about then too. If I was right, and the two were one and the same matter, it was obvious she knew what had happened to Tim Daly, and that was why she'd lost her own life.

I said to myself, "He said he was going to The Last Port of Call. And when people disappear, the last place they say they're going is usually the last place they did go!" I decided then and there I was going to finish it out for him, go there myself that very night, whether he had actually shown up there or not, and see if I could learn anything by just sitting quiet and keeping my eyes and ears open. My afternoon of research had been well spent, I felt.

I "retired" early that night to give Howie a chance to retire early, to give both of us a chance to step out a little sooner. As soon as the usual wrong number had called up, and I'd heard him tiptoe out to straighten it out, I made my own preparations for my first solo visit to a big city night-spot.

I thought Howie's doorman might as well be made useful as well as ornamental, so I asked him where it was and how to get to it. "Not that I'm going there myself," I hastened to assure him; when I saw the horrified look on his face, "I just thought I'd like to know where it was, that's all."

It didn't look like much on the outside when I finally got there. Just a slit of a doorway on a side street, with an awning over it and kind of smoky light peering out from the inside. I went in.

There was a young girl standing behind the hat-check counter over to one side of me, so I went over to her and struck up a conversation, to sort of feel my way along. I asked her if she'd been working there long. "Just three weeks," she said. That was about the right length of time for her to have substituted for the dead Wright girl. "Know anything about the girl that had the job ahead of you?"

"No," she said. "Except that I've heard she left them flat without giving any warning. Probably got married."

Yes, I thought bitterly, married to death!

I asked her how she liked her boss, how he treated her.

Her eyes lit up with pleasure. "Oh, Mr. Brenner's swell! Awfully considerate! Every night when the place closes up, he comes out special to make sure that I go home, he won't let me stay even five minutes overtime!"

What got him that way, I wondered somberly — did the last girl stay a little too late one night and see

something she shouldn't, is that why he's so particular about this one leaving when she's supposed to?

I took a hitch at my whalebone corset and I marched ahead in.

It was pretty well crowded and everybody having a high time — nobody paid the least attention to me. I guess they took me for one of these sweet old souls that peddle old lavender, the way I was dressed. I finally buttonholed a waiter and told him I was a customer — or at least wanted to be, if he'd find me some place to sit down. He looked me over like I was a freak, but finally led me over to a dinky little table smack beside the kitchen door, that nobody else wanted. I saw I'd have to take something if I wanted to stay, so I ordered root beer, which is not only my favorite drink but I figured was about the cheapest thing you could get in there. He said something under his breath that sounded like "This must be part of the floorshow," but he brought it.

I settled down and relaxed. I reached down and unbuttoned my shoes, which is the first thing I always do when I'm relaxing anywhere, but it wasn't easy to manage it under that midget table without upsetting the whole thing. Then I just sat tight, sipping my root beer and using my eyes for all I was worth. I wasn't interested in the people around me, they were just customers, I was interested in the people who ran the place. For a long time there was no sign of anyone. Then, about an hour after I'd first come in, a door over on the far side of the room opened up and a man came out. He closed it behind him, and then he just stood there looking on, as if all he wanted was to see how business was. I saw one of the waiters go up to him with a check somebody had given, and he O. K.'d it, so I knew by that he must be Brenner, the boss or manager of the place.

It was getting late and the crowd was starting to thin out now. I decided I'd have to pay another visit the following night, try my luck over again. I called the waiter over so I could pay him the ten or fifteen cents for the root beer.

Then when I looked at the tab he handed me, I nearly jumped a foot above my chair. "You put a zero on the end of it by mistake!" I gasped.

"That's no mistake."

"A dollar-fifty for a glass of root beer!" I shrilled. "I never carry that much around with me!"

"I thought so," he said. He called the headwaiter over.

"What'd you come in here for if you didn't have any money?" They went and knocked on the office door, and the man who had been standing outside it before came over. They told him what the trouble was.

He looked me over stony-eyed. "You better shell out or you'll stay here until you've scrubbed every floor in the place!"

"But I haven't got that much!" I turned my bag upside-down and shook it out over the table to show him, before I remembered what I had in it. That half thousand-dollar bill,

which I'd carefully pasted together again since the night before with strips of transparent paper, fluttered onto the table. I snatched it up and put it back where it belonged fast, but I could tell by the look on his face he'd seen what it was.

He was very quiet for a minute. Then he smiled, real friendly at me. "I was only kidding," he said. "Can't you take a joke? You not only don't have to pay for what you've had, but to show you there's no hard feeling, we'll give you another on the house." He turned to the waiter. "Bring it into my office, she'll be my guest in there."

"I think if you don't mind I'd like to go," I faltered.

"I want to make it up to you for this little unpleasantness," he insisted. "We don't often get nice homey ladies like yourself in here. I want to show you we appreciate your patronage." He took me by the arm and escorted me in.

The office door closed behind us, and he showed me to an easy chair. The waiter brought in my drink, but I noticed a look that passed between them as he set it down. Then he went out again and closed the door. I tasted it, and it was a little bit saltier than the one before.

"Go ahead, drink up," he encouraged. "I'll join you." He poured himself a little liquor out of his private stock.

There was a knock at the door, and a villainous-looking young fellow in a light gray suit and snap-brim hat came in. He looked at me hard. Then I saw him nod his head a little, affirmatively, to Brenner. That was all, he didn't say a word. Then he went out again.

I suddenly remembered that keyhole up at Lana Wright's room, and the eye I had felt staring at me through it when I was standing so still in front of the glass. It must have belonged to him, and this had been an identification, just now.

Brenner got up, went over to the door, opened it, and said to someone standing just outside it: "Tell the band to play them home. Knock when the place is emptied out. And take care of the front."

Then he turned back to me, and his whole manner had changed. He came over close and stood in front of me. "How much do you know?" he said harshly.

Something was making me sleepy — maybe being up so late. I'd finished the second root beer by now. "I don't know what you —"

He backed his arm at me threateningly. "Come on," he grated. "How much did she tell ya?"

I was starting to get real frightened, and it was no act. "She didn't tell me anything —" I stammered.

"Don't lie! You must be some hick-relative of hers from upstate. You were up in her room last night, weren't you! You're carrying around that half a grand-note we sent her, ain't you! I suppose she didn't tell you why she was laying low like that, hiding out! I seen her myself peeping

in through that glass patch in the kitchen-door, when we were in the act of carrying him downstairs to the basement. She ran out in the street too quick for us to get hold of her. She beat it away from where she was living at, and she never showed up here for work from then on. You mean she didn't tell you any of this?"

"No, she didn't!" I flared. "But now you have yourself!"

His face changed color. Then he said grimly: "I have, have I? That's your tough luck!"

Somebody rapped three times on the outside of the door. He went over and opened it. The younger man in the light gray suit said: "They've all gone, and I just locked the place up myself, boss, so there won't be any more slip-ups like last time, when that frail stayed behind darning a run in her stocking."

Brenner hitched his head at him, said: "Come in, Silva, and give me a hand."

"Let me out of here!" I screeched. I tried to get up from the chair and duck around the other side of the desk, but my legs wouldn't work, they got all woozy, and I slumped back again.

"Grandma's getting sleepy," Brenner snickered. "It's way past her bedtime."

"Think anyone knows she came here?" Silva asked anxiously.

"Naw, she's on her own, some hick relative of the Wright twist, happened to pop down and visit her. She knows too much now. . . . Come on," Brenner said to me viciously, "you want to know so bad where Tim Daly is, we'll show you."

I tried feebly to struggle against them, but they picked me up between them, one by the head and one by the feet, and carried me outside through the main club-room. Everyone was gone, all the lights were out, and the tables were stacked in the corners. They carried me through the swinging door into the kitchen, and to the back of it, and then down a flight of stairs to the basement.

"Turn on a light, before we brain ourselves," Brenner said.

The place lit up, and it helped me to keep my eyes open a little longer. There was a big white refrigerator, ceiling-high, tall enough to stand up in, glistening there against the wall. Then opposite there was one a little smaller. The big one had a padlock on it, the other didn't.

Brenner took out a key, unlocked the padlock, stripped it off. Silva said in a confidential undertone to him: "Ain't the kitchen help been wondering why they ain't allowed to use it?"

"I told them it's out of order," Brenner grunted. "They got the use of the other one so they don't think nothing of it. The riskiest places, right under people's noses, is always the safest, ever notice that?"

He swung open the great big slab that fronted it, almost as ponderous as the door of a safety-vault. A light went on somewhere inside of it. He jockeyed me forward, holding me against him, until I was in line with

the yawning entrance. The cold air coming out turned into steam as it hit the warm air outside.

"Now ya wanted to see Tim Daly, have yourself a look," he said. "There he is, cooling off. He got a little het up about some money I owed him, threatened to squeal on me to the cops —"

The thing was shaped like the letter N, over against the rear of the refrigerator. The trays had been moved out, so that there was no impediment. In a sitting position, knees up angularly before it.

For a minute the horror of what I was looking at revived me. The cold had preserved him. He looked as if he'd only died three hours ago instead of three weeks ago.

Then suddenly I felt myself flung forward. I landed on my hands and knees on the slippery porcelain floor, the top of my head down and resting against that leathery, motionless thing, like a shock-absorber. I was dimly aware of a jeering remark behind me. "Let us know if the temperature ain't just right, we'll send you in a hot water bottle." Probably the last time, I knew, that I would hear the sound of the human voice.

The door thudded heavily shut behind me, and the light went out.

Time stopped, it went out with the light. My only chance of surviving even for a few hours was to keep awake, and whatever they'd put into that drink was pulling me remorselessly down into stupor. I clambered erect against the slippery sides of it.

I pounded desperately on the thick, insulated porcelain lining of the door, until my hands were numb and I couldn't lift them to it any more. Then I just sort of slithered inertly down it into a huddled heap, the chattering of my own teeth the only further motion left in me. To the very end I was conscious of *that thing* behind me, over there in the dark. Pretty soon the two of us would be alike. My eyes finally lidded closed for good. Sleep had got me. And after sleep came death.

Something that burned kept going down my throat, a little at a time, and when it got down it would spread all over, bringing on a glow. I opened my eyes, and somebody said, "There she is."

The first thing I saw was Howie's face. He looked white and scared, but he tried to grin when he saw me looking at him. "That's your second quart of whiskey, you old toper," he said shakily.

There were a bunch of others there with us, policemen and internes and whatnot. That Rafferty was there, too, but I was even glad to see him for once. I was still there in the basement, wrapped in a blanket, but I was on the outside of that white thing and the padlock had been shot in two, that was all I cared about.

"How did you know where — where to find me?" I asked Howie weakly.

"An electrical storm came up just before daybreak. It blew open the

door of your room, and when I got up to close it, you weren't in there. I got scared stiff. I rushed downstairs and nearly shook the daylights out of that doorman, until I got him to remember that you'd asked him something about The Last Port of Call. I got in touch with Rafferty right away. The place was closed, but Brenner and a couple of his pals opened it up after we pounded on the door like mad. They were still there 'going over the accounts,' or so they claimed. They denied they'd laid eyes on you, of course. Well, we cased the place but saw nothing suspicious, and I guess we would have gone away again and left you slowly freezing to death down here, but one little thing saved you. Just as I was turning to go, I stepped on something round and hard."

He held out his hand and showed me. It was one of the buttons from my old-fashioned high shoes. It must have come off when I'd opened them, like I do whenever I'm sitting down anyplace.

"I knew there was only one person in all New York a thing like that could belong to. I knew you'd been there. I called Rafferty and his men back inside from the street, and we tore the place wide open."

"Mr. Brenner was a little too quick with his gun-pulling and had a fatal accident," Rafferty supplied with a lopsided smile. "But we got the other two in brand-new condition."

I still had a bone to pick with him, even though the whiskey was making me talk a little thick. "You ready to admit now that it wash murder?" I challenged. "I mean what happened to Lana Wright?"

"Lady," he said contritely, "with corpses all around us, right and left, you don't expect me to still say it wasn't, do you?"

"Hmph! Well, ish about time," I said haughtily. "The Tim Daly affair you know more about than I do. But here's exactly what happened to the girl: she saw the Tim Daly murder and ran for her life. She hid out up on La Salle Street, afraid even to go to the police, for fear Brenner and his men would head her off before she ever reached them. It took them three weeks, but they finally traced her. They didn't want to do the job up there, they figured it was too risky, so they tried to lure her back to the club. The day she died she found an envelope under her door with a half thousand-dollar bill in it. She was supposed to go back, and she'd receive the other half of the bill as the price of her silence. She knew what it was she'd really receive, and she didn't want any part of their blood money anyway. She tore the bill up into small pieces and left it there for them to find. Then she set out, apparently with the intention of going to the District Attorney's office, revealing what she knew, and asking protection. She saw that she no longer had any choice, now that her hiding-place had been discovered.

"Well, she never got there. Two of Brenner's men were already watching the place day and night in a car. They

started to trail her, to see what she was going to do. She didn't catch sight of them until she'd already cut herself off from help, was way over on Riverside Drive, right opposite the Tomb, standing waiting for a bus to take her downtown.

"She caught sight of them slithering toward her in this black car. She realized that they were going to haul her into it by main force and take her down to Brenner, in other words kidnap her in broad daylight, right off the city streets. She looked around her, and just at that moment there was a group of students filing into the Tomb. They were the only people in sight, and to save her life she rushed over, joined them unnoticed, and went inside with them. Then she hid on the staircase leading down to the sarcophagi.

"'However, one of Brenner's killers jumped out of the car, streaked after her, and mingled with the tail-end of the very same procession. He didn't see her, but he knew she must be in there someplace, so when the students filed out again, he stayed behind too, partly screening himself behind one of those rotary postcard racks over in the corner. The hunter and the hunted stayed behind in the Tomb, stalking one another. As soon as the place quieted down, he detected where she was, crept down after her, forced the poison into her mouth, and stifled her outcries with his handkerchief until it took effect and she dropped. His confederate, meanwhile, covered him up by deliberately setting off his horn in one of those long blasts that can't be stopped, right outside the Tomb. This drew the caretaker away from the entrance, to watch him and give advice while they fiddled with the mechanism, and not only drowned out the girl's muffled death-cries but permitted the murderer to sneak out again unnoticed behind the caretaker's back."

Rafferty just planted his arms akimbo and stared at me, wagging his head. "You know what you've done, don't you?" he marvelled. "You've not only solved one murder case under our very noses, but two, counting the Tim Daly matter!"

When Howie and I were riding back to his apartment later by ourselves, I asked him, a little embarrassed: "You figuring on telling the folks back home about my getting mixed up in all this fuss and excitement?"

"Well, I dunno," he said severely, "I was supposed to look after you —"

I waited awhile, then I asked sweetly: "Been getting any more wrong numbers on the phone lately?"

He sort of jolted for a minute. Then finally he said: "I guess what they don't know back home won't hurt them, I guess maybe I won't tell on you."

And he nudged me in the ribs with his elbow. So I nudged him back with mine.

"O"

In translation, if you please,
Exact! — No petty lying that improves
To suit the modern taste!

Lee Hays doesn't think Robert Browning would approve of what Mr. Hays has done with the Pardoneres Tale, but he has a notion that Chaucer wouldn't mind a bit. Where, asks Mr. Hays, do you suppose Chaucer himself got the story? Mr. Hays turned to Chaucer one day after reading the story of Susanna and the Elders in the Bible. He got to thinking how much Bible speech is loved by Southern farm people, and how he had heard them listen enthralled to readings from Shakespeare. And he remembered hearing Chaucer read, in the original, to Cumberland mountain folks and how they took Chaucer to their hearts. And how one old lady asked the reader of Chaucer when he, the reader, had written the tale — she had taken it for granted the tale was new. Indeed, the sound of Chaucer is closer to mountain talk, Mr. Hays believes, than Shakespeare, who used more dictionary words than Chaucer did.

Lee Hays wants one thing made absolutely clear: he is no scholar in Middle, or possibly in any other, English. He first heard Chaucer read to him in a speakeasy run by an Italian named Adolf who purveyed a wine yclept "cold coffee" in coffee mugs while a self-taught poet kept reading aloud from Chaucer and Dante and his own compositions. Adolf was nuts about Chaucer but didn't think much of Dante — "Why didn't the [censored] say what he means?" On the self-taught poet's own work Adolf never made any comment.

The moral of the Pardoneres Tale is an ancient theme: Gold is Bad. Isn't there a business, Mr. Hays reminds us, in Medea about a net of gold? Hasn't Eugene O'Neill rung the changes on the root of all evil? Yes, it's a classic theme, but Mr. Hays comments wryly that no one ever offered him a pot of gold in exchange for his soul, although many a time a beefsteak would have been sufficient temptation . . .

You'll hear more from Lee Hays in the pages of EQMM. We think he has a rare talent in his own right. He has spent most of his 34 years delving into the mysteries of American folk lore, and soon we will bring you an earthy sample of how Mr. Hays combines folk music with foul murder — a haunting and unforgettable medley.

THREE AGAINST DEETH

from the *Pardoneres Tale*
of the CANTERBURY TALES by Geoffrey Chaucer

done into *Kindely* English

by LEE HAYS

Thise ryotoures three,
of which I telle . . .

THREE RASCALS sat in a tavern riotously drinking and playing at dice. It was late at night, so late that when they heard a bell ringing they thought it was the bell which signaled daybreak.

But then they saw, passing before the tavern, a corpse being carried to his grave, and a man going before to clank the death bell.

One of the roisterers called to the pot boy and said, "Go and find out whose corpse that is! Hurry up!"

"Sir," said the pot boy, "I thought you knew. Why, the news was all over town at least two hours before you came here, last night."

"Who, then?"

"Why," says the boy, "he was an old friend of yours." He named the corpse, and the three roisterers looked at each other in astonishment, for the dead man had indeed been their roisterous friend and drinking companion and they had, in fact, played at dice with him only the day before.

"How did he meet his death, then?" cried one of the rascals.

"He was slain," said the boy, pleased to be the bearer of news.

"Slain!" cried the three.

"Happily he was drunk as a lord, though," said the boy, by way of comfort, "and probably didn't mind."

"Who killed him?" demanded one of the rascals.

"He was killed," said the boy deliberately, "while sitting upright in his chair, and some say he died of too much drink and a stoppage of the heart. But I think he was murdered, and by a sneaking killer who has slain many another in this land. I think he did it with a spear to sever your friend and his life."

"His name, fool!"

"Sir," said the boy, struggling in the grasp of the rascal who had seized him, "his name is Deeth."

It was such an odd name for those parts that the rascal shook the boy, thinking him lying.

"S-sir," cried the teeth-chattering boy, "he's killed over a thousand this year, has Deeth. You'd better watch out for him, for you may meet him!"

"You lie! No man —"

"I've told you the truth, sir! That's all I know about him! My mother says that he appears night or day,

when you least expect him. He —"

"Mother of God!" now cried out the tavern keeper. "Stop shaking the lad! He's told you the truth!"

"Do you, then, know this fellow, this what's-his-name?"

"Deeth? Well, no," admitted the tavern keeper. "But not a mile from here there's a village where, it's said, he killed every man, woman, and child this year, and all the servants besides. I believe he lives there, and comes out only to kill, and then returns to hide."

"Oh, sirs!" cried the pot boy, "watch out for him, or he'll sever you and your lives, as he did your friend!"

"By God," says one of the rascals, "I'm not afraid of the fellow. Just let him show his face to me. I'll —"

He thought a moment, then turned to the others. "Listen. We're comrades, aren't we? Pals? Let's take an oath to kill this murdering, sneaking Deeth who has slain our friend."

"I don't believe the boy's tale that he has killed over a thousand," said one of the rascals, "nor that he has destroyed a village full of folk, as the tavern keeper said. Unless his other name is Pestilence," he laughed. "No man has killed so many — no, not even in battle."

The third said, "No matter how many he boasts of having killed, this great slayer, it's our plain duty to seek him out and kill him! Let's swear to do that before night falls!"

At once they all held up their hands and pledged themselves to destroy Deeth, and the youngest of the three, in his enthusiasm, cried, "No slayer can stand against us three! We'll stick together like born brothers! One for all and all for one!"

And up they sterte al dronken,
in this rage . . .

They jumped up and reeled out of the tavern. They took the road which led to the village where the tavern keeper had said Deeth lived. As they went they swore many a grisly oath that when they met the odd-named fellow he should die in his tracks.

And as they went the youngest chanted with enthusiasm, "One for all, and all against Deeth!" until his two friends bade him shut up.

Before they had gone very far they came to a stile. They stepped over it; then they saw, about to ascend the other side, an old man. The old countryman wore a dirty cloak wrapped all about him, and all they could see of him was his pale and wrinkled face.

The old man greeted them politely and meekly, saying, "Now, lords, God bless you." But he stood in their way.

"Stand aside, you old goat," said the foremost rascal. He moved to pass by but caught a glimpse of the old man's face, whereupon he seized the old man's shoulder and swung him about for a closer look.

"My God," he said, "would you look at him! Did you ever see such an old fool? Listen, old man, why don't you crawl away and die? God knows it's past time."

With dignity the countryman looked the rude rascal in the eye and said, "You should live so long, and maybe you'd have better manners. Perhaps you'd change your youth for my age? Do me that favor, please, and then to please you I would crawl away and die, as you say."

"What's he saying?" demanded one of the rascals, pushing forward.

"The fact is," said the old man, "I'm too old to die. Though," he sighed, "I confess I wouldn't mind resting my old bones. Yes, I'd swap my cloak for a wooden one, for I'm weary of life. Would you believe it? I've been to India and back, looking for death."

"You old joker!" said the rascal, laughing scornfully. "Nobody wants to die, at any age!"

"If I did not," said the old countryman, "I do now, if only to be out of your presence."

"Let him go look for Deeth, the great slayer in these parts, then," said the youngest, jeeringly, "and Deeth will oblige him, I'm sure!"

"Well, I did speak to Deeth about it," said the old man, "but he wouldn't do me the favor. No man treats me with respect any more. You shouldn't treat an old man so rudely, young sirs. How would you like it if you were old and some brash youth spoke to you like that? Now, God bless you, and I'll be going."

He started to climb the stile but the rascals seized him and pulled him back, the youngest crying, "By God, you won't get away so easily!"

"No, by God," said another of the rascals. "We heard you mention the name of Deeth, the sneaking killer who has slain our friend and God knows how many others in this country. I swear, I believe you're in cahoots with him! I'll bet you're a spy for the great boasting killer!"

"Yes," cried the youngest, "you'd like to see him kill all us young folk, wouldn't you, just because you're so old yourself, you old goat!"

"Tell us where he is!" shouted the third rascal, drawing a dagger, "or we'll give you a stoppage of the heart as he gave our friend! Oh ho!" he laughed. "See how he squirms! You swine, you said you wanted to die. Now hold your tongue and you shall! Or tell us where Deeth is and live!"

"Now, sirs," pleaded the old man, "if that's all you want, I can surely oblige you."

"Speak!"

"Turn up this crooked path," said the old man, "till you come to a forest. There I left him, and there he is, I swear! Look for a great oak tree, and there you'll find him!"

At once the rascals released the countryman, one of them saying, "The old hypocrite! He didn't want to die at all!" And then they began to run toward the forest, so eager were they to meet and slay Deeth, and they did not hear the countryman's farewell: "And God save you!"

As they ran along the crooked path, twisting and turning, the youngest panted, "All against Deeth!"

And everich of thise ryotoures ran . . .

Their daggers in hand, the three rascals ran into the heart of the forest, and they ran until they came to a great oak. But there, to their great astonishment, shining in the first light of day, was a huge pile of bright, golden florins. It was such a mound that there must have been eight or ten bushels of the golden coins, at the very least. A fortune!

Forgetting all about Deeth, they gaped at the precious horde. The youngest knelt and plunged his fists into the mound, and raised his hands to let the florins trickle like water through his fingers. In wonder and delight he breathed, "They're real!"

One of the rascals said, soberly, "Listen, brothers, I've got an idea. I'm not dumb, if I do like to laugh and joke and have a good time. Listen, here's a fortune! What a life we might have with this gold!"

"By God," said the youngest, "who'd have thought we'd have such luck!"

The other said, "Easy come, easy go. Let's spend it quickly!"

"Wait," said the first rascal. "Here's my idea. We'll have to carry this gold to my house — or to yours, I don't care — before we can proceed to spend it. But we can't take it home in the daytime. Somebody would see it, sure, and say that we had stolen it."

"Thieves might kill us for it!" cried the youngest, shivering at the thought.

"We might be hanged on suspicion of murder," said the other, also shivering.

"Now, hold on," said the first rascal. "It's very simple. We'll wait until night and then take it cautiously, wherever we agree."

He proposed that they draw straws, and the one who should draw the short straw would run to town and bring back bread and meat and wine, being careful not to give away their secret. The other two would stand guard over the treasure. With food they would stay their hunger until the night, when they would take away the gold.

"Then will we stuff our bellies with the finest food in all the land!" cried the youngest.

So it was agreed, and they drew straws, and it happened that the youngest drew the short one. At once he pocketed some of the florins to pay for his purchases, promised his friends that he would be back before they could say, "*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*," and ran down the crooked path, hopped over the stile, and went toward the town.

And as he ran he sang, "One for all, and all — for one!"

And al-so sone as that he was gon . . .

No sooner had he gone than one of the rascals said to the other, "Listen, pal. We're sworn comrades, aren't we? Our friend has gone, and here is gold, a fortune, that we have agreed to split three ways. But what's to

keep us from dividing it between the two of us?"

The other said, dubiously, "Well, I don't know how we could arrange it. He knows the two of us are here with the gold. If he should come back and find us gone with the treasure, he'd know us for traitors, and seek us out wherever we go. Or do you mean to take his share away from him at dice? If so, I have some one-sided dice in my pocket, by chance . . ."

"Well," said the other, "I had something else in mind. But perhaps I'd better not tell. Perhaps I ought not to trust a man who would use one-sided dice."

"I wouldn't think of using them against a comrade! Tell me what you have in mind, and I swear that if I tell, you shall have my share of the fortune!"

So the rascal revealed his plan, and together they agreed upon it. They should have all the gold and the youngest none.

"We'll split it two ways," said he who had first proposed to betray their comrade, "and then, brother! We'll have everything we ever wished for. How do you intend to spend your share?"

"At dice," said the other promptly, "where there's a chance of restoring my half of the fortune to its original proportions."

And they agreed that while there was only one treasure, one treasure for all was much less to be desired than all of it for two.

The yongest, which that wente un-to the toun . . .

The youngest reached the town, and his mind was in a turmoil of gladness, remembering the great pile of beautiful golden florins they had found.

"Oh, Lord," he thought, "if I might have the whole thing all for myself! No man on earth would have such pleasure of it, as I!"

Then he thought that he might have the treasure, if he could devise a way to betray his comrades. "They are both rascals and don't deserve such luck," he assured himself. No sooner did he need such a plan than one popped into his head. "If it were not right," he reasoned, "I should not have thought of it."

At once he went into an apothecary's shop. He asked the apothecary if he had some poison. "For killing rats," he said.

Also, he assured the apothecary, there was a polecat in his backyard which had been killing his chickens, and he would use the poison against that beast as well.

Then to make his story three times as convincing, he added hastily, "Also, I haven't slept a wink for many a night, for there are bugs in my bed, and I'll poison them too, while I'm at it."

He would have described a dozen other uses for the poison but he need not have wasted his breath, for the apothecary caught sight of the golden florins in the rascal's hand and at

once interrupted. He had, he said, a poison so powerful that a portion no larger than a grain of wheat would persuade any living creature to exchange his spirit for immediate death, should the creature swallow it, of course.

The wicked youth seized the box of poison, tossed a florin to the apothecary, and ran out of the shop, lest he be asked to give his name.

Then he ran to other shops and purchased bread and meat and wine.

Then he left the town and made his way back toward his waiting comrades. He sprang over the stile and ran up the crooked path, panting, "All for one!"

Thou fallest, as it were
a stiked swyn . . .

When he reached the oak he saw that his friends had guarded the treasure well, and that it was still there, brightly gleaming.

They greeted him joyfully, and one of them took the food and wine from him. Then, as they had planned, the other jumped up and started wrestling with the youngest, playfully, as if to show his delight in their good fortune. And as they wrestled, the other rascal came and with his dagger stabbed the wretched youth in the side, for that was how the two false comrades had planned to get all the gold for themselves.

The rascal who had begun the wrestling also drew his dagger and stabbed the youth, who fell dead to the ground.

"That's the end of that," said the second false comrade. "Now, by God, let's have some food and drink."

"Maybe we ought to bury him first," said the other.

"There's time for that! Hand me that bottle of wine. The rascal brought three. I'll wager one is watered, and he was planning to stay sober while we drank, so that he could make off with the gold himself. The fool!"

He opened the bottle and sniffed. "At any rate, this isn't the watered one," he said, and drank.

The other rascal also drank, and before either man could have said "*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*," they both fell down dead.

And the three rascally comrades lay under that oak where they had thought to find the great slayer Deeth but instead had found, then lost, a fortune.

Thus ended been thise homicydes two,
And eek the false empoysoner also . . .
What nedeth it to sermone of it more?

'O'

How does Lillian de la Torre blend history, fiction, and detection in creating her wondrous tales of Dr. Sam: Johnson? "The Frantick Rebel" provides one answer to the ever-fascinating riddle of literary conception. The germ of the story lay, of course, in the absolute necessity — the artistic necessity — in Miss de la Torre's mind of Dr. Johnson matching wits with an American spy. Everything made such a story inevitable: the period was that of the Revolutionary War; the character of Dr. Johnson, plus his now-accepted criminological bent, would have led him into some sort of participation in the great conflict, even if off-stage. With which American spy would the Sage of Fleet Street joust? There was only one possible choice in Miss de la Torre's mind: the colorful, crotchety Patience Lovell Wright — Quakeress, vegetarian, wax-worker, and above all, patriot.

Now follow the path and bypaths of the creative faculty: Mistress Wright's penchant for wax-working suggested the Chelsea China Manufactory; Chelsea suggested Dr. Driffield's famous Academy. So, stewing in Miss de la Torre's cauldron of ideas, we already see the characters, the locale, and the threads of plot and counterplot. The rest is inspired perspiration.

It is interesting to note the ingenuity and authenticity of Miss de la Torre's source material. For example, the details of the life-mask are transferred from Thomas Jefferson's account of Browere's proceedings, even to the grout whose secret perished with the concocter. As to the portrait of Patience Wright, Miss de la Torre tells us that she did not have to invent any touches of her own: Mistress Wright was picturesque enough in real life to serve as the American Mata Hari, model of 1777.

THE FRANTICK REBEL

(as narrated by James Boswell in the year 1777)

by LILLIAN DE LA TORRE

"WHAT! Boswell!" cried the strapping virago to whom I had just been presented — "the friend to Liberty! Come to my arms! I must infallibly kiss thee!"

Though I am not by custom averse to the kisses of the Fair, I own that the proffered caress daunted me. The nymph who had offered it was taller than myself, vast, and antient; she had the hawk's profile of a red Onondaga, and a piercing, maniacal dark eye. Before I could protest, I found myself engulphed in draperies and

soundly bussed on both my cheeks.

"The friend of Liberty," she cried, "is the friend of America, and the friend of America is the friend of Patience Wright."

Her voice boomed like an orator's in the dusky halls of the Chelsea China Manufactory.

Dr. Sam: Johnson snorted.

"As for thee, Sam: Johnson," cried Mistress Wright, "surly monarchist that thee is, a kiss is far from thy deserts; but I will kiss thee in token of Christian forgiveness."

Dr. Johnson started back in horror. The potter's freckled boy snickered; the potter yielded to a fit of coughing. As the proffered kiss was bestowed upon the rigid philosopher, I could only stare at the extraordinary creature we had encountered. Friend to Liberty and friend to America I had always been; I glory in the appellation; but at that juncture I was not forward to publish my sentiments. 'Twas at the height of our unfortunate struggle with our fellow subjects 'tother side of the water, and I suppose in all London no other could have been found, besides this mad American, who would shout out rebellious sympathies in a voice that could be heard with ease clear to the Surrey side of Thames.

Dr. Johnson had come down to Chelsea, not to bandy words with a rebel, but to try out his newest clay in the potter's kiln. Setting his little brown scratch-wig straight and working his lips in silent disapproval, he withdrew to his work-room with what dignity he could muster. Being for the nonce potter's devil, I followed, leaving Mistress Wright engaged in kissing the potter's boy, presumably for being in his humble way also a friend to America. I pondered much what such a flamboyant rebel might be up to in London.

I was soon to learn, and from none other than the head of the secret service. Mr. William Eden came himself to Johnson's Court, begging with agitation my learned friend's assistance.

"'Tis Patience Wright the wax-worker," he groaned. "'Tis certain she's a spy, yet we can do nothing with her. Her wax-works are all the rage, and she is so great with her Royal Highness the Princess Amelia, and with even higher Personages, that we cannot lay a finger on her. At the Palace 'tis all 'Patience' and 'George' and 'Charlotte', she being a Quaker by religion and a Republican by sympathy; and I have it from the highest authority, the woman has had the impudence to rate his Sacred Majesty to his face about the American war. Upon this she was banished the Palace; but Queen Charlotte still inflexibly protects her, the while she communicates to Franklin in Paris."

"Foh," said Johnson, "what does a madwoman know that could advantage our enemies?"

"She is not so mad but there's method in it," said Eden, biting his lip, "and as to what she knows, she knows enough at this moment to foil

all our scheams and lose us our colonies forever."

JOHNSON: "Then she must be prevented from communicating it."

EDEN: "Yes, Sir, 'tis a matter the most serious. When you have heard all, I know you will lay aside your every occupation in order to serve your country."

JOHNSON: "Well, Sir, say on."

EDEN: "Sir, the scheam was laid down by one whom I shall call General B———. 'Tis for a military campaign of the first importance, which shall divide the rebellious colonies so that we may reduce them at our leisure. Now General B———, though a brilliant soldier, is in hours of ease a rake and a man of pleasure. No sooner, therefore, has he come to town, but he takes into keeping one Miss Fleay, late of the stage, and sets her up in a house in Chelsea, hard by the pottery. Down goes Miss Fleay to Chelsea with her cook and her odd boy and her waiting-woman — and Mistress Wright, if you please, goes along to teach her modelling, at which the lady has a dainty hand. Miss Fleay thought the kilns of the pottery the attraction held out by Chelsea — but now it appears as if the presence of General B——— was the true loadstone."

JOHNSON: "Well, and so Chelsea was all one idyll of true love and modelling in wax."

EDEN: "Aye, and thence comes our danger. In an ill moment, General B——— communicated his scheam to his companion, whose loyalty is above doubt; only to find too late that Mistress Wright, the frantick rebel, had over-heard all."

JOHNSON: "If the secret's out, how can I or any man mend the matter?"

EDEN: "Miss Fleay took steps at once. She attached herself so closely to Mistress Wright, that the American was totally unable to communicate with anyone; having meantime sent an urgent message to me, revealing the situation. We immediately placed the spy under the closest surveillance, and I do assure you that she has as yet neither communicated nor attempted to communicate with anyone outside the household. But this cannot last; she must send a messenger to Franklin at Paris, or go herself, within this eight days, if this intelligence is to advantage the rebels."

JOHNSON: "Sir, I am no bailiff; I cannot undertake to watch this lady. I am deep in experimentation with clays; my friend Boswell is newly come to town for a frisk; you must seek elsewhere for a watch-dog."

EDEN: "Nay, Dr. Johnson, the lady is encompassed by watch-dogs. Miss Fleay has augmented her domestick staff; Mrs. Wright's waiting-woman is one of my people, and the coachman, and the gardener's boy."

JOHNSON: "Then what do you ask of me?"

EDEN: "Sir, in the words of the satirick Juvenal, *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* We must have someone on hand who cannot be bought. Furthermore, the lady has a wild and fertile

invention, beyond the ken of any mere watch-dog. I would have you match wits with her, and intercept her communications no matter how slyly they are put forth."

I was eager to accept the commission: "Pray, Sir, let us do it. 'Twill be better than any frisk, and not so dull neither; and as to the clays, 'tis but a step to your kiln at the pottery."

Dr. Johnson scowled; the ranting republican of the pottery was clearly before his eye. But Mr. Eden added his persuasions to mine, and Dr. Johnson, appealed to in the sacred name of his King, consented to sojourn in Chelsea till the dangerous week was past. For better obfuscation, 'twas given out to the gazettes that Dr. Sam: Johnson and Mr. James Boswell were gone down to Oxford upon a literary errand.

Mr. Eden's coach set us down in Paradise Row, Chelsea, without more delay. We found the frantick American calmly modelling the head of a Cherokee Sachem, pulling and pinching the softened wax. Her companion in the gracious panelled room was a lady, to whose charms I incontinently yielded my heart — Miss Flora Fleay, late of Drury Lane, tall, agreeably formed, with a countenance in which strong sense and caressing manners mingled. She greeted us with a suspiration of relief, Mistress Wright with a calm inclination of the head.

Seated hand in hand by the fire, an antient pair in Quaker garb greeted us not at all.

"Your servant, ma'am," says nearsighted Sam: Johnson, bowing to the aged lady.

"My old father and mother," said Mistress Wright, pointing towards them with a hand from which trailed plain ruffles rather the worse for draggling in wax. "Don't be ashamed of them because they look so —" the pair in question heard this extraordinary remark without moving a muscle — "they were good folks, they turned Quaker —"

I looked at the subject of this discourse. They were wax figures.

"They turned Quaker," Mistress Wright was rattling on, "and imbued me with their most excellent principles. I shall call thee Samuel."

"As you will, Mistress Wright," said Dr. Sam: Johnson wryly.

"Pray call me Patience. And thee, friend Boswell, what is thy name?"

"James."

"James, I desire thy better acquaintance. Don't despise these good old folk, they did well by their children, they would never let us eat meat, and that is the reason why we were all so ingenious. Thee has heard of the ingenious Mrs. Wright from America, I suppose?"

Dr. Sam: Johnson scowled like a thunder-cloud, as he did at every affectation of singularity; but Mistress Wright continued her discourse unabashed:

"And as to strong spirits, I do contemn 'em, holding that nothing so operates to void phlegm and clarify the intellects as prime lemonade, in a

glass of which I desire you'll join me."

I thought the lady's offer rhetorical; when to my surprise she absolutely extracted from her capacious pocket a pair of lemons, and loaf sugar in a twist, and then and there compounded for the gratified philosopher a glass of his favorite regale. Dr. Sam: Johnson assisted at the mysteries with complaisance.

I seized the opportunity with raised eyebrow to question my agreeable hostess. She nodded encouragingly in reply:

"Not out of my sight a moment since the General departed."

The secret, then, was still safe; our task to keep it so yet lay before us.

Dinner passed without incident, save that Mistress Wright, eating vast quantities of beet-root, favoured us with a discourse in support of abstaining from meat and monarchy. Only Johnson's desire to serve his King prevented him from denouncing the eccentrick American.

Dinner done, we returned to modelling in the parlour. Miss Fleay did me the honour to embark upon the task of reproducing my features; features which, she said civilly, 'twas an absolute duty to transmit to posterity, being indeed, I flatter myself, though not beautiful, yet strong and characteristick.

Mistress Wright had a mind to Dr. Johnson — "Dear creature, I must have his head" — but the Sachem was to be finished first. The hawk face was nigh completed by bed-time, but being yet to be coloured, looked something ghostly, like a Roman busto. We left it haunting the mantelpiece as we retired. With Mistress Wright went her woman, Mr. Eden's agent, a rosy pretty-face creature with the powerful person of a grenadier, to lie in the truckle-bed and keep the American spy under her eye till morning. Dr. Johnson carried me with him for a late stroll about the garden. On the back step sat the gardener's boy. At the locked front gate the gardener was consoling his vigil with a short pipe of tobacco. Our charge was safely surrounded till morning.

The morrow was Dr. Johnson's day at the Pottery. With more misgivings than I liked he consigned his charge to me, and stumped off towards Cheyne Walk with the gardener's boy carrying his basket behind.

I passed the day most agreeably in sensible feminine society. Much to my contentment, General B——— never appeared (and I may say that through all this adventure we never laid eyes on the rakish General). Miss Fleay devoted herself assiduously to her modelling, and the moulded wax began to take on something the semblance of James Boswell. Mistress Wright had forgotten the Sachem. She took a freak to form a candle like an effigy. She fetched a roll of wax from her apartment, where Eden's agent was, finally, getting her sleep.

"Foh, how that woman sleeps!" cried Mistress Wright, little dreaming that her companion had devoted the

night, not to sleep, but to surveillance.

Warming the wax by the fire, she began to pull and pinch it into the semblance of a blackamoor page. 'Twas a quaint and pretty thing, and when 'twas done at the day's end I longed to possess it. But 'twas not for me. The wax-worker wrapped it lovingly in a roll of silk, and carried it carefully off. I followed; except when retired, the lady was my charge. I found her tendering it, a folded billet, and a coin to the odd boy.

"Ma'am," said I, twitching the billet from the boy's hand, "allow *me* to be of service. I will myself take this billet in charge." I scanned the superscription: "To Joshua Fennel at the Cross Keys."

The sharp eyes measured me; the lady shrugged:

" 'Tis no matter. The boy may carry the gift, and my message by word of mouth."

I gave permission with a nod.

"Say from me," Mistress Wright instructed the boy, "I desire my gift may give him light for his business."

"With permission, ma'am —" said I, and boldly unfolded the billet.

'Twas not sealed. Perusing it took but a moment. Mistress Wright desired that her gift might give him light for his business, and remained his true Christian friend.

As I scanned the missive, Dr. Sam: Johnson turned in at the gate, followed by the freckle-face potter's devil carrying the basket.

"What's to do here," says he, "and whither goes the boy?"

He indicated our messenger, now scuffing his way without hurry down Paradise Row.

"He carries a specimen of Mistress Wright's workmanship," said I, "and a message from her mouth. We have thought best to retain the written billet."

Mistress Wright smiled serenely. Dr. Johnson, scanning the billet, bellowed like a bull.

"Stop him!"

It was the freckle-face potter's lad who caught him. I was close on his heels, and had the candle out of his hand in a trice.

Mistress Wright's smile was not quite so serene; but with a fair grace she returned to the fire in the sitting-room. We left her under Miss Fleay's eye, and retired with Mistress Wright's pretty candle.

" 'Tis a shame," said Dr. Johnson, regarding it, "and yet it must be done."

He shattered it. It would have cast light on the rebels' business indeed — at its core was a rolled missive:

"Pray acquaint Mr. Franklin at Passy that a new British thrust will be launched —"

"This secret is not ours," said Johnson, and to my inexpressible disappointment cast the paper into the fire.

Mistress Patience's demeanour matched her name. She conceded us the first trick, and sat serenely by the fire patting and pulling her Sachem into shape. We'd a fine dish of jugged

hare to our dinner. As we relished it, Mistress Wright, eating roast potatoes, denounced us as no better than Society Islanders, that eat our fellow-creatures.

"Ma'am," says Johnson, his mouth full of hare, "you frantick republicans would upset the order and subordination of nature. And with Heaven's help, I shall myself endeavour to forfend the day."

"Thee will fail," said Mistress Wright cheerfully; "for ingenuity, he who is full of meat is no match for him who is nourisht with sallets; more especially when his cause is just."

Dr. Johnson choaked with indignation and jugged hare.

Mistress Wright carried the Sachem's head early to her chamber; her woman was at her heels. All retired betimes.

I was waked from my first light sleep by a knocking at our door. 'Twas the pretty-face grenadier, in a taking.

"Sir, she's dead. She don't breathe. Pray, pray, come to our chamber."

We struck flame to the candle, huddled on our cloathes, and ran to Mistress Wright's bed-chamber. There was the disarrayed truckle bed, as the woman had risen from it. In the shadow of the bed-curtains a figure lay motionless.

Johnson held the candle to the still face, the lappets of the night-cap falling on the high cheek-bones and sharpening the look of the nose. He touched the cold cheek. The head rolled sidewise — and kept on rolling. 'Twas severed from the trunk!

"Tschah," said Johnson, "this trick is as old as time."

He stripped back the cloathes and revealed the rolled bolster. The waxen Sachem's head fell to the ground and shattered.

"She's slipped between your fingers, woman," said he sternly to the distrest secret agent. "We must find her before she gets clear away."

"Nay, Sir, I have only nodded a moment; she cannot be far."

We ran down the stair. In the morning-room a light shewed. At Miss Fleay's writing-bureau, engaged with pen and ink, sat Mistress Wright. She had been taking refreshment, for the half of a lemon was at her elbow, and her start as we rushed in precipitated to the floor a glass half full.

"I rejoice, ma'am," said Dr. Johnson cordially, "to see that you are safe. You have given us all a turn. Pray, ma'am, allow me to escort you to your chamber."

Mistress Wright hesitated; then a second time conceded defeat. She deliberately tore into strips the written paper before her, and tossed it into the fire.

"Your most obliged, Sir," said she statelily, and laid her large well-formed hand on my friend's wrist.

The next morning the forgiving Quakeress addressed herself to the design of "having Dr. Johnson's head." She proposed to possess herself

of this desirable item by means of a life mask, the secret of which she was famed to have brought to a fine art. As upon her late lamented decease her secret died with her, I will endeavour to gratify the publick by detailing her proceedings.

To begin, then, the sturdy philosopher was denuded of his upper garments and placed supine upon a couch. The application of hog's lard followed, an operation which my friend only endured with much mumbling and grumbling. He redoubled his complaints when the fair artist inserted in his nostrils two stout straws to afford him breath during the remainder of the process. Now a thin grout was swiftly plastered over his countenance, stilling his mouth and sealing his eyes in the operation. Mistress Wright worked swiftly and silently. Thinly and evenly covered with grout, the face looked ghastly as a spectre; and Mistress Wright proceeded to chill my marrow the more by swathing the corpse-like jaw with such a fold of linen as is commonly used to bind the jaws of the dead in their winding-sheets. I shuddered silently.

Dr. Johnson lay like a Stoick as succeeding layers of grout were laid on, till the mask was so thick it lost all human form.

And three minutes after the last smear was applied, all was hard and ready to remove in two neat pieces.

"Faugh," said Dr. Sam: Johnson, sitting up, red in the face and glistening with hog's lard, "'tis too much like being buried alive; yet I rejoiced, in my prison, that my friend Boswell was by to effect my release if need arose."

"Sir," said I, acknowledging the tribute, "you may rely upon my vigilance."

"I design to do so," replied Johnson as Mistress Wright retired, "for today is my day at the pottery. Pray be more wary than last time."

Shamefacedly I promised, and pursued Mistress Wright below-stairs.

I was privileged to see Mistress Wright test her handiwork. This she did by closely pressing into the mould a thin shell of softened wax, working it into every crevice. With a kind of handle of wax she withdrew a perfect waxen mask of my revered friend's features.

"Bravo!" I cried. "The likeness is speaking! Pray, could not you gratify me with a copy?"

"Thee shall have it, James," promised the hearty Quakeress.

So saying, she summoned her woman to assist her, and disappeared with her into her own domain.

That morning saw the completion of the waxen busto of James Boswell; and I do verily believe that as fair Miss Flora's hand shaped my image in the pliable wax, so the same image was impressed upon her heart, erasing therefrom in some measure the gaudy figure of indiscreet General B— ——.

Once I thought good to oversee the proceedings of Mistress Wright; but I found her calmly seated in her own

apartment, applying the colourings of life to the waxen mask of my friend, while her woman sat stolidly by; so I returned to more congenial company.

At dinner Johnson was not by; but shortly after, I saw his familiar figure sitting in the wing chair by the fire, holding a book so close before his eyes as to brush his very eye-lashes. Mistress Wright's woman went to her dinner. It was with pleasure that I saw Mistress Wright take the opposing chair by the fire, with a cordial word that my friend, absorbed in his book, neglected to answer. I was free to walk in the garden with Miss Flora.

What was my surprize, then, as we came round the house, to see Mistress Wright, unattended, slipping down the walk with a covered basket on her arm. As I followed, I was still more thunderstruck to see Dr. Sam: Johnson approaching from the direction of Cheyne Walk. He met her as she left the gate.

"Well met, Mistress Wright. Allow me to relieve you of your burden. Whither do we carry it?"

Her countenance changed no more than the waxen Sachem's which it resembled.

"To the pottery, friend Samuel."

He bowed and handed her with courtly mien. I was glad to make one in the expedition, having been a prisoner in the house since our vigil started.

I shuddered as we passed Dr. Driffield's private mad-house, euphemistically denominated "the Academy". We turned into Lawrence Street, passed the sign of the Cross Keys, and came to the Chelsea China Manufactory.

The potters looked their surprise at seeing Dr. Sam: Johnson so precipitately returned; but among the mixing-rooms he had a cubicle of his own, and thither we turned our steps. The fire still burned on the hearth to give us warmth. Mistress Wright set down her basket, which Dr. Johnson officiously undertook to turn out. 'Twas filled with rumpled old gazettes.

Dr. Johnson carefully uncovered the white unblemished wasp's-nest shape, and set it to one side, scanning each gazette with care. Though he could detect no scribbled word, he prudently consigned all to the flames. Now for the first time I saw Mistress Wright's Red-Indian composure broken. She snatched ineffectually at his hand; the tears started in her eyes as the flames took the gazettes, and we saw the brown spidery writing start up with the heat.

"I thought so," said Dr. Sam: Johnson with satisfaction. "Lemonade indeed! You have been writing with it, ma'am, not quaffing it; and I counsel you to turn your attention to good roast meat, if you expect to prevail at this game."

"I will do so," said the angry rebel between her teeth, "and I will prevail."

I heard with satisfaction the instructions issued to the freckle-face boy for

preserving the mould that should gratify me with a busto of my illustrious friend; and then we walked back towards Paradise Row in the falling twilight.

At home a new wonder awaited me. I entered the drawing-room with my illustrious friend, in his snuff-colour suit and second-best wig; and there, in second-best brown suit and best wig, holding the book to his eyes, he sat in the wing chair by the fire! I looked from the Johnson at my elbow to the Johnson by the fire, and realized how I had been duped by the wily rebel and her wax-works. But for my wilier friend, I had permitted to happen the catastrophe we sought to avoid!

Sternly admonished, the waiting-woman sat up through the night, and Mistress Wright was for the nonce muzzled. On the morrow, it seemed, she took Dr. Johnson's advice; for when Mistress Wright joined us at table for the mid-day meal, her woman whispered me that she had spent the morning dressing a roast duck!

"So, ma'am," I rallied the lady, "you have become converted to our way of thinking, and have drest a succulent roast duck, which no doubt we are now about to sample."

"No, sir," replied she readily, though I thought she looked put about, "for nothing less than sweet charity would I require a fellow-creature to give up its life. 'Tis for a poor man, lies ill at the Cross Keys."

"I applaud your benevolence, ma'am," says Johnson, "and desire to imitate it. Come, let us all go down to the Cross Keys."

Accordingly the duck was fetched in its basket, covered by a linen napkin.

"Ma'am," says Johnson, peeking and sniffing the tempting aroma, "pray tell me, how have you stuft this tender fellow-creature?"

He probed at the filled cavity with his finger, and tasted the fragrant stuffing.

"This is too bad of thee, Samuel!" cried charitable Mistress Wright. "Think of the poor man!"

"He'll not grudge me a bite," says Johnson coolly, and pulled out a handful of dressing. Something came with it — a billet, folded small and tied with packthread. Johnson's smile became broad.

"Fie!" he cried. "How came this waste paper to mar such a dish!"

He tossed it in the fire, where it spluttered and flared to nothing in an odour of burning grease. Mistress Wright turned on her heel and left the roast duck to an inevitable fate.

There was no poor man ill at the Cross Keys, so much we learned of Eden's agents; neither had Joshua Fennel ever been heard of. Dr. Sam: Johnson muttered to himself upon this intelligence, and resolved to go no more to the Pottery until the matter was safely concluded. It fell to my lot to carry his commissions to the potters.

"At Dr. Johnson's service, Mr. Boswell," said the master potter, "and pray say to him, we deeply regret the accidental destruction of his mould, and desire he'll soon commission another —"

"Destruction!" I cried. "Is the mould destroyed, and no copy taken off?"

"Aye, with a pox on Josh and his clumsy fingers."

"He deserves," I cried, "to be soundly swinged."

"And swinged he shall be, when once I can lay my hands on him. Pray say so to Dr. Johnson."

Upon receipt of this bad news, Mistress Wright was eager to set about making a new mould; but Dr. Sam: Johnson incontinently refused.

"No, ma'am; you'll stop up my eyes no more."

Mistress Wright thereupon sulked; she sat with folded hands, and would not partake of the convivial punch which Miss Fleay that night brewed. Casting off care in the presence of my penetrating friend, I sped the hours in gallant drinking of healths; Miss Fleay and I were merry together; I felt the shadow of General B——— totally withdrawn, and longed to take his place with the lady that night. But, foxed though I was, duty restrained me; I left Miss Fleay to the punch, and Mistress Wright to the care of her woman, and followed my respected friend to our chamber.

He scowled upon me; I felt an uneasy sense of having exceeded prudence. I slumped on the bed.

"Resume your coat, sir," said he, "and stand up, if you can. I am uneasy for the safety of our secret, and mean to keep watch tonight."

We tiptoed down the stair and took up our stand in the garden under the American's window. A light showed, and two figures moved in the room. The curtains were drawn; in a little the light was extinguished. Then nothing, only darkness. A great drowse fell upon me. I cannot say how long I floated in it, but I know I was brought back with the jerk of a thumb in my ribs. Down the wisteria vine that rose to the window was clambering the figure of a man.

We closed in upon the spot where the intruder must take to the ground; when with a savage leap the dark figure hurled itself down from above our heads, dashed us momentarily to the ground, and made off towards the stables.

In a trice Johnson had recovered himself, pulled me to my feet, and reached the stable door in time to see the man leap to the bare back of Miss Fleay's own horse and ride out at the opened door. There was nothing to do but follow suit. Johnson must have got the General's horse — I marvelled at the agility with which he kept his seat on the mettlesome creature, holding to the halter with one hand. I followed riding loose and reckless on a less fleet creature.

There was no sound in Paradise Row save the sound of galloping hoofs. For the moment the stranger

had the start of us. Then we began to gain. At the corner of Cheyne Walk the rider ahead passed under the street-lamp, and we saw the hawk-like profile and the piercing eyes — 'twas the Quakeress herself in male attire! Though she rode with reckless skill, we were still gaining as we gallopped in a string up Cheyne Walk. There were lights in the private mad-house; I shuddered to think of the wretches incarcerated there.

"This is too dangerous," shouted Johnson over his shoulder. "If we cannot confine the frantick rebel one way, we must try another."

Before I could divine his meaning he had flung his pocket knife boldly through the closed window of Driffield's Academy. It brought the attendants to the gates in a trice; they were after us, hallooed on by Johnson, as we overhauled our quarry at the foot of Cheyne Row.

Johnson pulled down the horse she was riding. She sat erect and impassive as the mad-house attendants came level with us. Then the boldness of Johnson's scheam, so suddenly formed in his mind, became apparent.

"Alack, gentlemen," his Lichfield burr was suddenly strong, "I fear we have arouzed you late. This frantick wife of mine —" Patience Wright suddenly looked full at him with startled gaze — "this frantick poor creature should have been consigned to your care at a more reasonable hour, but that she suddenly gave us the slip at the ordinary and escaped in my attire as you see —"

I looked at her garb. It was indeed Dr. Johnson's second-best brown.

"Pray conduct us to Dr. Driffield."

I saw defeat in the American's eye; but I reckoned without her bold slyness. Narrowly watched by the attendants, and with one of us on each side, she was conducted through the portals of the mad-house, and the heavy door swung to behind us. Dr. Driffield received us, rubbing his fat hands.

"Hark ye, Doctor," said Mistress Wright, cool and collected, "a word in your ear. I am your debtor for delivering me, for yonder husband of mine —" impudently indicating Johnson — "is mad as the wind, and a sly madman he is. Coming hither to consign him to your care, he found means at the ordinary to deprive me of my attire and confine me. I gave him the slip in a suit of his cloathes, but he was nigh catching me, and it had gone hard with me but for a fortunate chance — in a fit of madness he flung a missile through your window, and so it chanced that your keepers have laid him by the heels. I beg you'll not credit his sly lies; for yonder lies his missile —" she nodded to it where it lay on the floor — "and the better to assure you he's mad indeed, he imagines himself in his phrenzy to be one of London's most famous men.

Johnson was indeed inflating himself to thunder out a denial of this impudent fabrication.

"Sir," he began, "I am Samuel Johnson —"

"Is it likely?" counters this impudent American. "Has Sam: Johnson a wife? Nay, is Sam: Johnson in London? You know from the gazettes he is gone to Oxford."

Dr. Driffield, alas, proved to be a great reader of the gazettes.

"True, ma'am," says he.

"I am Sam: Johnson," said my friend calmly, "and there are weighty reasons of state why this mad-woman must be confined."

"Be perswaded, sir," I cried, "this is indeed the Great Lexicographer, and I am James Boswell, at your service."

Unfortunately our midnight dash had discommoded my vitals. I hiccupped. Mistress Wright turned to me with scorn.

"What, Thomas!" she cried. "Is this the part of one who has been in my service, man and boy, for fourteen years! Take care, sirrah, you'll lose my favour. You have been bought by this old reprobate, 'tis clear—"

The hiccup did my business. Dr. Driffield used his own nose, and put me down for the drunken serving-man she made me seem.

"Away with them, men," says he.

"I'll not stir till this woman is confined," cried Johnson stoutly.

The fat doctor looked on him sourly. The American woman might have got clear off, had she but let well enough alone. But when one of the hulking mad-keepers laid a doubtful hand on her arm, she lost her head.

"Touch me," she cried defiantly, "at your peril; the Queen is my friend."

"You see," said Johnson to the mad-doctor, "her brain is addled."

Driffield looked from one to the other of us in perplexity.

"They're all mad," he decided. "Let them be confined."

I stared aghast as my revered friend was seized; while Johnson held the American spy in a grip of iron. Clearly so long as she was confined he had no care for us.

For four-and-twenty hours I saw my friend no more. Dawn came on, and with it thoughts as painful as the head they filled.

The sun was high when one of the mad-keepers gingerly thrust some hard bread and a bowl of water between the bars.

The hours dragged on. As my head cleared from the fumes of the punch, I began to feel a savage hunger. I would gladly have devoured Mistress Wright's roast duck, secret writings and all, if I could have come by it. The thought of the duck recalled to me the task we had set ourselves, and I rejoiced that even at this cost we had found a way to confine the frantick rebel with her secret still undivulged. Let her remain under restraint until the moment of danger should be past.

Nevertheless, I had scarce resigned myself to a like fate for myself and my friend. As my head cleared, I resolved to strike a stroke for freedom. When the burly mad-keeper returned at sun-down, I was ready for him.

"What say you," said I persuasively

through the bars, "to a handful of broad pieces?"

I saw in his eye that the mad-keeper could be bought; but he was wary.

"You've never a handful of broad pieces about you," he muttered, measuring my garb.

"True for you," said I; "but hark'ee, friend, my master has a purse of golden guineas in the keeping of the landlord of the Cross Keys; how if I was to come to him and say, my master sent for 'em? We should have the dividing of 'em between us."

"Done," said the mad-keeper instantly, and added slyly: "We'll go together."

I could hope for no better. The mad-keeper instantly set me free, and led the way through a tangle of outbuildings towards Lawrence Street and the Cross Keys. I kept ever alert to give my conductor the slip; but he pressed along with his arm linked in mine, and I was a prisoner still. Before the Cross Keys we halted.

"We must not enter together," said I with firmness. "The landlord will scarce yield the bag of guineas if I come with an accomplice at my elbow. Do you go in and bespeak a pot; I'll follow, get the swag, and join you as if by chance."

"Ye'll make off, ye mean," rasped the mad-keeper with a cunning look. "No, no, me lad; do *you* go in, and I'll follow. And look ye don't get out of my sight."

I shrugged, and went in.

"Hark'ee, landlord," I began to speak quietly and hastily to the thin needle-nose little man at the bar. But for him the smoky dark-panelled room was empty. He looked at me with disfavour. I saw in his eyes as in a mirror how I must look, rumpled, pasty-faced from punch and lack of sleep, and my heart sank. Over his shoulder I saw the door open, and in came the mad-keeper. He grinned evilly at me, and took up a post of vigilance on the settle by the fire.

The landlord listened to my muttered plea without change of expression, and then shook his head. He absolutely refused to send a messenger all the way to Whitehall. He seemed apprehensive that I was the advance guard of the running smobble.

"Then pray, landlord," I shifted my ground, "pray let the pot-boy be sent no further than Miss Fleay's in Paradise Row, I'll engage he'll be well paid for his trouble."

The landlord continued to look at me, impassive.

"The lady affects me," I lied desperately. " 'Tis an *affaire du coeur*, 'pon honour, landlord, do but befriend me, you'll be well rewarded, pray let me have ink and paper and the pot-boy to carry my billet."

The sharp little face suddenly split in a wide smile. There was not a tooth in the grinning gums.

"Faith, lad, if 'tis the heart is in it, I'll befriend thee," lisped he, "being myself a great sufferer from the tender passion."

He set paper and pen before me.

As I dipped the quill, he set himself with relish to peer over my shoulder and enjoy the composition of my *billet doux*. I ground my teeth, and wrote:

"Honour'd Madam:

He who loves you better than life, acquaints you that our time is ripe, for my schoolmaster Mr. J. is detained in Cheyne Walk, at the Academy, whence he will scarce come off with ease. Pray be circumspect, for should Eden hear of this he would enlarge him instanter. You take my meaning. I am detained at the Cross Keys by a bailiff — [The landlord glanced at my mad-keeper, and then back to me, and shook his head commiseratingly, as if to communicate the sympathy of a fellow-sufferer equally from bailiffs and the tender passion] — but I will take what means I may to give him the slip and come to you, whereby we may have the consolation of one another's company.

Thine till death,

J. B."

The pot-boy was rouzed from the kitchen ingle-nook, and off he went for Paradise Row. I returned willy-nilly to my mad-keeper, and told him the first tale that came to my head, that mine host had sent for the keys, and the guineas should shortly be ours. The man scowled into his pot.

Now up comes mine host, and with a wink to me, sets out to ply the sullen mad-keeper with liquor, lacing his pots with gin with the liberal hand of a friend to lovers. Four pots later the boy returned with a verbal message: "The lady bids me say, she takes your meaning, and will deal with your schoolmaster." The mad-keeper was too owlishly drunk to do more than blink foolishly. A few moments more, and his head dropped to the table. With a broad grin full of gums the landlord jerked his head in signal, and I was off in a trice. I came into Cheyne Walk just as Sir William Eden descended from his carriage at the mad-doctor's door. Soon my learned friend was once more at liberty, no whit the worse for his Academic sojourn, he having born it as a philosopher.

That day week, all danger past, we were once more at Dr. Driffield's door, and the frantick American, still wearing Dr. Johnson's second-best brown, was in her turn enlarged.

"No hard feelings, ma'am," said Dr. Johnson; "we have gained time, and time fights for the King."

"I'll kiss thee farewell," replied Mistress Wright, smiling, "in token of Christian forgiveness."

Dr. Johnson, magnanimous in victory, bore her Christian salute with a good grace.

We saw no more of the American wax-worker; but as Christmas came on we had a message from her.

"I am to say from the lady," said the messenger, "she desires it may cast light upon your business."

We stared upon the message, a slab

of such petrified grout as had formed the ill-fated life-mask of the Great Lexicographer.

"This is an Egyptian message," puzzled I as the messenger withdrew. "I can make nothing of this."

"It comes with the candle-message," mused Johnson. "We shattered the candle; are we to shatter this as well?"

BOSWELL: "Will it shatter like wax?"

JOHNSON: "The mould was shattered. The mould . . . Stay, Mr. Boswell, you oversaw its making, pray detail to me the manner of it."

BOSWELL: "Well, sir, she smeared your face with grout, and braced it with a fold of linen —"

JOHNSON: "A fold of linen! Why did I not hear of this?"

BOSWELL: "Nay, sir, you were by."

JOHNSON: "I was by! Deafened and blinded with grout! *'Twas the message!*"

BOSWELL: "Nay, sir, the linen was blank."

JOHNSON: "Blank! Tschah! 'Twas writ in secret ink. The Americans have had the secret after all!"

Angrily he dashed the slab to the hearth. It shattered. Folded within lay a strip of linen protecting a slip of paper. The paper was from that day's gazette:

"We are advized from New-York, that Lieutenant-general John Burgoyne —"

"Of course," remarked Johnson, "Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne. Who else would take a lady of Drury Lane into keeping while great events depended?"

"— Lieutenant-general John Burgoyne with 6,000 men has surrendered to the rebels near Saratoga in the Province of New-York. This stroke has much heartened the rebels, and 'tis thought that his Majesty the King of France will now conclude an alliance . . ."

Johnson threw down the item in disgust, and picked up the linen. Written on it in a curiously rusty-looking stuff was a letter from the American spy:

"Sir,

Pray accept of my acknowledgements for the help Dr. Johnson lately rendered the glorious cause of Liberty, in transporting with his own hand, the mould which carried that most necessary communication to Mr. Franklin, into the hands of my accomplice the potter's boy. The comedy of the mad-house served to keep the minions of the King amused until the boy had made the best of his way out of the country. How well he did his part, this glorious victory of Saratoga attests. With the blessings of a great and grateful nation, I am,

Sir,

Your oblig'd humble servant,

PATIENCE WRIGHT"

THE DAUPHIN'S DOLL

by ELLERY QUEEN

THERE IS A LAW among story-tellers, originally passed by Editors at the cries (they say) of their constituents, which states that stories about Christmas shall have Children in them. This Christmas story is no exception; indeed, misopedists will complain that we have overdone it. And we confess in advance that this is also a story about Dolls, and that Santa Claus comes into it, and even a Thief; though as to this last, whoever he was — and that was one of the questions — he was certainly not Barabbas, even parabolically.

Another section of the statute governing Christmas stories provides that they shall incline toward Sweetness and Light. The first arises, of course, from the orphans and the never-souring savor of the annual Miracle; as for Light, it will be provided at the end, as usual, by that luminous prodigy, Ellery Queen. The reader of gloomier temper will also find a large measure of Darkness, in the person and works of one who, at least in Inspector Queen's harassed view, was surely the winged Prince of that region. His name, by the way, was not Satan, it was Comus; and this is paradox enow, since the original Comus, as everyone knows, was the god of festive joy and mirth, emotions not commonly associated with the Underworld. As Ellery struggled to embrace his phantom foe, he puzzled over this *non sequitur* in vain; in vain, that is, until Nikki Porter, no scorner of the obvious, suggested that he *might* seek the answer where any ordinary mortal would go at once. And there, to the great man's mortification, it was indeed to be found: On page 262b of Volume 6, *Coleb to Damasci*, of the 175th Anniversary edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. A French conjuror of that name, performing in London in the year 1789, caused his wife to vanish from the top of a table — the very first time, it appeared, that this feat, uxorial or otherwise, had been accomplished without the aid of mirrors. To track his dark adversary's *nom de nuit* to its historic lair gave Ellery his only glint of satisfaction until that blessed moment when light burst all around him and exorcised the darkness, Prince and all.

But this is chaos.

Our story properly begins not with our invisible character but with our dead one.

Miss Ypson had not always been dead; *au contraire*. She had lived for seventy-eight years, for most of them breathing hard. As her father used to remark, "She was a very active little verb." Miss Ypson's father was a professor of Greek at a small Midwestern university. He had conju-

gated his daughter with the rather bewildered assistance of one of his brawnier students, an Iowa poultry heiress.

Professor Ypson was a man of distinction. Unlike most professors of Greek, he was a Greek professor of Greek, having been born Gerasymos Aghamos Ypsilonomon in Polykhnitos, on the island of Mytilini, "where," he was fond of recalling on certain occasions, "burning Sappho loved and sung" — a quotation he found unfailingly useful in his extracurricular activities; and, the Hellenic ideal notwithstanding, Professor Ypson believed wholeheartedly in immoderation in all things. This hereditary and cultural background explains the professor's interest in fatherhood — to his wife's chagrin, for Mrs. Ypson's own breeding prowess was confined almost exclusively to the barnyards on which her income was based; he held their daughter to be nothing less than a biological miracle.

The professor's mental processes also tended to confuse Mrs. Ypson. She never ceased to wonder why, instead of shortening his name to Ypson, her husband had not sensibly changed it to Jones. "My dear," the professor once replied, "you are an Iowa snob." "But nobody," Mrs. Ypson cried, "can spell it or pronounce it!" "This is a cross," murmured Professor Ypson, "which we must bear with Ypsilanti." "Oh," said Mrs. Ypson.

There was invariably something Sibylline about his conversation. His favorite adjective for his wife was "ypsiliform," a term, he explained, which referred to the germinal spot at one of the fecundation stages in a ripening egg and which was, therefore, exquisitely à propos. Mrs. Ypson continued to look bewildered; she died at an early age.

And the professor ran off with a Kansas City variety girl of considerable talent, leaving his baptized chick to be reared by an eggish relative of her mother's, named Jukes.

The only time Miss Ypson heard from her father — except when he wrote charming and erudite little notes requesting, as he termed it, *lucrum* — was in the fourth decade of his Odyssey, when he sent her a handsome addition to her collection, a terra cotta play doll of Greek origin over three thousand years old which, unhappily, Miss Ypson felt duty-bound to return to the Brooklyn museum from which it had unaccountably vanished. The note accompanying her father's gift had said, whimsically: "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"

There was poetry behind Miss Ypson's dolls. At her birth the professor, ever harmonious, signalized his devotion to fecundity by naming her Cytherea. This proved the Olympian irony. For, it turned out, her father's philoprogenitiveness throbbed frustrate in her mother's stony womb: even though Miss Ypson interred five husbands of quite adequate vigor, she remained infertile to the

end of her days. Hence it is classically tragic to find her, when all passion was spent, a sweet little old lady with a vague if eager smile who, under the name of her father, pattered about a vast and echoing New York apartment playing enthusiastically with dolls.

In the beginning they were dolls of common clay: a Billiken, a kewpie, a Kathe Kruse, a Patsy, a Foxy Grandpa, and so forth. But then, as her need increased, Miss Ypson began her fierce sack of the past.

Down into the land of Pharaoh she went for two pieces of thin desiccated board, carved and painted and with hair of strung beads, and legless — so that they might not run away — which any connoisseur will tell you are the most superb specimens of ancient Egyptian paddle doll extant, far superior to those in the British Museum, although this fact will be denied in certain quarters.

Miss Ypson unearthed a foremother of "Letitia Penn," until her discovery held to be the oldest doll in America, having been brought to Philadelphia from England in 1699 by William Penn as a gift for a playmate of his small daughter's. Miss Ypson's find was a wooden-hearted "little lady" in brocade and velvet which had been sent by Sir Walter Raleigh to the first English child born in the New World. Since Virginia Dare had been born in 1587, not even the Smithsonian dared impugn Miss Ypson's triumph.

On the old lady's racks, in her plate-glass cases, might be seen the wealth of a thousand childhoods, and some riches — for such is the genetics of dolls — possessed by children grown. Here could be found "fashion babies" from fourteenth century France, sacred dolls of the Orange Free State Fingo tribe, Satsuma paper dolls and court dolls from old Japan, beady-eyed "Kalifa" dolls of the Egyptian Sudan, Swedish birch-bark dolls, "Katcina" dolls of the Hopis, mammoth-tooth dolls of the Eskimos, feather dolls of the Chippewa, tumble dolls of the ancient Chinese, Coptic bone dolls, Roman dolls dedicated to Diana, *pantin* dolls which had been the street toys of Parisian exquisites before Madame Guillotine swept the boulevards, early Christian dolls in their *crèches* representing the Holy Family — to specify the merest handful of Miss Ypson's Briarean collection. She possessed dolls of pasteboard, dolls of animal skin, spool dolls, crab-claw dolls, eggshell dolls, cornhusk dolls, rag dolls, pine-cone dolls with moss hair, stocking dolls, dolls of *bisque*, dolls of palm leaf, dolls of *papier-mâché*, even dolls made of seed pods. There were dolls forty inches tall, and there were dolls so little Miss Ypson could hide them in her gold thimble.

Cytherea Ypson's collection bestrode the centuries and took tribute of history. There was no greater — not the fabled playthings of Montezuma, or Victoria's, or Eugene Field's; not the collection at the Metropolitan, or the South Kensington, or the

royal palace in old Bucharest, or anywhere outside the enchantment of little girls' dreams.

It was made of Iowan eggs and the Attic shore, corn-fed and myrtle-clothed; and it brings us at last to Attorney John Somerset Bondling and his visit to the Queen residence one December twenty-third not so very long ago.

DECEMBER THE TWENTY-THIRD is ordinarily not a good time to seek the Queens. Inspector Richard Queen likes his Christmas oldfashioned; his turkey stuffing, for instance, calls for twenty-two hours of over-all preparation and some of its ingredients are not readily found at the corner grocer's. And Ellery is a frustrated gift-wrapper. For a month before Christmas he turns his sleuthing genius to tracking down unusual wrapping papers, fine ribbons, and artistic stickers; and he spends the last two days creating beauty.

So it was that when Attorney John S. Bondling called, Inspector Queen was in his kitchen, swathed in a barbecue apron, up to his elbows in *fines herbes*, while Ellery, behind the locked door of his study, composed a secret symphony in glittering fuchsia metallic paper, forest-green moiré ribbon, and pine cones.

"It's almost useless," shrugged Nikki, studying Attorney Bondling's card, which was as crackly-looking as Attorney Bondling. "You say you know the Inspector, Mr. Bondling?"

"Just tell him Bondling the estate lawyer," said Bondling neurotically. "Park Row. He'll know."

"Don't blame me," said Nikki, "if you wind up in his stuffing. Goodness knows he's used everything else." And she went for Inspector Queen.

While she was gone, the study door opened noiselessly for one inch. A suspicious eye reconnoitered from the crack.

"Don't be alarmed," said the owner of the eye, slipping through the crack and locking the door hastily behind him. "Can't trust them, you know. Children, just children."

"Children!" Attorney Bondling snarled. "You're Ellery Queen, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Interested in youth? Christmas? Orphans, dolls, that sort of thing?" Mr. Bondling went on in a remarkably nasty way.

"I suppose so."

"The more fool you. Ah, here's your father. Inspector Queen —!"

"Oh, that Bondling," said the old gentleman absently, shaking his visitor's hand. "My office called to say someone was coming up. Here, use my handkerchief; that's a bit of turkey liver. Know my son? His secretary, Miss Porter? What's on your mind, Mr. Bondling?"

"Inspector, I'm handling the Cytherea Ypson estate, and —"

"Cytherea Ypson," frowned the Inspector. "Oh, yes. She died only recently."

"Leaving me with the headache," said Mr. Bondling bitterly, "of disposing of her Dollection."

"Her what?" asked Ellery.

"Dolls — collection. Dollection. She coined the word."

Ellery strolled over to his armchair.

"Do I take this down?" sighed Nikki.

"Dollection," said Ellery.

"Spent about thirty years at it. Dolls!"

"Yes, Nikki, take it down."

"Well, well, Mr. Bondling," said Inspector Queen. "What's the problem? Christmas comes but once a year, you know."

"Will provides the Dollection be sold at auction," grated the attorney, "and the proceeds used to set up a fund for orphan children. I'm holding the public sale right after New Year's."

"Dolls and orphans, eh?" said the Inspector, thinking of Javanese black pepper and Country Gentleman Seasoning Salt.

"That's *nice*," beamed Nikki.

"Oh, is it?" said Mr. Bondling softly. "Apparently, young woman, you've never tried to satisfy a Surrogate. I've administered estates for nineteen years without a whisper against me, but let an estate involve the interests of just one little fatherless child, and you'd think from the Surrogate's attitude I was Bill Sykes himself!"

"My stuffing," began the Inspector.

"I've had those dolls catalogued. The result is ominous! Did you know there's no set market for the damnable things? And aside from a few personal possessions, the Dollection constitutes the old lady's entire estate. Sank every nickel she had in it."

"But it should be worth a fortune," remarked Ellery.

"To whom, Mr. Queen? Museums always want such things as free and unencumbered gifts. I tell you, except for one item, those hypothetical orphans won't realize enough from that sale to keep them in — in bubble gum for two days!"

"Which item would that be, Mr. Bondling?"

"Number Six-seventy-four," the lawyer snapped. "This one."

"Number Six-seventy-four," read Inspector Queen from the fat catalogue Bondling had fished out of a large greatcoat pocket. "The Dauphin's Doll. Unique. Ivory figure of a boy Prince eight inches tall, clad in court dress, genuine ermine, brocade, velvet. Court sword in gold strapped to waist. Gold circlet crown surmounted by single blue brilliant diamond of finest water, weight approximately 49 carats —"

"How many carats?" exclaimed Nikki.

"Larger than the *Hope* and the *Star of South Africa*," said Ellery, with a certain excitement.

"— appraised," continued his father, "at one hundred and ten thousand dollars."

"Expensive dollie."

"Indecent!" said Nikki.

"This indecent — I mean exquisite royal doll," the Inspector read on, "was a birthday gift from King Louis XVI of France to Louis Charles, his second son, who became dauphin at the death of his elder brother in 1789. The little dauphin was proclaimed Louis XVII by the royalists during the French Revolution while in custody of the *sans-culottes.* His fate is shrouded in mystery. Romantic, historic item."

"*Le prince perdu.* I'll say," muttered Ellery. "Mr. Bondling, is this on the level?"

"I'm an attorney, not an antiquarian," snapped their visitor. "There are documents attached, one of them a sworn statement — holograph — by Lady Charlotte Atkyns, the English actress-friend of the Capet family — she was in France during the Revolution — or purporting to be in Lady Atkyns's hand. It doesn't matter, Mr. Queen. Even if the history is bad, the diamond's good!"

"I take it this hundred-and-ten-thousand-dollar dollie constitutes the bone, as it were, or that therein lies the rub?"

"You said it!" cried Mr. Bondling, cracking his knuckles in a sort of agony. "For my money the Dauphin's Doll is the only negotiable asset of that collection. And what's the old lady do? She provides by will that on the day preceding Christmas the Cytherea Ypson Dollection is to be publicly displayed . . . on the main floor of Nash's Department Store! *The day before Christmas, gentlemen!* Think of it!"

"But why?" asked Nikki, puzzled.

"Why? Who knows why? For the entertainment of New York's army of little beggars, I suppose! Have you any notion how many peasants pass through Nash's on the day before Christmas? My cook tells me — she's a very religious woman — it's like Armageddon."

"Day before Christmas," frowned Ellery. "That's tomorrow."

"It does sound chancy," said Nikki anxiously. Then she brightened. "Oh, well, maybe Nash's won't cooperate, Mr. Bondling."

"Oh, won't they!" howled Mr. Bondling. "Why, old lady Ypson had this stunt cooked up with that gang of peasant-purveyors for years! They've been snapping at my heels ever since the day she was put away!"

"It'll draw every crook in New York," said the Inspector, his gaze on the kitchen door.

"Orphans," said Nikki. "The orphans' interests *must* be protected." She looked at her employer accusingly.

"Special measures, dad," he said.

"Sure, sure," said the Inspector, rising. "Don't you worry about this, Mr. Bondling. Now if you'll be kind enough to excu —"

"Inspector Queen," hissed Mr. Bondling, leaning forward tensely, "that is not all."

"Ah," said Ellery briskly, lighting a cigaret. "There's a specific villain

in this piece, Mr. Bondling, and you know who he is."

"I do," said the lawyer hollowly, "and then again I don't. I mean, it's Comus."

"*Comus!*" the Inspector screamed.

"Comus?" said Ellery slowly.

"Comus?" said Nikki. "Who dat?"

"Comus," nodded Mr. Bondling. "First thing this morning. Marched right into my office, bold as day — must have followed me, I hadn't got my coat off, my secretary wasn't even in. Marched in and tossed this card on my desk."

Ellery seized it. "The usual, dad."

"His trademark," growled the Inspector, his lips working.

"But the card just says 'Comus,' " complained Nikki. "Who — ?"

"Go on, Mr. Bondling!" thundered the Inspector.

"And he calmly announced to me," said Bondling, blotting his cheeks with an exhausted handkerchief, "that he's going to steal the Dauphin's Doll tomorrow, in Nash's."

"Oh, a maniac," said Nikki.

"Mr. Bondling," said the old gentleman in a terrible voice, "just what did this fellow look like?"

"Foreigner — black beard — spoke with a European accent of some sort. To tell you the truth, I was so thunderstruck I didn't notice details. Didn't even chase him till it was too late."

The Queens shrugged at each other, Gallically.

"The old story," said the Inspector; the corners of his nostrils were greenish. "The brass of the colonel's monkey and when he does show himself nobody remembers anything but beards and foreign accents. Well, Mr. Bondling, with Comus in the game it's serious business. Where's the collection right now?"

"In the vaults of the Life Bank & Trust, Forty-third Street branch."

"What time are you to move it over to Nash's?"

"They wanted it this evening. I said nothing doing. I've made special arrangements with the bank, and the collection's to be moved at seven thirty tomorrow morning."

"Won't be much time to set up," said Ellery thoughtfully, "before the store opens its doors." He glanced at his father.

"You leave Operation Dollie to us, Mr. Bondling," said the Inspector grimly. "Better give me a buzz this afternoon."

"I can't tell you, Inspector, how relieved I am —"

"Are you?" said the old gentleman sourly. "What makes you think he won't get it?"

When Attorney Bondling had left, the Queens put their heads together, Ellery doing most of the talking, as usual. Finally, the Inspector went into the bedroom for a session with his direct line to headquarters.

"Anybody would think," sniffed Nikki, "you two were planning the defense of the Bastille. Who is this Comus, anyway?"

"We don't know, Nikki," said

Ellery slowly. "Might be anybody. Began his criminal career about five years ago. He's in the grand tradition of Lupin — a saucy, highly intelligent rascal who's made stealing an art. He seems to take a special delight in stealing valuable things under virtually impossible conditions. Master of make-up — he's appeared in a dozen different disguises. And he's an uncanny mimic. Never been caught, photographed, or fingerprinted. Imaginative, daring — I'd say he's the most dangerous thief operating in the United States."

"If he's never been caught," said Nikki skeptically, "how do you know he commits these crimes?"

"You mean and not someone else?" Ellery smiled pallidly. "The techniques mark the thefts as his work. And then, like Arsène, he leaves a card — with the name 'Comus' on it — on the scene of each visit."

"Does he usually announce in advance that he's going to swipe the crown jewels?"

"No." Ellery frowned. "To my knowledge, this is the first such instance. Since he's never done anything without a reason, that visit to Bondling's office this morning must be part of his greater plan. I wonder if —"

The telephone in the living room rang clear and loud.

Nikki looked at Ellery. Ellery looked at the telephone.

"Do you suppose — ?" began Nikki. But then she said, "Oh, it's too absurd."

"Where Comus is involved," said Ellery wildly, "nothing is too absurd!" and he leaped for the phone. "Hello!"

"A call from an old friend," announced a deep and hollowish male voice. "Comus."

"Well," said Ellery. "Hello again."

"Did Mr. Bondling," asked the voice jovially, "persuade you to 'prevent' me from stealing the Dauphin's Doll in Nash's tomorrow?"

"So you know Bondling's been here."

"No miracle involved, Queen. I followed him. Are you taking the case?"

"See here, Comus," said Ellery. "Under ordinary circumstances I'd welcome the sporting chance to put you where you belong. But these circumstances are not ordinary. That doll represents the major asset of a future fund for orphaned children. I'd rather we didn't play catch with it. Comus, what do you say we call this one off?"

"Shall we say," asked the voice gently, "Nash's Department Store — tomorrow?"

THUS THE EARLY morning of December twenty-fourth finds Messrs. Queen and Bondling, and Nikki Porter, huddled on the iron sidewalk of Forty-third Street before the holly-decked windows of the Life Bank & Trust Company, just outside a double line of armed guards. The guards form a channel between the bank entrance and an armored truck,

down which Cytherea Ypson's Doll-ection flows swiftly. And all about gapes New York, stamping callously on the aged, icy face of the street against the uncharitable Christmas wind.

Now is the winter of his discontent, and Mr. Queen curses.

"I don't know what you're beefing about," moans Miss Porter. "You and Mr. Bondling are bundled up like Yukon prospectors. Look at *me*."

"It's that rat-hearted public relations tripe from Nash's," says Mr. Queen murderously. "They all swore themselves to secrecy, Brother Rat included. Honor! Spirit of Christmas!"

"It was all over the radio last night," whimpers Mr. Bondling. "And in this morning's papers."

"I'll cut his creep's heart out. Here! Velie, keep those people away!"

Sergeant Velie says good-naturedly from the doorway of the bank, "You jerks stand back." Little does the Sergeant know the fate in store for him.

"Armored trucks," says Miss Porter bluishly. "Shotguns."

"Nikki, Comus made a point of informing us in advance that he meant to steal the Dauphin's Doll in Nash's Department Store. It would be just like him to have said that in order to make it easier to steal the doll en route."

"Why don't they hurry?" shivers Mr. Bondling. "Ah!" Inspector Queen appears suddenly in the doorway. His hands clasp treasure.

"Oh!" cries Nikki.

New York whistles.

It is magnificence, an affront to democracy. But street mobs, like children, are royalists at heart.

New York whistles, and Sergeant Thomas Velie steps menacingly before Inspector Queen, Police Positive drawn, and Inspector Queen dashes across the sidewalk between the bristling lines of guards.

Queen the Younger vanishes, to materialize an instant later at the door of the armored truck.

"It's just immorally, hideously beautiful, Mr. Bondling," breathes Miss Porter, sparkly-eyed.

Mr. Bondling cranes, thinly.

ENTER *Santa Claus, with bell.*

Santa. Oyez, oyez. Peace, good will. Is that the dollie the radio's been yappin' about, folks?

Mr. B. Scram.

Miss P. Why, Mr. Bondling.

Mr. B. Well, he's got no business here. Stand back, er, Santa. Back!

Santa. What eateth you, my lean and angry friend? Have you no compassion at this season of the year?

Mr. B. Oh . . . Here! (*Clink.*) Now will you *kindly*. . . ?

Santa. Mighty pretty dollie. Where they takin' it, girlie?

Miss P. Over to Nash's, Santa.

Mr. B. You asked for it. Officer!!!

Santa. (*Hurriedly*) Little present for you, girlie. Compliments of old Santy. Merry, merry.

Miss P. For *me?* (EXIT *Santa, rapidly, with bell.*) Really, Mr. Bondling, was it necessary to. . . ?

Mr. B. Opium for the masses! What did that flatulent faker hand you, Miss Porter? What's in that unmentionable envelope?

Miss P. I'm sure I don't know, but isn't it the most touching idea? Why, it's addressed to *Ellery*. Oh! Elleryyyyyy!

Mr. B. (EXIT *excitedly*) Where is he? You — ! Officer! Where did that baby-deceiver disappear to? A Santa Claus. . . !

Mr. Q. (*Entering on the run*) Yes? Nikki, what is it? What's happened?

Miss P. A man dressed as Santa Claus just handed me this envelope. It's addressed to you.

Mr. Q. Note? (*He snatches it, withdraws a miserable slice of paper from it on which is block-lettered in pencil a message which he reads aloud with considerable expression.*) "Dear Ellery, Don't you trust me? I said I'd steal the Dauphin in Nash's emporium today and that's exactly where I'm going to do it. Yours —" Signed. . .

Miss P. (*Craning*) "Comus." That Santa?

Mr. Q. (*Sets his manly lips. An icy wind blows*)

EVEN THE MASTER had to acknowledge that their defenses against Comus were ingenious.

From the Display Department of Nash's they had requisitioned four miter-jointed counters of uniform length. These they had fitted together, and in the center of the hollow square thus formed they had erected a platform six feet high. On the counters, in plastic tiers, stretched the long lines of Miss Ypson's babies. Atop the platform, dominant, stood a great chair of handcarved oak, filched from the Swedish Modern section of the Fine Furniture Department; and on this Valhalla-like throne, a huge and rosy rotundity, sat Sergeant Thomas Velie of police headquarters, morosely grateful for the anonymity endowed by the scarlet suit and the jolly mask and whiskers of his appointed role.

Nor was this all. At a distance of six feet outside the counters shimmered a surrounding rampart of plate glass, borrowed in its various elements from *The Glass Home of the Future* display on the sixth floor rear, and assembled to shape an eight-foot wall quoined with chrome, its glistening surfaces flawless except at one point, where a thick glass door had been installed. But the edges fitted intimately and there was a formidable lock in the door, the key to which lay buried in Mr. Queen's right trouser pocket.

It was 8:54 A.M. The Queens, Nikki Porter, and Attorney Bondling stood among store officials and an army of plainclothesmen on Nash's main floor surveying the product of their labors.

"I think that about does it," muttered Inspector Queen at last. "Men! Positions around the glass partition."

Twenty-four assorted gendarmes in mufti jostled one another. They

took marked places about the wall, facing it and grinning up at Sergeant Velie. Sergeant Velie, from his throne, glared back.

"Hagstrom and Piggott — the door."

Two detectives detached themselves from a group of reserves. As they marched to the glass door, Mr. Bondling plucked at the Inspector's overcoat sleeve. "Can all these men be trusted, Inspector Queen?" he whispered. "I mean, this fellow Comus —"

"Mr. Bondling," replied the old gentleman coldly, "you do your job and let me do mine."

"But —"

"Picked men, Mr. Bondling! I picked 'em myself."

"Yes, yes, Inspector. I merely thought I'd —"

"Lieutenant Farber."

A little man with watery eyes stepped forward.

"Mr. Bondling, this is Lieutenant Geronimo Farber, headquarters jewelry expert. Ellery?"

Ellery took the Dauphin's Doll from his greatcoat pocket, but he said; "If you don't mind, dad, I'll keep holding on to it."

Somebody said, "Wow," and then there was silence.

"Lieutenant, this doll in my son's hand is the famous Dauphin's Doll with the diamond crown that —"

"Don't touch it, Lieutenant, please," said Ellery. "I'd rather nobody touched it."

"The doll," continued the Inspector, "has just been brought here from a bank vault which it ought never to have left, and Mr. Bondling, who's handling the Ypson estate, claims it's the genuine article. Lieutenant, examine the diamond and give us your opinion."

Lieutenant Farber produced a loupe. Ellery held the dauphin securely, and Farber did not touch it.

Finally, the expert said: "I can't pass an opinion about the doll itself, of course, but the diamond's a beauty. Easily worth a hundred thousand dollars at the present state of the market — maybe more. Looks like a very strong setting, by the way."

"Thanks, Lieutenant. Okay, son," said the Inspector. "Go into your waltz."

Clutching the dauphin, Ellery strode over to the glass gate and unlocked it.

"This fellow Farber," whispered Attorney Bondling in the Inspector's hairy ear. "Inspector, are you absolutely sure he's — ?"

"He's really Lieutenant Farber?" The Inspector controlled himself. "Mr. Bondling, I've known Gerry Farber for eighteen years. Calm yourself."

Ellery was crawling perilously over the nearest counter. Then, bearing the dauphin aloft, he hurried across the floor of the enclosure to the platform.

Sergeant Velie whined, "Maestro, how in hell am I going to sit here all day without washin' my hands?"

But Mr. Queen merely stooped and

lifted from the floor a heavy little structure faced with black velvet consisting of a floor and a backdrop, with a two-armed chromium support. This object he placed on the platform directly between Sergeant Velie's massive legs.

Carefully, he stood the Dauphin's Doll in the velvet niche. Then he clambered back across the counter, went through the glass door, locked it with the key, and turned to examine his handiwork.

Proudly the prince's plaything stood, the jewel in his little golden crown darting "on pale electric streams" under the concentrated tide of a dozen of the most powerful floodlights in the possession of the great store.

"Velie," said Inspector Queen, "you're not to touch that doll. Don't lay a finger on it."

The Sergeant said, "Gaaaaa."

"You men on duty. Don't worry about the crowds. Your job is to keep watching that doll. You're not to take your eyes off it all day. Mr. Bondling, are you satisfied?" Mr. Bondling seemed about to say something, but then he hastily nodded. "Ellery?"

The great man smiled. "The only way he can get that bawbie," he said, "is by spells and incantations. Raise the portcullis!"

THEN BEGAN THE interminable day, *dies irae*, the last shopping day before Christmas. This is traditionally the day of the inert, the procrastinating, the undecided, and the forgetful, sucked at last into the mercantile machine by the perpetual pump of Time. If there is peace upon earth, it descends only afterward; and at no time, on the part of anyone embroiled, is there good will toward men. As Miss Porter expresses it, a cat fight in a bird cage would be more Christian.

But on this December twenty-fourth, in Nash's, the normal bedlam was augmented by the vast shrilling of thousands of Children. It may be, as the Psalmist insists, that happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; but no bowmen surrounded Miss Ypson's darlings this day, only detectives carrying revolvers, not a few of whom forbore to use same only by the most heroic self-discipline. In the black floods of humanity overflowing the main floor little folks darted about like electrically charged minnows, pursued by exasperated maternal shrieks and the imprecations of those whose shins and rumps and toes were at the mercy of hot, happy little limbs; indeed, nothing was sacred, and Attorney Bondling was seen to quail and wrap his greatcoat defensively about him against the savage innocence of childhood. But the guardians of the law, having been ordered to simulate store employees, possessed no such armor; and many a man earned his citation that day for unique cause. They stood in the very millrace of the tide; it churned about them, shouting, "Dollies! *Dollies!*" until the very word lost

its familiar meaning and became the insensate scream of a thousand Loreleis beckoning strong men to destruction below the eye-level of their diamond Light.

But they stood fast.

And Comus was thwarted. Oh, he tried. At 11:18 A.M. a tottering old man holding fast to the hand of a small boy tried to wheedle Detective Hagstrom into unlocking the glass door "so my grandson here — he's terrible nearsighted — can get a closer look at the pretty dollies." Detective Hagstrom roared, "Rube!" and the old gentleman dropped the little boy's hand violently and with remarkable agility lost himself in the crowd. A spot investigation revealed that, coming upon the boy, who had been crying for his mommy, the old gentleman had promised to find her. The little boy, whose name — he said — was Lance Morganstern, was removed to the Lost and Found Department; and everyone was satisfied that the great thief had finally launched his attack. Everyone, that is, but Ellery Queen. He seemed puzzled. When Nikki asked him why, he merely said: "Stupidity, Nikki. It's not in character."

At 1:46 P.M., Sergeant Velie sent up a distress signal. Inspector Queen read the message aright and signaled back: "O.K. Fifteen minutes." Sergeant Santa C. Velie scrambled off his perch, clawed his way over the counter, and pounded urgently on the inner side of the glass door. Ellery let him out, relocking the door immediately, and the Sergeant's red-clad figure disappeared on the double in the general direction of the main-floor gentlemen's relief station, leaving the dauphin in solitary possession of the dais.

During the Sergeant's recess Inspector Queen circulated among his men repeating the order of the day.

The episode of Velie's response to the summons of Nature caused a temporary crisis. For at the end of the specified fifteen minutes he had not returned. Nor was there a sign of him at the end of a half-hour. An aide dispatched to the relief station reported back that the Sergeant was not there. Fears of foul play were voiced at an emergency staff conference held then and there and countermeasures were being planned even as, at 2:35 P.M., the familiar Santa-clad bulk of the Sergeant was observed battling through the lines, pawing at his mask.

"Velie," snarled Inspector Queen, "where have you been?"

"Eating my lunch," growled the Sergeant's voice, defensively. "I been taking my punishment like a good soldier all day, Inspector, but I draw the line at starvin' to death even in line of duty."

"Velie — !" choked the Inspector; but then he waved his hand feebly and said, "Ellery, let him back in there."

And that was very nearly all. The only other incident of note occurred at 4:22 P.M. A well-upholstered woman with a red face yelled,

"Stop! Thief! He grabbed my pocketbook! Police!" about fifty feet from the Ypson exhibit. Ellery instantly shouted, "*It's a trick! Men, don't take your eyes off that doll!*"

"It's Comus disguised as a woman," exclaimed Attorney Bondling, as Inspector Queen and Detective Hesse wrestled the female figure through the mob. She was now a wonderful shade of magenta. "What are you *doing?*" she screamed. "Don't arrest *me!* — catch that crook who stole my pocketbook!" "No dice, Comus," said the Inspector. "Wipe off that makeup." "McComas?" said the woman loudly. "My name is Rafferty, and all these folks saw it. He was a fat man with a mustache." "Inspector," said Nikki Porter, making a surreptitious scientific test. "This is a female. Believe me." And so, indeed, it proved. All agreed that the mustachioed fat man had been Comus, creating a diversion in the desperate hope that the resulting confusion would give him an opportunity to steal the little dauphin.

"Stupid, stupid," muttered Ellery, gnawing his fingernails.

"Sure," grinned the Inspector. "We've got him nibbling his tail, Ellery. This was his do-or-die pitch. He's through."

"Frankly," sniffed Nikki, "I'm a little disappointed."

"Worried," said Ellery, "would be the word for me."

INSPECTOR QUEEN WAS too case-hardened a sinner's nemesis to lower his guard at his most vulnerable moment. When the 5:30 bells bonged and the crowds began struggling toward the exits, he barked: "Men, stay at your posts. Keep watching that doll!" So all hands were on the *qui vive* even as the store emptied. The reserves kept hustling people out. Ellery, standing on an Information booth, spotted bottlenecks and waved his arms.

At 5:50 P.M. the main floor was declared out of the battle zone. All stragglers had been herded out. The only persons visible were the refugees trapped by the closing bell on the upper floors, and these were pouring out of elevators and funneled by a solid line of detectives and accredited store personnel to the doors. By 6:05 they were a trickle; by 6:10 even the trickle had dried up. And the personnel itself began to disperse.

"No, men!" called Ellery sharply from his observation post. "Stay where you are till all the store employees are out!" The counter clerks had long since disappeared.

Sergeant Velie's plaintive voice called from the other side of the glass door. "I got to get home and decorate my tree. Maestro, make with the key."

Ellery jumped down and hurried over to release him. Detective Piggott jeered, "Going to play Santa to your kids tomorrow morning, Velie?" at which the Sergeant managed even through his mask to project a four-letter word distinctly, forgetful of Miss Porter's presence, and stamped

off toward the gentlemen's relief station.

"Where you going, Velie?" asked the Inspector, smiling.

"I got to get out of these x-and-dash Santy clothes somewheres, don't I?" came back the Sergeant's mask-muffled tones, and he vanished in a thunderclap of his fellow-officers' laughter.

"Still worried, Mr. Queen?" chuckled the Inspector.

"I don't understand it." Ellery shook his head. "Well, Mr. Bondling, there's your dauphin, untouched by human hands."

"Yes. Well!" Attorney Bondling wiped his forehead happily. "I don't profess to understand it, either, Mr. Queen. Unless it's simply another case of an inflated reputation . . ." He clutched the Inspector suddenly. "Those men!" he whispered. "*Who are they?*"

"Relax, Mr. Bondling," said the Inspector good-naturedly. "It's just the men to move the dolls back to the bank. Wait a minute, you men! Perhaps, Mr. Bondling, we'd better see the dauphin back to the vaults ourselves."

"Keep those fellows back," said Ellery to the headquarters men, quietly, and he followed the Inspector and Mr. Bondling into the enclosure. They pulled two of the counters apart at one corner and strolled over to the platform. The dauphin was winking at them in a friendly way. They stood looking at him.

"Cute little devil," said the Inspector.

"Seems silly now," beamed Attorney Bondling. "Being so worried all day."

"Comus must have had *some* plan," mumbled Ellery.

"Sure," said the Inspector. "That old man disguise. And that purse-snatching act."

"No, no, dad. Something clever. He's always pulled something clever."

"Well, there's the diamond," said the lawyer comfortably. "He didn't."

"Disguise . . ." muttered Ellery. "It's always been a disguise. Santa Claus costume — he used that once — this morning in front of the bank. . . . Did we see a Santa Claus around here today?"

"Just Velie," said the Inspector, grinning. "And I hardly think —"

"Wait a moment, please," said Attorney Bondling in a very odd voice.

He was staring at the Dauphin's Doll.

"Wait for what, Mr. Bondling?"

"What's the matter?" said Ellery, also in a very odd voice.

"But . . . not possible . . ." stammered Bondling. He snatched the doll from its black velvet repository. "*No!*" he howled. "*This isn't the dauphin! It's a fake — a copy!*"

Something happened in Mr. Queen's head — a little *click!* like the sound of a switch. And there was light.

"Some of you men!" he roared. "*After Santa Claus!*"

"After who, Ellery?" gasped Inspector Queen.

"Don't stand here! *Get him!*" screamed Ellery, dancing up and down. "The man I just let out of here! The Santa who made for the men's room!"

Detectives started running, wildly.

"But Ellery," said a small voice, and Nikki found that it was her own, "that was Sergeant Velie."

"It was *not* Velie, Nikki! When Velie ducked out just before two o'clock, *Comus waylaid him!* It was Comus who came back in Velie's Santa Claus rig, wearing Velie's whiskers and mask! *Comus has been on this platform all afternoon!*" He tore the dauphin from Attorney Bondling's grasp. "Copy. . . . He did it, he did it!"

"But Mr. Queen," whispered Attorney Bondling, "his voice. He spoke to us . . . in Sergeant Velie's voice."

"Yes, Ellery," Nikki heard herself saying.

"I told you yesterday Comus is a great mimic, Nikki. Lieutenant Farber! Is Farber still here?"

The jewelry expert, who had been gaping from a distance, shook his head and shuffled into the enclosure.

"Lieutenant," said Ellery in a strangled voice. "Examine this diamond. . . . I mean, *is* it a diamond?"

Inspector Queen removed his hands from his face and said froggily, "Well, Gerry?"

Lieutenant Farber squinted once through his loupe. "The hell you say. It's strass —"

"It's what?" said the Inspector piteously.

"Strass, Dick — lead glass — paste. Beautiful job of imitation — as nice as I've ever seen."

"Lead me to that Santa Claus," whispered Inspector Queen.

But Santa Claus was being led to him. Struggling in the grip of a dozen detectives, his red coat ripped off, his red pants around his ankles, but his whiskery mask still on his face, came a large shouting man.

"But I tell you," he was roaring, "I'm Sergeant Tom Velie! Just take the mask off — that's all!"

"It's a pleasure," growled Detective Hagstrom, trying to break their prisoner's arm, "we're reservin' for the Inspector."

"Hold him, boys," whispered the Inspector. He struck like a cobra. His hand came away with Santa's face.

And there, indeed, was Sergeant Velie.

"Why, it's Velie," said the Inspector wonderingly.

"I only told you that a thousand times," said the Sergeant, folding his great hairy arms across his great hairy chest. "Now who's the so-and-so who tried to bust my arm?" Then he said, "My pants!" and as Miss Porter turned delicately away, Detective Hagstrom humbly stooped and raised Sergeant Velie's pants.

"Never mind that," said a cold, remote voice.

It was the master, himself.

"Yeah?" said Sergeant Velie.

"Velie, weren't you attacked when you went to the men's room just before two?"

"Do I look like the attackable type?"

"You did go to lunch? — in person?"

"And a lousy lunch it was."

"It was *you* up here among the dolls all afternoon?"

"Nobody else, Maestro. Now, my friends, I want action. Fast patter. What's this all about? Before," said Sergeant Velie softly, "I lose my temper."

While divers headquarters orators delivered impromptu periods before the silent Sergeant, Inspector Richard Queen spoke.

"Ellery. Son. How in the name of the second sin did he do it?"

"Pa," replied the master, "you got me."

DECK THE HALL with boughs of holly, but not if your name is Queen on the evening of a certain December twenty-fourth. If your name is Queen on that lamentable evening you are seated in the living room of a New York apartment uttering no falalas but staring miserably into a somber fire. And you have company. The guest list is short, but select. It numbers two, a Miss Porter and a Sergeant Velie, and they are no comfort.

No, no ancient Yuletide carol is being trolled; only the silence sings.

Wail in your crypt, Cytherea Ypson; all was for nought; your little dauphin's treasure lies not in the empty coffers of the orphans but in the hot clutch of one who took his evil inspiration from a long-crumbled specialist in vanishments.

Fact: Lieutenant Geronimo Farber of police headquarters had examined the diamond in the genuine dauphin's crown a matter of seconds before it was conveyed to its sanctuary in the enclosure. Lieutenant Farber had pronounced the diamond a diamond, and not merely a diamond, but a diamond worth in his opinion over one hundred thousand dollars.

Fact: It was this genuine diamond and this genuine Dauphin's Doll which Ellery with his own hands had carried into the glass-enclosed fortress and deposited between the authenticated Sergeant Velie's verified feet.

Fact: All day — specifically, between the moment the dauphin had been deposited in his niche until the moment he was discovered to be a fraud; that is, during the total period in which a theft-and-substitution was even theoretically possible — no person whatsoever, male or female, adult or child, had set foot within the enclosure except Sergeant Thomas Velie, alias Santa Claus; and some dozens of persons with police training and specific instructions, not to mention the Queens themselves, Miss Porter, and Attorney Bondling, testified unqualifiedly that Sergeant Velie had not touched the doll, at any time, all day.

Fact: All those deputized to watch the doll swore that they had done so

without lapse or hindrance the everlasting day; moreover, that at no time had anything touched the doll — human or mechanical — either from inside or outside the enclosure.

Fact: Despite all the foregoing, at the end of the day they had found the real dauphin gone and a worthless copy in its place.

"It's brilliantly, unthinkably clever," said Ellery at last. "A master illusion. For, of course, it *was* an illusion. . . ."

"Witchcraft," groaned the Inspector.

"Mass mesmerism," suggested Nikki Porter.

"Mass bird gravel," growled the Sergeant.

Two hours later Ellery spoke again.

"So Comus had a worthless copy of the dauphin all ready for the switch," he muttered. "It's a world-famous dollie, been illustrated countless times, minutely described, photographed. . . . All ready for the switch, but how did he make it? How? How?"

"You said that," said the Sergeant, "once or forty-two times."

"The bells are tolling," sighed Nikki, "but for whom? Not for us." And indeed, while they slumped there, Time, which Seneca named father of truth, had crossed the threshold of Christmas; and Nikki looked alarmed, for as that glorious song of old came upon the midnight clear, a great light spread from Ellery's eyes and beatified the whole contorted countenance, so that peace sat there, the peace that approximateth understanding; and he threw back that noble head and laughed with the merriment of an innocent child.

"Hey," said Sergeant Velie, staring.

"Son," began Inspector Queen, half-rising from his armchair; when the telephone rang.

"Beautiful!" roared Ellery. "Oh, exquisite! How did Comus make the switch, eh? Nikki —"

"From somewhere," said Nikki, handing him the telephone receiver, "a voice is calling, and if you ask me it's saying 'Comus.' Why not ask him?"

"Comus," whispered the Inspector, shrinking.

"Comus," echoed the Sergeant, baffled.

"Comus?" said Ellery heartily. "How nice. Hello there! Congratulations."

"Why, thank you," said the familiar deep and hollow voice. "I called to express my appreciation for a wonderful day's sport and to wish you the merriest kind of Yuletide."

"You anticipate a rather merry Christmas yourself, I take it."

"*Laeti triumphantes*," said Comus jovially.

"And the orphans?"

"They have my best wishes. But I won't detain you, Ellery. If you'll look at the doormat outside your apartment door, you'll find on it — in the spirit of the season — a little gift, with the compliments of Comus. Will you remember me to Inspector

Queen and to Attorney Bondling?"

Ellery hung up, smiling.

On the doormat he found the true Dauphin's Doll, intact except for a contemptible detail. The jewel in the little golden crown was missing.

"IT WAS," SAID Ellery later, over pastrami sandwiches, "a fundamentally simple problem. All great illusions are. A valuable object is placed in full view in the heart of an impenetrable enclosure, it is watched hawkishly by dozens of thoroughly screened and reliable trained persons, it is never out of their view, it is not once touched by human hand or any other agency, and yet, at the expiration of the danger period, it is gone — exchanged for a worthless copy. Wonderful. Amazing. It defies the imagination. Actually, it's susceptible — like all magical hocus-pocus — to immediate solution if only one is able — as I was not — to ignore the wonder and stick to the fact. But then, the wonder is there for precisely that purpose: to stand in the way of the fact.

"What is the fact?" continued Ellery, helping himself to a dill pickle. "The fact is that between the time the doll was placed on the exhibit platform and the time the theft was discovered no one and no thing touched it. Therefore between the time the doll was placed on the platform and the time the theft was discovered *the dauphin could not have been stolen.* It follows, simply and inevitably, that the dauphin must have been stolen *outside that period.*

"Before the period began? No. I placed the authentic dauphin inside the enclosure with my own hands; at or about the beginning of the period, then, no hand but mine had touched the doll — not even, you'll recall, Lieutenant Farber's.

"Then the dauphin must have been stolen after the period closed."

Ellery brandished half the pickle. "And who," he demanded solemnly, "is the only one besides myself who handled that doll after the period closed and before Lieutenant Farber pronounced the diamond to be paste? *The only one?*"

The Inspector and the Sergeant exchanged puzzled glances, and Nikki looked blank.

"Why, Mr. Bondling," said Nikki, "and he doesn't count."

"He counts very much, Nikki," said Ellery, reaching for the mustard, "because the facts say Bondling stole the dauphin at that time."

"Bondling!" The Inspector paled.

"I don't get it," complained Sergeant Velie.

"Ellery, you must be wrong," said Nikki. "At the time Mr. Bondling grabbed the doll off the platform, the theft had already taken place. It was the worthless copy he picked up."

"That," said Ellery, reaching for another sandwich, "was the focal point of his illusion. How do we know it was the worthless copy he picked up? Why, he said so. Simple, eh? He said so, and like the dumb

bunnies we were, we took his unsupported word as gospel."

"That's right!" mumbled his father. "We didn't actually examine the doll till quite a few seconds later."

"Exactly," said Ellery in a munchy voice. "There was a short period of beautiful confusion, as Bondling knew there would be. I yelled to the boys to follow and grab Santa Claus — I mean, the Sergeant here. The detectives were momentarily demoralized. You, dad, were stunned. Nikki looked as if the roof had fallen in. I essayed an excited explanation. Some detectives ran; others milled around. And while all this was happening — during those few moments when nobody was watching the genuine doll in Bondling's hand because everyone thought it was a fake — Bondling calmly slipped it into one of his greatcoat pockets and from the other produced the worthless copy which he'd been carrying there all day. When I did turn back to him, it was the copy I grabbed from his hand. And his illusion was complete.

"I know," said Ellery dryly, "it's rather on the let-down side. That's why illusionists guard their professional secrets so closely; knowledge is disenchantment. No doubt the incredulous amazement aroused in his periwigged London audience by Comus the French conjuror's dematerialization of his wife from the top of a table would have suffered the same fate if he'd revealed the trap door through which she had dropped. A good trick, like a good woman, is best in the dark. Sergeant, have another pastrami."

"Seems like funny chow to be eating early Christmas morning," said the Sergeant, reaching. Then he stopped. Then he said, "Bondling," and shook his head.

"Now that we know it was Bondling," said the Inspector, who had recovered a little, "it's a cinch to get that diamond back. He hasn't had time to dispose of it yet. I'll just give downtown a buzz —"

"Wait, dad," said Ellery.

"Wait for what?"

"Whom are you going to sic the hounds on?"

"What?"

"You're going to call headquarters, get a warrant, and so on. Who's your man?"

The Inspector felt his head. "Why . . . Bondling, didn't you say?"

"It might be wise," said Ellery, thoughtfully searching with his tongue for a pickle seed, "to specify his alias."

"Alias?" said Nikki. "Does he have one?"

"What alias, son?"

"Comus."

"*Comus!*"

"*Comus?*"

"Oh, come off it," said Nikki, pouring herself a shot of coffee, straight, for she was in training for the Inspector's Christmas dinner. "How could Bondling be Comus when Bondling was with us all day? — and Comus kept making disguised appearances all over the place . . .

that Santa who gave me the note in front of the bank — the old man who kidnaped Lance Morganstern — the fat man with the mustache who snatched Mrs. Rafferty's purse."

"Yeah," said the Sergeant. "How?"

"These illusions die hard," said Ellery. "Wasn't it Comus who phoned a few minutes ago to rag me about the theft? Wasn't it Comus who said he'd left the stolen dauphin — minus the diamond — on our doormat? Therefore Comus is Bondling.

"I told you Comus never does anything without a good reason," said Ellery. "Why did 'Comus' announce to 'Bondling' that he was *going* to steal the Dauphin's Doll? Bondling told us that — putting the finger on his *alter ego* — because he wanted us to believe he and Comus were separate individuals. He wanted us to watch for *Comus* and take *Bondling* for granted. In tactical execution of this strategy Bondling provided us with three 'Comus'-appearances during the day — obviously, confederates.

"Yes," said Ellery, "I think, dad, you'll find on backtracking that the great thief you've been trying to catch for five years has been a respectable estate attorney on Park Row all the time, shedding his quiddities and his quillets at night in favor of the soft shoe and the dark lantern. And now he'll have to exchange them all for a number and a grilled door. Well, well, it couldn't have happened at a more appropriate season; there's an old English proverb that says the Devil makes his Christmas pie of lawyers' tongues. Nikki pass the pastrami."

We are indebted to Maurice Renault, editor of the French edition of "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," for this original short story by one of the most gifted of contemporary French crime writers. Pierre Boileau was born in 1906 in Paris, at the foot of the Butte Montmartre, just off the Place Pigalle, and he has remained faithful to this quarter which is so peculiarly suited to a writer of detective fiction. Monsieur Boileau's philosophy of the detective story is worth more than passing comment — it will delight such practitioners of the art as John Dickson Carr. First, M. Boileau adheres unswervingly to the puzzle-novel: atmosphere and psychology, for all their admitted importance, should occupy only a secondary place: priority must always go to mystery.

"As a clearly defined genre," says M. Boileau, "the detective story should, above all else, constitute a problem. I sometimes wonder if the desire to 'revitalize' the old formula is not rather an astute pretext to palliate a lack of imagination and especially to avoid the numerous and formidable difficulties presented by the pure detective story."

Touché, M. Boileau!

But M. Boileau is too perceptive a student of the form to advocate a puzzle without life — a mere conundrum or riddle clothed inanimately in exposition. "The puzzle," continues M. Boileau, "should not be created arbitrarily, simply to fascinate the reader: it should unfold rigorously and inevitably from the basic idea of the novel." And further, "the truth should not emerge arbitrarily in the last pages: rather the normal development of events should not permit the truth to emerge earlier. To push the reader's curiosity to the highest possible point and yet not disappoint him when he reaches the explanation — that is the true double-goal of the detective-story writer."

Ah, M. Boileau, you are a man after our own heart!

TRIANGLE

by PIERRE BOILEAU

(*Translated by Anthony Boucher*)

René Valmour stood behind the rock, waiting.

The nameless road through the forest of Fontainebleau was deserted. Night was falling rapidly, black and cold with the foretaste of winter. Already René Valmour could hardly make out the long stretch of road under the trees which the glaring lights of the car would sweep so soon.

Then he would leave his hiding-place and establish himself in plain sight on the stony road which would retain no footprints. Then the hour would strike to fulfill his horrible, inevitable compulsion. His gloved fingers pressed the butt of the murdering weapon, the very revolver of his victim-to-be: Francis Mugal, his first cousin.

René Valmour was an honest man. He had not hardened himself to crime without painful attempts at rebellion. But how else could Jacqueline be set free from her unwanted husband?

If he could only have persuaded her to run away with him. . . .

He had tried. "We'll run away together. I'll take you to the other end of the earth — some lost, forgotten spot where he'll never think of hunting for us."

She would lift to him her eyes of myrtle blue, so full of anguish. "Francis will find us no matter where we hide. I don't know how he will do it, but I do know that he will find us. One fine day he'll be standing there before us, and then . . ."

She would break off and thrust out trembling arms as though to ward off some obsessive vision. And he would chide her gently, "Poor troubled darling! But where would Francis get the resources to track us down? You need a great deal of money for that kind of undertaking. Where could he raise it? Certainly not from Grandfather Victor."

She would shake her blonde head. "You don't know his true nature, how violent he really is inside. There isn't any obstacle that he couldn't surmount with his love — or his hate. And can you think what our life would be with such a threat hanging over us?"

And then there would come the inevitable tears that always accompanied her eternal and futile lament, "Oh, my dear, my very dear . . . why couldn't I have met you first?"

Why had an unjust fate made them meet too late? René Valmour was in the colonies when his cousin had married Jacqueline. And to the colonies he had quickly returned, obeying the plea of the tortured wife: "We must bow to our fate. We must part. . . . Forget me!"

A bad guess, that. Absence had heightened his passion. Abruptly he had broken off his trip and returned delirious, ready for anything. And it was then that the hideous project had begun to take form.

For a long time he had hesitated to reveal his idea to Jacqueline. But the young woman's sudden silences, her fleeting glances, and above all the horrified expression which sometimes distorted her lovely features, gave him to understand that the thoughts of the woman he loved had slowly followed the same path as his own, and that she too had conceived The Solution.

First in half-words and hints, finally free from all reticence and with the most complete *sang-froid*, they tackled the problem.

Now that he could talk with her,

she dispelled the one objection that had always held him back. "How about Grandfather Victor? Remember Francis and I are his only heirs and the old miser's terribly rich. Wouldn't I be suspected? And while no one could guess my real motive, I'd be accused of killing Francis to get his share of the inheritance."

She readily convinced him how ridiculous this notion was. With all the money that he had himself . . .

It was Jacqueline who conceived this attack on the road. For himself, René would have preferred a less brutal procedure. Poisoning by small doses, for instance. But this was no time to argue about tastes in methods. All that mattered was their security, and Jacqueline's plan offered a maximum of safety to himself.

She was then living in Marlotte, where they had taken a villa for the summer. Francis could spend his month's vacation there, and the rest of the summer he could see his wife weekends. He came down from Paris by car every Friday evening . . .

So. She took her husband's loaded revolver from the side pocket of Francis' car and gave it to René, who cautiously refrained from touching it with his bare fingertips. Toward the end of September the roads through the forest of Fontainebleau are deserted around dinnertime. Francis Mugal would hardly be surprised at his cousin's appearance; more than once René, dropping in for an impromptu visit, had gone out on the road to meet him.

Francis would stop. René would beckon him to get out, as though he'd found something by the road. . . .

The verdict would be suicide. Francis Mugal always drove with gloves; that would explain the absence of fingerprints. And as for motive . . .

Who was there who knew the man and had not been struck by the recent change in his appearance and even his character? To whom had he not confided his maddening business worries? Then, as decisive evidence, his widow would produce his last letters, all expressive of utter discouragement. She would state that she had long feared the worst, and René would confirm her testimony.

René searched for the flaw in the plan and could not find it. Francis Mugal would be found dead, a bullet in his heart, his own revolver at his side. Jacqueline's husband had been on the verge of bankruptcy and of a nervous breakdown. The verdict would be inevitable.

Now he was waiting behind this rock, his hands in his pockets, motionless. The sharp autumn wind struck his feverish cheeks. He was ready.

A brilliant glare crossed the night. René Valmour recognized the sound of the motor. From then on, it all happened with the inevitability of fate.

He went out on the road, signaling the oncoming car to a halt while he leaned over and seemed to examine the ground. The car stopped some

five meters away. Francis Mugal leaped out.

"René! What a grand surprise! And what are you staring at there?"

The murderer's only answer was to beckon his cousin closer. When they were almost touching, he rose abruptly, pulled out the revolver, and pressed the trigger.

The hammer made a little dry click. There was no shot. René Valmour tightened his index finger. The same dry click. . . .

. . . and this time there was a shot. Francis Mugal had jumped back and there was a gun in his hand. René Valmour fell dead.

The drama had occupied a playing time of five seconds. A second passenger sprang from the car.

"I'll be damned! That was a narrow escape, old man. . . . But you look as if you knew this poor devil?"

"I should, my dear Commissioner. It's my cousin, René Valmour."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes, my first cousin. But I'm damned if I understand . . ."

Divisional Commissioner Gélibin had to help his trembling companion to the bank beside the road. He waited until Mugal had partly pulled himself together.

"Now you'll have to help me move the body out of the roadway. Then we'll go make our depositions at the police station. Lucky for you, Francis, that I was with you; my evidence should simplify things."

Francis Mugal seemed still uncertain of his reflexes, so M. Gélibin took the wheel — Divisional Commissioner Gélibin, a very recent friend whom Mugal had obligingly offered to drive on Fridays to Marlotte, where his wife was also staying.

The police investigation did establish certain points; for instance, that Francis Mugal owed his life to the fact that the bullets in his attacker's weapon had been exposed to moisture, which had ruined the powder charge. On the other hand, the investigation failed to establish the origin of the revolver, an out-of-date model which, it was decided, must have been in René Valmour's possession for years.

The only real mystery was the matter of motive — a mystery which remained unsolved, since every hypothesis met with insuperable objections. The curiosity of the police was, however, on a purely abstract level, since Valmour's death had forestalled any need for legal action.

Thus it was that several months later, when the fabulously rich Grandfather Victor, the state of whose health had long been a matter of concern to his family, had yielded up his soul to the God of misers, Francis Mugal was the sole heir of the old man's enormous fortune — thanks to a plan constructed with a greater ingenuity than he had ever displayed in business, and masterfully executed with the assistance of the most faithful of wives.

THE BROTHER OF HEAVEN

by VINCENT CORNIER

IN the afternoon of that thunderous July day a Chinaman named Lek Su was found stabbed to death in a deserted riverside warehouse in Thurbaston Street, Pennyfields. His life had, apparently, been given up without the slightest struggle. There was nothing of horror or fear on his face — but a deep and dreaming smile; a peacefulness more terrible than either.

The personal possessions of this Chinaman, Lek Su, were oddly assorted and very curious.

Apart from visiting-cards which gave his name, he carried a bunch of keys and a few shillings' worth of loose change. An unused first-class return ticket for Harrogate was in a vest pocket, wrapped in a piece of paper on which the times of certain L.M.S. trains had been marked down.

Slued upon tiny gold rings along a length of plaited black hair, beneath his shirt collar, was a pouch of loosely-spun lilac silk, very clean but very worn and old, containing a *tong* device: a token made of hammered silver. It proclaimed the dead man a member of the vast Chinese freemasonry called the *Hwey T'ien-Lao* — the society of the Brothers of Heaven. Since the sign was of precious metal, and not of painted almond leaf, it was evident that Lek Su was high in the councils of the secret order. And a fine red cleft was across the obverse of the token — the late Mr. Lek Su was thereby indicated as an executioner.

Altogether a most peculiar denizen, dead or alive, to find in hard-working Pennyfields. A cosmopolitan, a conglomerate, if ever there was one — his hat had been bought from the store of one Hyam B. Bertwein, of West Eighty-Second Street, New York; his factory-made tweed suit had come from Leeds; his exquisitely hand-fashioned shoes from Vienna. A brass lozenge, let into the instep of one of them, gave the number of his private last, and the name of the shoemaker as Pallika and Gerstermann, of the Mariahilferstrasse in Wien VI.

Lots of chewing-gum, some nodules of orris root, a phial of paregoric, and a toadstool-like cake of eating-opium were also taken out of his clothing. His watch was of gun-metal and his knife was that of a sailor.

Quite a lot of detail to give, I know, but somewhat necessary — for it is not an everyday occurrence to find a world-travelled Chinese executioner dead in a mouldering warehouse, clasping a Finnan-haddock box full of glorious orchids — smiling in uttermost peace; slain by a phantom.

For, on the first awesome aspect of the mystery, it appeared that nothing but a phantom hand could have dealt the fatal blow. I was there in that

warehouse within half an hour of the discovery.

Barnabas Hildreth inveigled me into the business. I had just celebrated the beginning of my summer holidays by inviting him to lunch at my club. Halfway through the meal the police rang up to ask him to make for Thurbaston Street at his speediest. Not that the C.I.D. had any especial yearning for a Secret Service agent's entrance on their case. As Hildreth sardonically remarked, they required the services of an expert on — well, cosmopolitan members of Chinese ruling *tongs*, such as *Hwey T'ien-Lao*. Whitehall had referred them to Barnabas Hildreth.

Hildreth was in a grim, warm humor from the moment he left the telephone-box. At lunch I had found him lackadaisical and off-hand and not at all enamored of the suggestion I had impulsively made, that he should go on holiday with me. Now he was vibrant and full of some devilish sprightliness.

"Get your ta-ta, Ingram, old chap! I've got on to something that'll lick holidays flat!" A glass, three-quarters full of a fine *Rudesheimer*, was standing on the table where he had, apathetically, left it. He picked it up and drained it exultantly. "That's to a new interest in life," he said.

"What on earth's the trouble?" I asked. It nettled me to see a *Burgweg Auslese* hock, of a vintage, gulped like water. "Surely we might finish here —"

"Finish be damned! Come on, Ingram, don't waste time! From all accounts this case looks like being a smasher. . . . Tell you all about it in the taxi."

And running down to Pennyfields, he told me much that I have already recorded.

I retain a confused recollection of Thurbaston Street: of a hotly metallic sky lowering above a sullen river full of coppery runlets from the sun. I recall the mew of uneasy gulls and the clank and wheeze of cranes at labor in a neighboring timber yard. As we entered the warehouse yard the Inspector in charge of the case saluted Hildreth — and he was entered in the lists against that shadowy adversary, the killer of Lek Su.

The examination of the Chinaman's body and scrutiny of his queer belongings kept Hildreth engaged for the best part of an hour. An ambulance car had arrived in Thurbaston Street by this time, and a crowd had followed it. Gigantic and excited dronings came up to the windows, and thunder began to rattle in the distance. . . . At four o'clock, when the police-surgeon went his way, and Lek Su's body was taken to the mortuary, the storm was at its height. Its bitter violence scattered all but a few sheltered stragglers of that morbid congregation outside.

It did more — it cleaned the air and rid the big warehouse of the mingled stenches of river-mud, fish-curing smoke, and the raw and resinous smell of that timber-yard. In this comparative cleanliness the odor from the

kit of living orchids grew extraordinarily potent.

To my astonishment Hildreth never glanced at that slatted box of perfect blooms. His interests were centred all about the ghastly area where Lek Su had died, yet he seemed blind to the orchids; deliberately blind.

Deposits of thick grey mud, which had gone together to make a lap-marked carpet over all the floor, fascinated him. While the warehouse had been derelict the Thames had overflowed many a time, and silt had come into the place, in layer after layer, to make it dank and desolate.

But — those moist layerings took and retained footprints. There was the secret of their interest for Hildreth.

Lightly made though they had been, the impressions of cats' paws and the trident tracks of rats were distinct all over. Lek Su's Viennese footgear had left a broken spoor, to death. Each of the constables had been responsible for hundreds of prints. My own shoes showed their shapes, as though matrices had been formed from them in glycerined modelling-clay; Hildreth's also.

But there were no others made!

Lek Su had died in the middle of the floor. Lek Su had been stabbed in the back. The knife that had given him his quietus had been withdrawn and had gone.

Yet no similar markings remained to betray the traffic of the murderer — who, it was feasible to suppose, must have been within the place. Had the weapon remained embedded in the wound one might have argued it had been thrown from one of the two doorways or from any of the gaping windows. The distances between the body and any aperture were not so great: a lead-weighted blade, in the hands of an expert hurler, can transfix a matchbox at twenty yards. . . .

But the weapon was gone. There were signs apparent on Lek Su's body which proved that the blade had been forcibly withdrawn within a few minutes of death, and that by human agency.

"I should say, sir," suggested the Detective-Inspector, "that the poor chap was stabbed outside this place and staggered in here to die."

"I had thought of that possibility, Inspector." Hildreth was dangerously owlish and bland. "I rejected it when I remembered this would cause Mr. Su to bleed somewhat — leaving a spattered trail to here. Besides, his feet-marks show he walked in a steady line from the side-door yonder to this box of flowers. As you say, he ought to have staggered a bit, with a triangular lump of steel driven five inches into his vitals."

The Inspector colored and looked rueful.

"I see the hoss-sense in that," he admitted. "Right enough! But, I say, sir, have you any special reason for stating that Lek Su walked up to these orchids? Don't you think he might have brought them with him?"

The strange aura, I cannot define it otherwise, that made people call Hil-

dreth the Black Monk, descended on him now. His eyes glowed; he looked finer-cut, and his voice was musical and grave as that of a fervent priest at his devotions.

"No, Inspector Umpleby, I don't think Lek Su brought them with him." He paused. "But I am inclined to believe they were already placed there, as a lure, and having found them here, Lek Su was on his knees before them, bowing to the dust — adoring them as things holy — when the one who had set the murderous trap sprang it."

He turned then, passionately, and waved to the beautiful flowers.

"I have heard of them before — actually swotted up a long and solemn account, in German, of their history and appearance — but I never dreamed I should see them. Those are the sacred emblem-flowers of the great Chinese secret society called the *Hwey T'ien-Lao* — the Brothers of Heaven — *Cœlogene Hepasthenii*, one of the most mysterious plants on earth."

There was a silence, broken only by the slow retreats of thunder. Then he said:

"I should advise you to handle those orchids at the end of a pair of fire-tongs. The secret of their power is something I don't profess to know, but according to more than one authority, they can kill."

It was difficult to give credence to that much. For my part, I saw nothing about the blossoms but the tenderest and most appealing beauty.

There would be some sixty flowers in all — garlands of emerald petals, with downy bronze "fiddles" drooping from central columns of coral-veined and gold-flecked ivory. What leaves there were had the spiky and sage-colored look of pineapple sprouts, but were delicately formed.

The roots were half hidden in a peaty and somewhat oily humus. Only by peering closely under the proud garlands could they be seen. . . . And being seen, some uncanny touch of instinct laid up within my mind a burden of belief in Hildreth's words.

Here could lurk fatality. Nature, who zones the wasp and zigzags the adder to bespeak the quality of venom, had blazoned *danger* on these snakish tubes. They carried a sullen orange and violet pile on their surfaces; a livid and velvety something, between the bloom of a peach and rankest mould. Big egg-shaped excrescences were on them, and these were moist with a saffron sweat. . . .

I looked up, uneasily, to discover Hildreth was crouched above something he had discerned on the carpet of mud. I went over to his side. . . . He laughed and pointed to a little hole, such as the ferrule of a fine walking-cane might have made. It was very cleanly cut through the mud to the concrete below. One aspect of it had a semi-circular shape, the other was slightly elongated and cuneiform. A man having drilled through the "carpet" with a pencil, thereafter lazily dragging it away, could have

made an exactly similar impression.

"Any ideas about that, Ingram?" The Black Monk was at his apogee: in his most baffling and *exalté* mood. "And that — *and that?*"

I swivelled about and looked at the places he indicated. Three or four more of these peculiar little holes showed up; then ten — a dozen — a score. I said I had no ideas. . . .

"Got such a thing as a length of twine, Inspector Umpleby? I want to do a bit of measuring."

The admirable Inspector produced a supple steel riband tape measure.

The average of distance between these holes was some four feet three inches. Some were less than four feet, others verged on four and a half — but they were all fashioned along identical lines: a tiny C-shaped lobe elongated to a >-like channel, tapered up to the absolute surface of the mud. . . .

Some of the arrow heads pointed to the box of orchids, while others, in a *détour*, formed an erratic procession to the side door.

Hildreth made a few notes and asked Umpleby to have casts taken of half a dozen or so of the markings.

After this I followed my friend from point to point about the place. I knew he had satisfied himself with something momentous.

The windows opening on to Thurbaston Street attracted him. He looked up at their ruinous state for a long while, grunting to himself as though disgusted. There was hardly any glass left in the framings.

Yet they allowed us a dreary vista . . . of a house-front and a coping and two chimney-stacks; of numerous enamelled advertisements for tea and shag-tobacco and "Double-Brew" brown ale.

"No windows — no windows opposite," I heard Hildreth muttering.

Now he crossed the floor to the river frontage. On this side the outlook was considerably better. We could see a line of barges and an outgoing tug . . . we gazed on the narrow wharf . . . then, sideways glancing, looked over the drenched timber yard. . . .

Hildreth, amazingly enough for him, gave me a thump between my shoulder-blades.

"And there we strike oil," was the cryptic observation he made.

The constable came back with a spirit stove, a copper kettle and a composition of paraffin wax and resin. . . . With slow and methodical process he began to take his casts.

After watching for a while I turned away to join Inspector Umpleby and the restless Barnabas Hildreth. They chatted together near the side door.

Umpleby and Hildreth had decided on an experiment. I was waved aside and the Inspector pulled on that door. Fully opened, it made a wedge-shaped angle with the wall.

"*Right*," Hildreth snapped, "that's about the ticket. I think the idea's sound — *eh?*"

"Yes, sir. A man could hide behind this easily enough. Granted, of course, he wasn't a fat 'un."

"Are you trying to find out if the murderer did?" I asked.

"We are," said Hildreth. "On Lek Su's opening this door, anyone lurking in this alley could easily have slipped into hiding in that angle. Su wouldn't see him until it was too late. Perhaps he never did see the other at all. By the peaceful look on his face, one might argue that Su never had a qualm of apprehension."

"How was it that his body was discovered so swiftly after the murder?" I had meant to ask that question before. "Within a few minutes of death, according to the doctor — within an an hour, certainly. Was anyone seen coming out of here, or what?"

Inspector Umpleby made the reply:

"It was all because of a rat-migration," he astoundingly said. "That first drew our attention."

"A — a *what?*"

"A rat-drove, as we call 'em down here, sir. You see," he explained, quite earnestly, "all these warehouses swarm with the filthy beasts. And it pays us to watch them carefully, if they get on the move.

"About half-past one a constable reported that a swarm of rats were making out of here across to the timber yard. A few minutes later we got the same story from the yard itself, over the 'phone.

"Well, you see, sir, rats don't shift their living quarters without a very definite reason — especially not in broad daylight. Escaping gas from a leaky main is one of the commonest causes of their flittings; fire, or rising water, are two others. You'll understand now why it pays us to keep an eye open for such. . . ."

I nodded and said I did.

"Well, sir, I came round here myself. Sure enough, rats were steadily making out of the place, all set for the wood-piles over the way. Then I noticed the side door of the warehouse was slightly ajar . . . walked in . . . and found the dead man. And that's all there is to it."

"It's too much of a coincidence to ignore," I suggested. "The flight of the rats and this murder *must* have a connection. Perhaps the scent of the orchids upset them and —"

"Ever seen a mole-catcher at Ingram?" Hildreth rapped "Ever seen a rat-catcher — either? . . . Simply reekin fume; put it on the palm hands." Another fragment traordinary knowledge fell off in my remembrance: "They use oils of geranium and bog-myrtle, with the essences of *neroli*, and ambergris digested with absolute alcohol. And I'll be damned if you can wash it out of their skin, let alone wear it off."

"But what's that to do with it?"

"Can't you jump the gap, old man? Take it as a fact that all rodents are as fascinated by perfume — especially flower *aethers* — as any woman. . . . Get into a graden where night-scented stocks and nicotines grow. Watch the antics of the mice you'll see pottering around —" He laughed and paused and took out his cigarette-case; a sure sign that work was done. "*No*, some-

thing that was not a perfume sent those rats a-packing — have a smoke?"

As we lighted up, the constable who had taken the casts brought the results over to us. Hildreth examined them carefully and wrapped one specimen in a handkerchief.

"*Excellent!*" he applauded. "They're clear enough, Inspector Umpleby, to show us to one certain conclusion."

"Yes, Mr. Hildreth, and what's that?"

"That a woman murdered Lek Su — a woman somewhere between four feet eight and five feet; a slender little creature with abnormally shaped lf-muscles." He chuckled at Um-'s ludicrous face. "Hang it all, dly serious! Have a look his area for a woman — prob- fond of dancing — an- that description. What I y 'abnormally shaped' calves . . . not round and feminine. They'll be flat-backed and something like those you'll see on a hundred-yard sprinter."

"I — I don't dispute you, sir" — Umpleby was absolutely floored — "but it's all very vague."

Hildreth grew sombre and almost petulant.

"*Vague?* Then I'll be directly otherwise, although it's taking a devilish long shot. . . . You want a Celestial, or at least a half-caste. I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn she's of considerable beauty. And, if and when you do find her, always provided it doesn't take you too long, have a good look at her fingertips . . . they'll more than likely be stained maroon." He turned and slowly sauntered to the narrow door. "But I hope you never do find her, poor beggar! It occurs to me that Lek Su got no more than he deserved."

A fortnight elapsed before I saw or heard from Hildreth again.

When he eventually turned up at my flat in Bayswater he looked haggard and hungry.

I poured him a whisky and soda and talked about the weather. Gradually he lost his terrible air of strain. Gradually he came round to the mysterious affair of the dead Lek Su.

"I think," he gently mentioned, "I've found the killer."

"*Really?*" I charged his glass again and aped a casual state I did not feel. "I'm interested to hear that!"

"It *is* a woman — told you it would be. . . . A Celestial, *and* a beauty, and not much more than five feet in height." He screwed up his eyes and chuckled. "Although you've not seen her in the flesh, you've looked on her shade many a time — and heard her voice, my good Ingram!"

"*I* have?"

"Of course! You're a great cinema-goer, aren't you?" I nodded. "And she's a screen 'star' — Verna Ninos by name."

I blinked and gasped. I seemed instantly to capture an impression of Verna Ninos, in a thousand shifting moods and all a glamor. Certainly she had an Oriental caste of features, despite publicity-mongering which dub-

bed her Mexican, or Chilean, I forget exactly which.

"You appear sure."

"I *am* sure! D'you know," the Black Monk thrust his head forward and challenged arrogantly, "I found so much in that warehouse, I could have gone far deeper into detail."

"You flabbergasted Umpleby and the constables, anyway. I can't say about myself. I'm by way of getting used to you, y'know."

"Behold, a disciple! Now that's rather decent of you, Ingram! It's pleasant to know one isn't considered an eccentric ass by all men, all the time." He had touched on the secret issue of his life.

"Good of you — *good* of you," he muttered himself to an embarrassed silence.

Then his story came with a bewildering rush. . . .

"Lek Su — although that would not be his proper name — was a *mandarin*. Not a *mandarin* of the magenta silk or of the yellow . . . a man of the highest lordly rank. He was a prince of the lilac silk. I saw that immediately I noticed the color and the beautiful warp and woof of that pouch he wore around his neck. And the loop of hair on which it had been slung . . . that was the pigtail he had sacrificed to the *convenances* of Occidental civilization. Another proof. Only a member of the highest caste would have cared so much.

"However, that to one side. . . . Now we have a man who is, indubitably, a Chinaman of rank and breeding carrying about with him a cheap-jack metal watch and clad in a mass-produced suit. Yet his feet must be shod with exquisite care. Another pointer to his quality, Ingram. Lek Su had been used to litters and *palanquins* and cushions. His tender feet were not efficient enough for slogging along concreted streets.

"This cultured and nurtured man had recently thought fit to leave his native province for America and Europe. Neither his shoes nor his hat was old. New York and Vienna and London hadn't known him long. . . .

"I asked myself *why* he had done this thing. Why should he have started off on such a momentous pilgrimage? Why should he have left his powerful luxury and his *lsi hiang* and his opium-pipes?

"Well, I recollected the significance of the *tong* token he wore. He was high in the order of the *Hwey T'ien-Lao* . . . and let me tell you, old fellow, the 'Brothers of Heaven' are a mighty company. So high was he in their degrees, he had the power not only of life and death, but, in actuality, was an executioner. Probably an office exercised by proxy . . . nevertheless a grand-master's prerogative."

He stopped and watched me warily.

"Boring you?" he challenged.

"Not — not at all! You stupefy me, rather than bore. How the devil d'you get to know all this?"

"*Ugh* — I couldn't sub-edit a paragraph; I couldn't control a newspaper. . . . To you, your job. To me, mine. It's all a matter of — of never ceasing

to absorb. I'm afraid I'm cursed with the faculty of a sponge."

"Squeeze out a bit more," I advised him.

"Very well then. From the assumption of Lek Su's princely rank and his eminence in the order of the Brothers of Heaven, it wasn't a far cry to the realization that nothing short of disaster could have sent him globe-trotting. I had to determine on a motive that was gigantic. And I found it, first pop off, in that haddock-box.

"There, in his death, he was confronted by something which must easily have been the greatest factor in all his life: the emblem orchid of the *Hwey T'ien-Lao*.

"Don't imagine that orchid meant to Lek Su what regalia means to a mason. More than that — much, much more! It was even more to him than saintly relics are to a priest. Those emerald blossoms were his *sesame* to paradise. Their perfume was the air of hereafter. *So* much.

"He would have known those holy orchids enshrined in porcelain pavilions, among lacquerings and entablatures of gold, screened from vulgar gaze by strings of jewels hanging like a glass bead-curtain. He saw them at the last in a wooden box on the overflowed mud of an English river."

"Problem is," I ventured, "how'd they get there?"

He turned and looked through me in that peculiar way of his that made one think him sightless at times.

"Suppose they had been stolen. . . . Suppose one of those far-away porcelain pavilions had been rifled, and the robber had fled with the spoil — out of China, across to America, from America to Vienna, from Vienna to London. . . ."

"Yes, I catch your drift. *Yes?*"

"And Lek Su, an overlord of the *Hwey T'ien-Lao*, to whom the sacred plant had been entrusted, was charged by the outraged Brothers with the task of recovering that plant and punishing the thief. . . . Wouldn't that fit in with all known facts?"

"It would," I admitted. "But, tell me, why should anyone want to pinch a few orchids? 'Sacred' they might be to the company of Brothers of Heaven, but what earthly use would they be to anyone else?"

Hildreth slowly jerked his head and made clucking noises, evidently expressive of his contempt for my intelligence.

"I think I could give you, off-hand, the names of half a dozen British orchid culturists who would rave about that haddock-boxed plant. Aye, and they'd tumble over themselves to pay thousands of guineas for it — always provided the vendor could guarantee it to grow. In America the plant, *and* the secret, would command even more fantastic prices.

"Good lord, man! *Cœlogene Hepasthenii* is acknowledged to be the world's most lovely and mysterious orchid. It has been discovered, in its natural habitat, in a teakwood forest, and brought from the Far East to Europe. But always the specimen died. . . . According to authority no

one except the pledged priestesses of the *Hwey T'ien-Lao* know how to cultivate it in artificial surroundings. Not even *mandarins* of the *tong* know that secret. Only the priestesses, whose whole lives are dedicated to that service, understand the process."

"You — you are so appallingly certain ——"

Hildreth rounded on me.

"When Whitehall recommended me as an expert to the C.I.D., Whitehall had to know its business and I mine." He showed his teeth. "Damn it all, Ingram, as I've said before, it's my job. . . . But if you want verse and chapter, go to the Dutch and German authorities on orchids. Expeditions have been sent out to collect *Cœlogene Hepasthenii* — volumes have been written about it; Kew probably has waxen models of it — Hamburg certainly . . . but that's as far as anyone gets. As I say, the secret of its culture is locked up among the mysteries of the *Hwey T'ien-Lao*."

Since he was inclined to sullenness I hastened to make amends.

"Then, I take it, your argument is tending to prove that one of these secret 'priestesses' must have accompanied the orchid all the way from its pavilion in China — to Thurbaston Street."

"Jolly good! That's the direct line, Ingram!" His good humor was buoyantly restored. "That *is* the order of the day. As you saw, the plant was flourishing; vital and perfectly healthy. Granting a period of some months elapsed since its theft from Lek Su's charge, naturally it follows that one of these priestesses must have been in constant attendance on its needs."

"Clear enough, I must say! And, at the last, you attempt to identify this attendant as Verna Ninos?"

"*Yes*, I do!" He took out a notebook and referred to it. "She is a cinema actress . . . a ballet dancer . . . an Oriental 'vamp' of a type that has universal appeal. She was attached to a *mandarin's* household from her birth, nineteen years ago.

"In company with a rather peculiar male she descended on Hollywood not so long ago. Her success was instantaneous. Three months ago she was in New York. Since then she has been in Vienna. Six weeks ago she came to England. For a while she stayed in London — then, if you please, she betook herself to Harrogate, where she is at present.

"And ask yourself, how does all that fit in with Lek Su's pilgrimage — *eh?* From the hat to the shoes, to the L.M.S. ticket for Harrogate — how's that, umpire?"

I gasped. The amazing fellow had certainly succeeded in establishing a very strong case.

"I think you must be very near the bone," I said to him. "But go on, tell me the lot."

He closed his notebook and smiled.

"Now I am going to venture a step farther. Not only was Verna Ninos the priestess who knew how to keep the blossoms alive and healthy — I am suggesting she was the actual thief.

That — under compulsion — she stole that sacred orchid."

"Well, it wouldn't need much compulsion, if she knew she could get thousands of pounds for it!"

"I do the woman enough justice to believe money would not have tempted her to such an awful betrayal. Love might. . . . We mustn't forget our mysterious second string: the other Chinese — Hugh MacKinley."

"Hugh MacKinley, a — a Chinese!" I nearly collapsed with laughter. "*Gad!* I've heard nothing so rich as that in months!"

Hildreth chuckled.

"It's a bit thick, I must say. However we'll assume love was the touchstone of this infamy. MacKinley incites the girl to theft. She steals the orchid: they flee out of China together.

"Now the thunders of the *Hwey T'ien-Lao* are loosed: Lek Su gets it in the neck. He is degraded. He has lost 'face.' His house is disgraced and his hopes of paradise are lost . . . and his is the task of restoration. So our princely *mandarin* sets out on his mission of recovery and vengeance. From that moment it is a matter of kill or be killed. . . . Ask yourself, what chances of survival had Verna Ninos or Hugh MacKinley once that fellow had laid hands on 'em — *eh?*"

"Not many," I agreed.

"Hence the *finale*. The pursuit was hot and devilishly dangerous. Apparently the precious orchid wasn't so readily marketable as the robbers had supposed. Either it was too dangerous to buy, else its price was too great.

"Knowing Lek Su was not to be shaken off, I suggest they got in touch with him, by some means unknown, and offered the plant as the price of immunity. And he would agree. He could do nothing otherwise. *Cœlogene Hepasthenii* was greater to him than mortal life."

"Thence to Thurbaston Street," I softly interpolated this because Hildreth was off again into another of his brooding silences. "How — and *why?*"

He glanced over his smoke.

"Maybe you noticed that oily humus in which the orchid grew. Maybe you heard my reference to maroon stains on the woman's fingers?"

"Yes."

"Just outside that warehouse is a timber yard. I told you I struck oil there . . . teakwood oil, and it stains fingers. Recall that the orchid grows on the teak. Those *pseudo*-bulbs are its living laboratories for the change of teakwood oils to nutriment. The gums and resins of teak had to be procured to keep the thing alive. . . . I argue that such stuff was obtained from that timber yard. Hence, knowing the district — this London Chinatown — neither Verna Ninos nor MacKinley would miss that empty warehouse.

"It was an ideal site for murder. Think of it, Ingram, as their Oriental brains would think of it. A big empty floor: lonely, remote. Just the place to choose for their deadly snare.

"For that's what it amounted to at the last. Lek Su had to die. He alive, they could never rest in peace. Even though he recovered his beloved orchid, yet he could not be trusted . . . so the truly terrible trap was set."

After a while he grunted out:

"Told you that the woman would have peculiar calves, didn't I?"

Astonished, I said. "Yes."

"Well, she has. I've been scouting around Harrogate lately. I've seen this Verna Ninos in the flesh; took particular care to follow her when she went golfing. . . . The only flaw in her physical beauty is the abnormal development of her *gastrocnemius* muscles: her calves. They're those of a ballet-dancer. They're flattened and ugly — but, by Jove, you should see how nimbly they can pull her up on her toes."

"It's peculiar to have to recognize her as a dancer," I said. "A priestess — a dancer ——"

"A *mandarin's* toy." Hildreth was cold and blunt. "Many a time she would have to dance for his serene highness Lek Su. When she saw that muddied warehouse floor she would doubtless recollect the magnificent pavements of the palace she had always known. It would be, maybe, with horror and loathing that she remembered how she had been forced to perform for Lek Su's lazy amusement . . . the Dance of the Silver Grasses, for instance — one of the most peculiar bits of terpsichorean art that is known."

He was laughing grimly now. I knew that here was climax. Here was the last card he had to play.

"Very well, thought she, she would dance for the last time for him, the lordly Lek Su. She strapped little bamboo stilts to her toes and raised herself erect on them" (I was frankly goggling now) "and *'tippy-tip-tipped'* like a fairy over that mud. All the tracks she left were the tiny holes made by the stilt ferrules.

"Then, having put down the orchids in the centre of the floor, she would lurk in the angle of the door waiting for Lek Su.

"He came and saw the plants. In an ecstasy of relief and adoration he knelt before them, at uttermost peace at last. . . . He would never think of his far-away palace, and the supremely beautiful attendant of the *T'ien-Lao* orchid — she whom so often he had seen with her tiny clamped-up toes settled into the cups of bending rods of silver bamboo, dancing delicately for his delight. . . . He would never think — but she would be remembering. . . .

"Can you envisage the truly Oriental horribleness of that last essay of hers? Can you see her, as I seem to see her, *pizzicato*-ing across that gray silt? Then the swift strike of her three-cornered dagger . . . her withdrawal of it: her gloating satisfaction — her terrible triumph?"

I closed my eyes and admitted that I could. The knowledge that small stilts had been used could come to him, but never could have come to

me, or, I suppose, the police. It explained all.

"It *was* her triumph, but in it she lost the orchids. There is no doubt in my mind but that she fully intended collecting them and taking them with her. Something prevented her . . . and I've a shrewd idea what it was — *those rats!*"

"Yes? How so?"

"I believe the killing agency of those orchids is a gas. Notice how they flared up with scent after the thunderstorm's disturbance? And something similar takes place with their roots and bulbs. . . . In their natural state I take the view that they flourish without doing much harm. But artificially cultured, fed with the essential oil of teak; glutted with it, one might say, the *pseudo*-bulbs and the roots give off a noxious vapor strong enough to poison.

"The humus was full of teak — the oils of it metamorphosed through the plant structure into a deadly air — would scatter the rats instantly. In the muggy oppression preceding that storm they'd become aware of its presence and go frantic. . . . And I'll bet that woman, although capable of killing a man in cold blood, daren't face the rats! At any rate she forsook the precious blooms — and left the only clue worthwhile, apart, of course, from Lek Su's *tong* device and his shoes." And now he was very quiet.

"One thing I can't understand," I said at length, "is how you decided on the woman's height ——"

"The average distance between her steps, taken on those stilts, was four feet three inches. Merely the consideration of an equilateral triangle plus an eighth of any one side, added to give the head . . . result, somewhere about five feet. You see, she couldn't very well stride out beyond the incidental angles of her gravity, otherwise she'd have fallen."

"'Fraid that's not a problem for my mind," I said to him, "so I'll take your word for it, along with all the rest."

"*Er* — thank you!"

"What are you going to do? You can't be party to this, y'know. . . . This woman has done murder. This Hugh MacKinley is apparently her accomplice in ——"

"*Pace!*" Hildreth waved a solemn hand. He fished a length of newspaper from a pocket. "You're on holiday and, therefore, keep as far away from news as possible. Read this — in this afternoon's stop-press box of your own particular organ."

I read, with singular alarm:

FAMOUS SCREEN STAR KILLED

It is reported from Harrogate that Miss Verna Ninos, the famous cinema actress, and her companion, Mr. Hugh MacKinley, were trapped in their overturned car this afternoon and fatally burned. It is believed another car was involved in the crash, but no trace of this has yet been found.

"Nor ever will be," Hildreth murmured hollowly. "Poor pretty fool . . . did she not realize that where the one hand of the Brothers failed, another reached out — to strike?"

And I have hated orchids ever since.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *In Edith Wharton we welcome to the pages of EQMM another Pulitzer Prize winner — indeed, the first woman to be awarded two Pulitzer Prizes, one for her novel,* THE AGE OF INNOCENCE, *in 1920, and the second for "The Old Maid" (dramatized from her book,* OLD NEW YORK) *which won the drama prize in 1935. Mrs. Wharton was a native New Yorker. She was born to the upper-class society of New York which in that extinct era led the pleasant, leisurely, and un(social)conscious life of Paris, Newport, and the Riviera. Tended by governesses and trained by tutors, it is surprising how far from her own background Mrs. Wharton's literary bent took her. Her family and friends regarded her early writing as an unaccountable eccentricity — as taboo a subject for discussion as "sex." Yet the two most important influences on Mrs. Wharton's literary thinking can now be traced to her personal friend, Henry James, and to the French novelist, Paul Bourget. Today the grand old lady is remembered for* THE HOUSE OF MIRTH, *published as long ago as 1905, and for her masterpiece, the grim New England tragedy,* ETHAN FROME.

There are other sidelights of interest in her literary career. We glean the piquant fact that Mrs. Wharton was the first woman to receive an honorary Litt.D. from Yale — no mean accomplishment, dear readers. And surely it must have given Mrs. Wharton a more than passing thrill to have Sinclair Lewis dedicate BABBITT *to her — to the gracious 60-year-old belle dame who as a little girl had been raised so carefully, so safely, and so prophylactically in New York's gilded cage.*

ABOUT THE READER: *We are indebted to Ellen D. Struhs of New York City for the selection of Edith Wharton's "A Bottle of Perrier." Not only did Ellen Struhs suggest the story for reprint but she consulted the files of the Public Library to find out for us in which of Mrs. Wharton's books we could read this memorable tale. We are happy to acknowledge our gratitude in print, and we hope that other "constant readers" will also recommend their favorite detective-crime short stories to our attention. Simply give us the titles and authors' names, if that is all you can recall, and we promise to track down every one of your choices and bring them back alive.*

Ellen Struhs made another nomination for reprint — Erle Stanley Gardner's stories about Lester Leith which appeared in old "Flynn's" magazine, later called "Detective Fiction Weekly." Ellen Struhs described Lester Leith as a lawyer-crook on whom the police could never pin any evidence, even though they planted an undercover man in Leith's household as his valet. Leith would solve crimes merely from accounts in the daily

newspapers, and would catch the criminals, shaking them down, long before the police were even on the right trail. Ellen Struhs remembers the yarns "as entertaining and fascinating as cleverly performed sleight-of-hand." In the opinion of Ellen Struhs, "Perry Mason pales by comparison."

As a matter of fact, we have been trying to persuade Erle Stanley Gardner for a long time to permit EQMM to reprint some of the Lester Leith stories. But Mr. Gardner has consistently refused. We do not know why Mr. Gardner has persisted in "killing off" Lester Leith — he never explained. Certainly the exploits of Lester Leith deserve a ratiocinative revival, and we would be delighted to serve as the revivalist. Why don't enough of you write to Mr. Gardner and ask him to reconsider? No writer should disregard the wishes of John Q. and Ellen S. Public: friends or foes, in the final analysis the fans are the "sole arbiters" — their loyalty has earned them the perennial right of "readers' choice."

ABOUT THE STORY: *But back to "A Bottle of Perrier" . . . It has been said of Edith Wharton's work that "her characters are given sharp, clear, consistent shapes." You will find that true: young Medford, the velvet-footed Gosling, and especially the strange archeologist, Henry Almodham, are sharp and clear and consistent against the shimmering background of the desert. It has also been said that Mrs. Wharton's style is a "clear, luminous medium in which things are seen in precise and striking outline." You will find that true: the mystery and menace of the infinite sands, the enervating heat, the timelessness, the silence, the inaccessibility — all become luminous. But there is something else — something brooding and haunting — which becomes increasingly clear and finally emerges "in precise and striking outline." You won't forget that something — Mrs. Wharton has etched it in words for all time.*

A BOTTLE OF PERRIER

by EDITH WHARTON

A TWO days' struggle over the treacherous trails in a well-intentioned but short-winded "flivver," and a ride of two more on a hired mount of unamiable temper, had disposed young Medford, of the American School of Archeology at Athens, to wonder why his queer English friend, Henry Almodham, had chosen to live in the desert.

Now he understood.

He was leaning against the roof parapet of the old building, half Christian fortress, half Arab palace, which had been Almodham's pretext; or one of them. Below, in an inner court, a little wind, rising as the sun sank, sent through a knot of palms the rain-like rattle so cooling to the pilgrims of the desert. An ancient fig tree, enormous, exuberant, writhed over a whitewashed well-head, sucking life from what appeared to be the only source of moisture within the walls. Beyond these, on every side, stretched away the mystery of the sands, all golden with promise, all livid with menace, as the sun alternately touched or abandoned them.

Young Medford, somewhat weary after his journey from the coast, and awed by his first intimate sense of the omnipresence of the desert, shivered and drew back. Undoubtedly, for a scholar and a misogynist, it was a wonderful refuge; but one would have to be, incurably, both.

"Let's take a look at the house," Medford said to himself, as if speedy contact with man's handiwork were necessary to his reassurance.

The house, he already knew, was empty save for the quick cosmopolitan manservant, who spoke a sort of palimpsest Cockney lined with Mediterranean tongues and desert dialects — English, Italian or Greek, which was he? — and two or three burnoused underlings who, having carried Medford's bags to his room, had relieved the place of their gliding presences. Mr. Almodham, the servant told him, was away; suddenly summoned by a friendly chief to visit some unexplored ruins to the south, he had ridden off at dawn, too hurriedly to write, but leaving messages of excuse and regret. That evening late he might be back, or next morning.

Almodham, as young Medford knew, was always making these archeological explorations; they had been his ostensible reason for settling in that remote place, and his desultory search had already resulted in the discovery of several early Christian ruins of great interest.

Medford was glad that his host had not stood on ceremony, and rather relieved, on the whole, to have the next few hours to himself. He had had a malarial fever the previous summer, and in spite of his cork helmet he had probably caught a touch of the sun; he felt curiously, helplessly tired, yet deeply content.

And what a place it was to rest in! The silence, the remoteness, the illimitable air! And in the heart of the wilderness green leafage, water, comfort — he had already caught a glimpse of wide wicker chairs under the palms — a humane and welcoming habitation. Yes, he began to understand Almodham. To anyone sick of the Western fret and fever the very walls of this desert fortress exuded peace.

As his foot was on the ladder-like stair leading down from the roof,

Medford saw the manservant's head rising toward him. It rose slowly and Medford had time to remark that it was sallow, bald on the top, diagonally dented with a long white scar, and ringed with thick ash-blond hair. Hitherto Medford had noticed only the man's face — youngish, but sallow also — and been chiefly struck by its wearing an odd expression which could best be defined as surprise.

The servant, moving aside, looked up, and Medford perceived that his air of surprise was produced by the fact that his intensely blue eyes were rather wider open than most eyes, and fringed with thick ash-blond lashes; otherwise there was nothing noticeable about him.

"Just to ask — what wine for dinner, sir? Champagne, or — "

"No wine, thanks."

The man's disciplined lips were played over by a faint flicker of deprecation or irony, or both.

"Not any at all, sir?"

Medford smiled back. "Well, no; I've been rather seedy, and wine's forbidden."

The servant remained incredulous. "Just a little light Moselle, though, to color the water, sir?"

"No wine at all," said Medford, growing bored. He was still in the stage of convalescence when it is irritating to be argued with about one's dietary.

"Oh — what's your name, by the way?" he added, to soften the curtness of his refusal.

"Gosling," said the other unexpectedly, though Medford didn't in the least know what he had expected him to be called.

"You're English, then?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"You've been in these parts a good many years, though?"

Yes, he had, Gosling said; rather too long for his own liking; and added that he had been born at Malta. "But I know England well too." His deprecating look returned. "I will confess, sir, I'd like to have 'ad a look at Wembley.* Mr. Almodham 'ad promised me — but there — " As if to minimize the *abandon* of this confidence, he followed it up by a ceremonious request for Medford's keys, and an enquiry as to when he would like to dine. Having received a reply, he still lingered, looking more surprised than ever.

"Just a mineral water, then, sir?"

"Oh, yes — anything."

"Shall we say a bottle of Perrier?"

Perrier in the desert! Medford smiled assentingly, surrendered his keys and strolled away.

The house turned out to be smaller than he had imagined, or at least the habitable part of it; for above this towered mighty dilapidated walls of yellow stone, and in their crevices clung plaster chambers, one above the other, cedar-beamed, crimson-shuttered but crumbling. Out of this jumble of masonry and stucco, Christian and Moslem, the latest tenant of

*The famous exhibition at Wembley, near London, took place in 1924.

the fortress had chosen a cluster of rooms tucked into an angle of the ancient keep. These apartments opened on the uppermost court, where the palms chattered and the fig tree coiled above the well. On the broken marble pavement, chairs and a low table were grouped, and a few geraniums and blue morning-glories had been coaxed to grow between the slabs.

A white-skirted boy with watchful eyes was watering the plants; but at Medford's approach he vanished like a wisp of vapor.

There was something vaporous and insubstantial about the whole scene; even the long arcaded room opening on the court, furnished with saddle-bag cushions, divans with gazelle skins, and rough indigenous rugs; even the table piled with old *Timeses* and ultra-modern French and English reviews — all seemed, in that clear mocking air, born of the delusion of some desert wayfarer.

A seat under the fig tree invited Medford to doze, and when he woke the hard blue dome above him was gemmed with stars and the night breeze gossiped with the palms.

Rest — beauty — peace. Wise Almodham!

Wise Almodham! Having carried out — with somewhat disappointing results — the excavation with which an archeological society had charged him twenty-five years ago, he had lingered on, taken possession of the Crusaders' stronghold, and turned his attention from ancient to medieval remains. But even these investigations, Medford suspected, he prosecuted only at intervals, when the enchantment of his leisure did not lie on him too heavily.

The young American had met Henry Almodham at Luxor the previous winter; had dined with him at old Colonel Swordsley's, on that perfumed starlit terrace above the Nile; and having somehow awakened the archeologist's interest, had been invited to look him up in the desert the following year.

They had spent only that one evening together, with old Swordsley blinking at them under memory-laden lids, and two or three charming women from the Winter Palace chattering and exclaiming; but the two men had ridden back to Luxor together in the moonlight, and during that ride Medford fancied he had puzzled out the essential lines of Henry Almodham's character. A nature saturnine yet sentimental; chronic indolence alternating with spurts of highly intelligent activity; gnawing self-distrust soothed by intimate self-appreciation; a craving for complete solitude coupled with the inability to tolerate it for long.

There was more, too, Medford suspected; a dash of Victorian romance, gratified by the setting, the remoteness, the inaccessibility of his retreat, and by being known as *the* Henry Almodham — "the one who lives in a Crusaders' castle, you know" — the gradual imprisonment in a pose as-

sumed in youth, and into which middle age had slowly stiffened; and something deeper, darker, too, perhaps, though the young man doubted that; probably just the fact that living in that particular way had brought healing to an old wound, an old mortification, something which years ago had touched a vital part and left him writhing. Above all, in Almodham's hesitating movements and the dreaming look of his long well-featured brown face with its shock of gray hair, Medford detected an inertia, mental and moral, which life in this castle of romance must have fostered and excused.

"Once here, how easy not to leave!" he mused.

"Dinner, sir," Gosling announced.

The table stood in an open arch of the living-room; shaded candles made a rosy pool in the dusk. Each time he emerged into their light the servant, white-jacketed, velvet-footed, looked more competent and more surprised than ever. Such dishes, too — the cook also a Maltese? Ah, they were geniuses, these Maltese! Gosling bridled, smiled his acknowledgment, and started to fill the guest's glass with Chablis.

"No wine," said Medford patiently.

"Sorry, sir. But the fact is — "

"You said there was Perrier?"

"Yes, sir; but I find there's none left. It's been awfully hot, and Mr. Almodham has been and drank it all up. The new supply isn't due till next week. We 'ave to depend on the caravans going south."

"No matter. Water, then. I really prefer it."

Gosling's surprise widened to amazement. "Not water, sir? Water — in these parts?"

Medford's irritability stirred again. "Something wrong with your water? Boil it then, can't you? I won't — " He pushed away the half-filled wine-glass.

"Oh — boiled? Certainly, sir." The man's voice dropped almost to a whisper. He placed on the table a succulent mess of rice and mutton, and vanished.

Medford leaned back, surrendering himself to the night, the coolness, the ripple of wind in the palms.

One agreeable dish succeeded another. As the last appeared, the diner began to feel the pangs of thirst, and at the same moment a beaker of water was placed at his elbow. "Boiled, sir, and I squeezed a lemon into it."

"Right. I suppose at the end of the summer your water gets a bit muddy?"

"That's it, sir. But you'll find this all right, sir."

Medford tasted. "Better than Perrier." He emptied the glass, leaned back and groped in his pocket. A tray was instantly at his hand with cigars and cigarettes.

"You don't — smoke, sir?"

Medford, for answer, held up his cigar to the man's light. "What do you call this?"

"Oh, just so. I meant the other style." Gosling glanced discreetly at the opium pipes of jade and amber

which were laid out on the low table.

Medford shrugged away the invitation — and wondered. Was that perhaps Almodham's other secret — or one of them? For he began to think there might be many; and all, he was sure, safely stored away behind Gosling's vigilant brow.

"No news yet of Mr. Almodham?"

Gosling was gathering up the dishes with dexterous gestures. For a moment he seemed not to hear. Then — from beyond the candle gleam — "News, sir? There couldn't 'ardly be, could there? There's no wireless in the desert, sir; not like London." His respectful tone tempered the slight irony. "But tomorrow evening ought to see him riding in." Gosling paused, drew nearer, swept one of his swift hands across the table in pursuit of the last crumbs, and added tentatively: "You'll surely be able, sir, to stay till then?"

Medford laughed. The night was too rich in healing; it sank on his spirit like wings. Time vanished, fret and trouble were no more. "Stay? I'll stay a year if I have to!"

"Oh — a year?" Gosling echoed it playfully, gathered up the dessert dishes and was gone.

Medford had said that he would wait for Almodham a year; but the next morning he found that such arbitrary terms had lost their meaning. There were no time measures in a place like this. The silly face of his watch told its daily tale to emptiness. The wheeling of the constellations over those ruined walls marked only the revolutions of the earth; the spasmodic motions of man meant nothing.

The very fact of being hungry, that stroke of the inward clock, was minimized by the slightness of the sensation — just the ghost of a pang, that might have been quieted by dried fruit and honey. Life had the light monotonous smoothness of eternity.

Toward sunset Medford shook off this queer sense of otherwhereness and climbed to the roof. Across the desert he spied for Almodham. Southward the Mountains of Alabaster hung like a blue veil lined with light. In the west a great column of fire shot up, spraying into plumy cloudlets which turned the sky to a fountain of rose-leaves, the sands beneath to gold.

No riders specked them. Medford watched in vain for his absent host till night fell, and the punctual Gosling invited him once more to table.

In the evening Medford absently fingered the ultramodern reviews — three months old, and already so stale to the touch — then tossed them aside, flung himself on a divan and dreamed. Almodham must spend a lot of time in dreaming; that was it. Then, just as he felt himself sinking down into torpor, he would be off on one of these dashes across the desert in quest of unknown ruins. Not such a bad life.

Gosling appeared with Turkish coffee in a cup cased in filigree.

"Are there any horses in the stable?" Medford suddenly asked.

"Horses? Only what you might call pack-horses, sir. Mr. Almodham has the two best saddle-horses with him."

"I was thinking I might ride out to meet him."

Gosling considered. "So you might, sir."

"Do you know which way he went?"

"Not rightly, sir. The caid's man was to guide them."

"Them? Who went with him?"

"Just one of our men, sir. They've got the two thoroughbreds. There's a third but he's lame." Gosling paused. "Do you know the trails, sir? Excuse me, but I don't think I ever saw you here before."

"No," Medford acquiesced, "I've never been here before."

"Oh, then" — Gosling's gesture added: "In that case, even the best thoroughbred wouldn't help you."

"I suppose he may still turn up tonight?"

"Oh, easily, sir. I expect to see you both breakfasting here tomorrow morning," said Gosling cheerfully.

Medford sipped his coffee. "You said you'd never seen me here before. How long have you been here yourself?"

Gosling answered instantly, as though the figures were never long out of his memory: "Eleven years and seven months altogether, sir."

"Nearly twelve years! That's a longish time."

"Yes, it is."

"And I don't suppose you often get away?"

Gosling was moving off with the tray. He halted, turned back, and said with sudden emphasis: "I've never once been away. Not since Mr. Almodham first brought me here."

"Good Lord! Not a single holiday?"

"Not one, sir."

"But Mr. Almodham goes off occasionally. I met him at Luxor last year."

"Just so, sir. But when he's here he needs me for himself; and when he's away he needs me to watch over the others. So you see —"

"Yes, I see. But it must seem to you devilish long."

"It seems long, sir."

"But the others? You mean they're not — wholly trustworthy?"

"Well, sir, they're just Arabs," said Gosling with careless contempt.

"I see. And not a single old reliable among them?"

"The term isn't in their language, sir."

Medford was busy lighting his cigar. When he looked up he found that Gosling still stood a few feet off.

"It wasn't as if it 'adn't been a promise, you know, sir," he said, almost passionately.

"A promise?"

"To let me 'ave my holiday, sir. A promise — agine and agine."

"And the time never came?"

"No, sir. The days just drifted by —"

"Ah. They would, here. Don't sit up for me," Medford added. "I think I shall wait for Mr. Almodham."

Gosling's stare widened. "Here, sir? Here in the court?"

The young man nodded, and the servant stood still regarding him, turned by the moonlight to a white spectral figure, the unquiet ghost of a patient butler who might have died without his holiday.

"Down here in this court all night, sir? It's a lonely spot. I couldn't 'ear you if you was to call. You're best in bed, sir. The air's bad. You might bring your fever on again."

Medford laughed and stretched himself in his long chair. "Decidedly," he thought, "the fellow needs a change." Aloud he remarked: "Oh, I'm all right. It's you who are nervous, Gosling. When Mr. Almodham comes back I mean to put in a word for you. You shall have your holiday."

Gosling still stood motionless. For a minute he did not speak. "You would, sir, you would?" He gasped it out on a high cracked note, and the last word ran into a laugh — a brief shrill cackle, the laugh of one long unused to such indulgences.

"Thank you, sir. Good night, sir." He was gone.

"You do boil my drinking water, always?" Medford questioned, his hand clasping the glass without lifting it.

The tone was amicable, almost confidential; Medford felt that since his rash promise to secure a holiday for Gosling he and Gosling were on terms of real friendship.

"Boil it? Always, sir. Naturally." Gosling spoke with a slight note of reproach, as though Medford's question implied a slur — unconscious, he hoped — on their newly established relation. He scrutinized Medford with his astonished eyes, in which a genuine concern showed itself through the glaze of professional indifference.

"Because, you know, my bath this morning —"

Gosling was in the act of receiving from the hands of a gliding Arab a fragrant dish of *kuskus*. Under his breath he whispered to the native: "You damned aboriginy, you, can't you even 'old a dish steady? Ugh!" The Arab vanished before the imprecation, and Gosling, with a calm deliberate hand, set the dish before Medford. "All alike, they are." Fastidiously he wiped a trail of grease from his linen sleeve.

"Because, you know, my bath this morning simply stank," said Medford, plunging fork and spoon into the dish.

"Your bath, sir?" Gosling stressed the word. Astonishment, to the exclusion of all other emotion, again filled his eyes as he rested them on Medford. "Now, I wouldn't 'ave 'ad thåt 'appen for the world," he said self-reproachfully.

"There's only the one well here, eh? The one in the court?"

Gosling aroused himself from absorbed consideration of the visitor's complaint. "Yes, sir; only the one."

"What sort of well is it? Where does the water come from?"

"Oh, it's just a cistern, sir. Rain water. There's never been any other

here. Not that I ever knew it to fail; but at this season sometimes it does turn queer. Ask any o' them Arabs, sir; they'll tell you. Liars as they are, they won't trouble to lie about that."

Medford was cautiously tasting the water in his glass. "This seems all right," he pronounced.

Sincere satisfaction was depicted on Gosling's countenance. "I seen to its being boiled myself, sir. I always do. I 'ope that Perrier'll turn up tomorrow, sir."

"Oh, tomorrow" — Medford shrugged, taking a second helping. "Tomorrow I may not be here to drink it."

"What — going away, sir?" cried Gosling.

Medford, wheeling round abruptly, caught a new and incomprehensible look in Gosling's eyes. The man had seemed to feel a sort of dog-like affection for him; had wanted, Medford could have sworn, to keep him on, persuade him to patience and delay; yet now, Medford could equally have sworn, there was relief in his look, satisfaction, almost, in his voice.

"So soon, sir?"

"Well, this is the fifth day since my arrival. And as there's no news yet of Mr. Almodham, and you say he may very well have forgotten all about my coming —"

"Oh, I don't say that, sir; not forgotten! Only, when one of those old piles of stones takes 'old of him, he does forget about the time, sir. That's what I meant. The days drift by — 'e's in a dream. Very likely he thinks you're just due now, sir." A small thin smile sharpened the lustreless gravity of Gosling's features. It was the first time that Medford had seen him smile.

"Oh, I understand. But still —" Medford paused. Through the spell of inertia laid on him by the drowsy place and its easeful comforts his instinct of alertness was struggling back. "It's odd —"

"What's odd?" Gosling echoed unexpectedly, setting the dried dates and figs on the table.

"Everything," said Medford.

He leaned back in his chair and glanced up through the arch at the lofty sky from which noon was pouring down in cataracts of blue and gold. Almodham was out there somewhere under that canopy of fire, perhaps, as the servant said, absorbed in his dream. The land was full of spells.

"Coffee, sir?" Gosling reminded him. Medford took it.

"It's odd that you say you don't trust any of these fellows — these Arabs — and yet that you don't seem to feel worried at Mr. Almodham's being off God knows where, all alone with them."

Gosling received this attentively, impartially; he saw the point. "Well, sir, no — you wouldn't understand. It's the very thing that can't be taught, when to trust 'em and when not. It's 'ow their interests lie, of course, sir; and their religion, as they call it." His contempt was unlimited. "But even to begin to understand

why I'm not worried about Mr. Almodham, you'd 'ave to 'ave lived among them, sir, and you'd 'ave to speak their language."

"But I—" Medford began. He pulled himself up short and bent above his coffee.

"Yes, sir?"

"But I've traveled among them more or less."

"Oh, traveled!" Even Gosling's intonation could hardly conciliate respect with derision in his reception of this boast.

"This makes the fifth day, though," Medford continued argumentatively. The midday heat lay heavy even on the shaded side of the court, and the sinews of his will were weakening.

"I can understand, sir, a gentleman like you 'aving other engagements — being pressed for time, as it were," Gosling reasonably conceded.

He cleared the table, committed its freight to a pair of Arab arms that just showed and vanished, and finally took himself off while Medford sank into the divan. A land of dreams. . .

The afternoon hung over the place like a great velarium of cloth-of-gold stretched across the battlements and drooping down in ever slacker folds upon the heavy-headed palms. When at length the gold turned to violet, and the west to a bow of crystal clasping the dark sands, Medford shook off his sleep and wandered out. But this time, instead of mounting to the roof, he took another direction.

He was surprised to find how little he knew of the place after five days of loitering and waiting. Perhaps this was to be his last evening alone in it. He passed out of the court by a vaulted stone passage which led to another walled enclosure. At his approach two or three Arabs who had been squatting there rose and melted out of sight. It was as if the solid masonry had received them.

Beyond, Medford heard a stamping of hoofs, the stir of a stable at nightfall. He went under another archway and found himself among horses and mules. In the fading light an Arab was rubbing down one of the horses, a powerful young chesnut. He too seemed about to vanish; but Medford caught him by the sleeve.

"Go on with your work," he said in Arabic.

The man, who was young and muscular, with a lean Bedouin face, stopped and looked at him.

"I didn't know your Excellency spoke our language."

"Oh, yes," said Medford.

The man was silent, one hand on the horse's restless neck, the other thrust into his woollen girdle. He and Medford examined each other in the faint light.

"Is that the horse that's lame?" Medford asked.

"Lame?" The Arab's eyes ran down the animal's legs. "Oh, yes; lame," he answered vaguely.

Medford stooped and felt the horse's knees and fetlocks. "He seems pretty fit. Couldn't he carry me for a canter this evening if I felt like it?"

The Arab considered; he was evidently perplexed by the weight of responsibility which the question placed on him.

"Your Excellency would like to go for a ride this evening?"

"Oh, just a fancy. I might or I might not." Medford lit a cigarette and offered one to the groom, whose white teeth flashed his gratification. Over the shared match they drew nearer and the Arab's diffidence seemed to lessen.

"Is this one of Mr. Almodham's own mounts?" Medford asked.

"Yes, sir; it's his favorite," said the groom, his hand passing proudly down the horse's bright shoulder.

"His favorite? Yet he didn't take him on this long expedition?"

The Arab fell silent and stared at the ground.

"Weren't you surprised at that?" Medford queried.

The man's gesture declared that it was not his business to be surprised.

The two remained without speaking while the quick blue night descended.

At length Medford said carelessly: "Where do you suppose your master is at this moment?"

The moon, unperceived in the radiant fall of day, had now suddenly possessed the world, and a broad white beam lay full on the Arab's white smock, his brown face and the turban of camel's hair knotted above it. His agitated eyeballs glistened like jewels.

"If Allah would vouchsafe to let us know!"

"But you suppose he's safe enough, don't you? You don't think it's necessary yet for a party to go out in search of him?"

The Arab appeared to ponder this deeply. The question must have taken him by surprise. He flung a brown arm about the horse's neck and continued to scrutinize the stones of the court.

"When the master is away Mr. Gosling is our master."

"And he doesn't think it necessary?"

The Arab sighed: "Not yet."

"But if Mr. Almodham were away much longer —"

The man was again silent, and Medford continued: "You're the head groom, I suppose?"

"Yes, Excellency."

There was another pause. Medford half turned away; then, over his shoulder: "I suppose you know the direction Mr. Almodham took? The place he's gone to?"

"Oh, assuredly, Excellency."

"Then you and I are going to ride after him. Be ready an hour before daylight. Say nothing to anyone — Mr. Gosling or anybody else. We two ought to be able to find him without other help."

The Arab's face was all a responsive flash of eyes and teeth. "Oh, sir, I undertake that you and my master shall meet before tomorrow night. And none shall know of it."

"He's as anxious about Almodham as I am," Medford thought; and a faint shiver ran down his back.

"All right. Be ready," he repeated.

He strolled back and found the court empty of life, but fantastically peopled by palms of beaten silver and a white marble fig tree.

"After all," he thought irrelevantly, "I'm glad I didn't tell Gosling that I speak Arabic."

He sat down and waited till Gosling, approaching from the living-room, ceremoniously announced for the fifth time that dinner was served.

Medford sat up in bed with the jerk which resembles no other. Someone was in his room. The fact reached him not by sight or sound — for the moon had set, and the silence of the night was complete — but by a peculiar faint disturbance of the invisible currents that enclose us.

He was awake in an instant, caught up his electric hand-lamp and flashed it into two astonished eyes. Gosling stood above the bed.

"Mr. Almodham — he's back?" Medford exclaimed.

"No, sir; he's not back." Gosling spoke in low controlled tones. His extreme self-possession gave Medford a sense of danger — he couldn't say why, or of what nature. He sat upright, looking hard at the man.

"Then what's the matter?"

"Well, sir, you might have told me you talk Arabic" — Gosling's tone was now wistfully reproachful — "before you got 'obnobbing with that Selim. Making randy-voos with 'im by night in the desert."

Medford reached for his matches and lit the candle by the bed. He did not know whether to kick Gosling out of the room or to listen to what the man had to say; but a quick movement of curiosity made him determine on the latter course.

"Such folly! First I thought I'd lock you in. I might 'ave." Gosling drew a key from his pocket and held it up. "Or again I might 'ave let you go. Easier than not. But there was Wembley."

"Wembley?" Medford echoed. He began to think the man was going mad. One might, so conceivably, in that place of postponements and enchantments! He wondered whether Almodham himself were not a little mad.

"Wembley. You promised to get Mr. Almodham to give me an 'oliday — to let me go back to England in time for a look at Wembley. Every man 'as 'is fancies, 'asn't 'e, sir? And that's mine. I've told Mr. Almodham so, agine and agine. He'd never listen, or only make believe to; say: 'We'll see, now, Gosling, we'll see'; and no more 'eard of it. But you was different, sir. You said it, and I knew you meant it — about my 'oliday. So I'm going to lock you in."

Gosling spoke composedly, but with an underthrill of emotion in his queer Mediterranean-Cockney voice.

"Lock me in?"

"Prevent you somehow from going off with that murderer. You don't suppose you'd ever 'ave come back alive from that ride, do you?"

A shiver ran over Medford, as it

had the evening before when he had said to himself that the Arab was as anxious as he was about Almodham. He gave a slight laugh.

"I don't know what you're talking about. But you're not going to lock me in."

The effect of this was unexpected. Gosling's face was drawn up into a convulsive grimace and two tears rose to his pale eyelashes and ran down his cheeks.

"You don't trust me, after all," he said plaintively.

Medford leaned on his pillow and considered. Nothing as queer had ever before happened to him. The fellow looked almost ridiculous enough to laugh at; yet his tears were certainly not simulated. Was he weeping for Almodham, already dead, or for Medford, about to be committed to the same grave?

"I should trust you at once," said Medford, "if you'd tell me where your master is."

Gosling's face resumed its usual guarded expression, though the trace of the tears still glittered on it.

"I can't do that, sir."

"Ah, I thought so!"

"Because — 'ow do I know?"

Medford thrust a leg out of bed. One hand, under the blanket, lay on his revolver.

"Well, you may go now. Put that key down on the table first. And don't try to do anything to interfere with my plans. If you do I'll shoot you," he added concisely.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't shoot a British subject; it makes such a fuss. Not that I'd care — I've often thought of doing it myself. Sometimes in the sirocco season. That don't scare me. And you shan't go."

Medford was on his feet now, the revolver visible. Gosling eyed it with indifference.

"Then you do know where Mr. Almodham is? And you're determined that I shan't find out?" Medford challenged him.

"Selim's determined," said Gosling, "and all the others are. They all want you out of the way. That's why I've kept 'em to their quarters — done all the waiting on you myself. Now will you stay here? For God's sake, sir! The return caravan is going through to the coast the day after tomorrow. Join it, sir — it's the only safe way! I darsn't let you go with one of our men, not even if you was to swear you'd ride straight for the coast and let this business be."

"This business? What business?"

"This worrying about where Mr. Almodham is, sir. Not that there's anything to worry about. The men all know that. But the plain fact is they've stolen some money from his box, since he's been gone, and if I hadn't winked at it they'd 'ave killed me; and all they want is to get you to ride out after 'im, and put you safe away under a 'eap of sand somewhere off the caravan trails. Easy job. There; that's all, sir. My word it is."

There was a long silence. In the weak candle-light the two men stood considering each other.

Medford's wits began to clear as the sense of peril closed in on him. His mind reached out on all sides into the enfolding mystery, but it was everywhere impenetrable. The odd thing was that, though he did not believe half of what Gosling had told him, the man yet inspired him with a queer sense of confidence as far as their mutual relation was concerned.

Medford laid his revolver on the table. "Very well," he said. "I won't ride out to look for Mr. Almodham, since you advise me not to. But I won't leave by the caravan; I'll wait here till he comes back."

He saw Gosling whiten under his sallowness. "Oh, don't do that, sir; I couldn't answer for them if you was to wait. The caravan'll take you to the coast the day after tomorrow as easy as if you was riding in Rotten Row."

"Ah, then you know that Mr. Almodham won't be back by the day after tomorrow?" Medford caught him up.

"I don't know anything, sir."

"Not even where he is now?"

Gosling reflected. "He's been gone too long, sir, for me to know that."

The door closed on him.

Medford found sleep unrecoverable. He leaned in his window and watched the stars fade and the dawn break in all its holiness. As the stir of life rose among the ancient walls he marveled at the contrast between that fountain of purity welling up into the heavens and the evil secrets clinging bat-like to the nest of masonry below.

He no longer knew what to believe or whom. Had some enemy of Almodham's lured him into the desert and bought the connivance of his people? Or had the servants had some reason of their own for spiriting him away, and was Gosling possibly telling the truth when he said that the same fate would befall Medford?

Medford, as the light brightened, felt his energy return. The very impenetrableness of the mystery stimulated him. He would stay, and he would find out the truth.

It was always Gosling himself who brought up the water for Medford's bath; but this morning he failed to appear with it, and when he came it was to bring the breakfast tray. Medford noticed that his face was of a pasty pallor, and that his lids were reddened as if with weeping. The contrast was unpleasant, and a dislike for Gosling began to shape itself in the young man's breast.

"My bath?" he queried.

"Well, sir, you complained yesterday of the water —"

"Can't you boil it?"

"I 'ave, sir."

"Well, then —"

Gosling went out sullenly and presently returned with a brass jug. "It's the time of year — we're dying for rain," he grumbled, pouring a scant measure of water into the tub.

Yes, the well must be pretty low, Medford thought. Even boiled, the water had the disagreeable smell that he had noticed the day before, though of course in a slighter degree. But a

bath was a necessity in that climate.

He spent the day in rather fruitlessly considering his situation. He had hoped the morning would bring counsel, but it brought only courage and resolution, and these were of small use without enlightenment. Suddenly he remembered that the caravan going south from the coast would pass near the castle that afternoon. Gosling had dwelt on the date often enough, for it was the caravan which was to bring the box of Perrier water.

"Well, I'm not sorry for that," Medford reflected, with a slight shrinking of the flesh. Something sick and viscous, half smell, half substance, seemed to have clung to his skin since his morning bath, and the idea of having to drink that water again was nauseating.

But his chief reason for welcoming the caravan was the hope of finding in it some European, or at any rate some native official from the coast, to whom he might confide his anxiety. He hung about, listening and waiting, and then mounted to the roof to gaze northward along the trail. But in the afternoon glow he saw only three Bedouins guiding laden packmules toward the castle.

As they mounted the steep path he recognized some of Almodham's men, and guessed at once that the southward caravan trail did not actually pass under the walls and that the men had been out to meet it, probably at a small oasis behind some fold of the sand-hills. Vexed at his own thoughtlessness in not foreseeing such a possibility, Medford dashed down to the court, hoping the men might have brought back some news of Almodham.

As Medford reached the court, angry vociferations, and retorts as vehement, rose from the stable-yard. He leaned over the wall and listened.

Gosling, master of all the desert dialects, was cursing his subordinates in a half-dozen.

"And you didn't bring it — and you tell me it wasn't there, and I tell you it was, and that you know it, and that you either left it on a sand-heap while you were jawing with some of those slimy fellows from the coast, or else fastened it on to the horse so carelessly that it fell off on the way — and all of you too sleepy to notice. Oh, you sons of females I wouldn't soil my lips by naming! Well, back you go to hunt it up, that's all!"

"By Allah and the tomb of his Prophet, you wrong us unpardonably. There was nothing left at the oasis, nor yet dropped off on the way back. It was not there, and that is the truth in its purity."

"Truth! Purity! You miserable lot of shirks and liars, you — and the gentleman here not touching a drop of anything but water — as you profess to do, you liquor-swilling humbugs!"

Medford drew back from the parapet with a smile of relief. It was nothing but a case of Perrier — the missing case — which had raised the passions of these grown men to the pitch of frenzy! The anti-climax lifted a load

from his breast. If Gosling, the calm and self-controlled, could waste his wrath on so slight a hitch in the working of the commissariat, he at least must have a free mind. How absurd this homely incident made Medford's speculations seem!

He was at once touched by Gosling's solicitude, and annoyed that he should have been so duped by the hallucinating fancies of the East.

Almodham was off on his own business; very likely the men knew where and what the business was; and even if they had robbed him in his absence, and quarreled over the spoils, Medford did not see what he could do. It might even be that his eccentric host — with whom, after all, he had had but one evening's acquaintance — repenting of an invitation too rashly given, had ridden away to escape the boredom of entertaining him. As this alternative occurred to Medford it seemed so plausible that he began to wonder if Almodham had not simply withdrawn to some secret suite of that intricate dwelling, and were waiting there for his guest's departure.

So well would this explain Gosling's solicitude to see the visitor off — so completely account for the man's nervous and contradictory behavior — that Medford, smiling at his own obtuseness, hastily resolved to leave on the morrow. Tranquillized by this decision, he lingered about the court till dusk fell, and then, as usual, went up to the roof. But today his eyes, instead of raking the horizon, fastened on the clustering edifice of which, after six days' residence, he knew so little. Aerial chambers, jutting out at capricious angles, baffled him with closely shuttered windows, or here and there with the enigma of painted panes. Behind which window was his host concealed, spying, it might be, at this very moment on his guest?

The idea that that strange moody man, with his long brown face and shock of white hair, his half-guessed selfishness and tyranny, and his morbid self-absorption, might be actually within a stone's throw, gave Medford, for the first time, a sharp sense of isolation. He felt himself shut out, unwanted — the place, now that he imagined someone might be living in it unknown to him, became lonely, inhospitable, dangerous.

"Fool that I am — he probably expected me to pack up and go as soon as I found he was away!" the young man reflected. Yes; decidedly, he would leave the next morning.

Gosling had not shown himself all the afternoon. When at length, belatedly, he came to set the table, he wore a look of sullen, almost surly, reserve which Medford had not yet seen on his face. He hardly returned the young man's friendly "Hallo — dinner?" and when Medford was seated handed him the first dish in silence. Medford's glass remained unfilled till he touched its brim.

"Oh, there's nothing to drink, sir. The men lost the case of Perrier — or dropped it and smashed the bottles. They say it never came. 'Ow do I know, when they never open their

'eathen lips but to lie?" Gosling burst out with sudden violence.

He set down the dish he was handing, and Medford saw that he had been obliged to do so because his whole body was shaking as if with fever.

"My dear man, what does it matter? You're going to be ill," Medford exclaimed, laying his hand on the servant's arm. But the latter, muttering: "Oh, God, if I'd only 'a' gone for it myself," jerked away and vanished from the room.

Medford sat pondering; it certainly looked as if poor Gosling were on the edge of a breakdown. No wonder, when Medford himself was so oppressed by the uncanniness of the place. Gosling reappeared after an interval, correct, close-lipped, with the dessert and a bottle of white wine. "Sorry, sir."

To pacify him, Medford sipped the wine and then pushed his chair away and returned to the court. He was making for the fig tree by the well when Gosling, slipping ahead, transferred his chair and wicker table to the other end of the court.

"You'll be better here — there'll be a breeze presently," he said. "I'll fetch your coffee."

He disappeared again, and Medford sat gazing up at the pile of masonry and plaster, and wondering whether he had not been moved away from his favorite corner to get him out of — or into? — the angle of vision of the invisible watcher. Gosling, having brought the coffee, went away and Medford sat on.

At length he rose and began to pace up and down as he smoked.

Medford went back to his seat; but as soon as he had resumed it he fancied that the gaze of his hidden watcher was jealously fixed on the red spark of his cigar. The sensation became increasingly distasteful; he could almost feel 'Almodham reaching out long ghostly arms from somewhere above him in the darkness. He moved back into the living-room, where a shaded light hung from the ceiling; but the room was airless, and finally he went out again and dragged his seat to its old place under the fig tree. From there the windows which he suspected could not command him, and he felt easier, though the corner was out of the breeze and the heavy air seemed tainted with the exhalation of the adjoining well.

"The water must be very low," Medford mused. The smell, though faint, was unpleasant. He drowsed.

When he woke the moon was pushing up its ponderous orange disk above the walls, and the darkness in the court was less dense. He must have slept for an hour or more. The night was delicious, or would have been anywhere but there. Medford felt a shiver of his old fever and remembered that Gosling had warned him that the court was unhealthy at night.

"On account of the well, I suppose. I've been sitting too close to it," he reflected. His head ached, and he fancied that the sweetish foulish smell clung to his face as it had after his

bath. He stood up and approached the well to see how much water was left in it. But the moon was not yet high enough to light those depths, and he peered down into blackness.

Suddenly he felt both shoulders gripped from behind and forcibly pressed forward, as if by someone seeking to push him over the edge. An instant later, almost coinciding with his own swift resistance, the push became a strong tug backward, and he swung round to confront Gosling, whose hands immediately dropped from his shoulders.

"I thought you had the fever, sir — I seemed to see you pitching over," the man stammered.

Medford's wits returned. "We must both have it, for I fancied you were pitching me," he said with a laugh.

"Me, sir?" Gosling gasped. "I pulled you back as 'ard as ever —"

"Of course. I know."

Gosling was silent. At length he asked: "Aren't you going up to bed, sir?"

"No," said Medford, "I prefer to stay here."

Gosling's face took on an expression of dogged anger. "Well, then, I prefer that you shouldn't."

Medford laughed again. "Why? Because it's the hour when Mr. Almodham comes out to take the air?"

The effect of this question was unexpected. Gosling dropped back a step or two and flung up his hands, pressing them to his lips as if to stifle a low outcry.

"Come! Own up that he's here and have done with it!" cried Medford.

"Here? What do you mean by 'here'? You 'aven't seen 'im, 'ave you?" Before the words were out of the man's lips he flung up his arms again, stumbled forward and fell in a heap at Medford's feet.

Medford, still leaning against the well-head, smiled down contemptuously at the stricken wretch. His conjecture had been the right one, then.

"Get up, man. Don't be a fool! It's not your fault if I guessed that Mr. Almodham walks here at night —"

"Walks here!" wailed the other, still cowering.

"Well, doesn't he? He won't kill you for owning up, will he?"

"Kill me? Kill me? I wish I'd killed *you!*" Gosling half got to his feet, his head thrown back in ashen terror. "And I might 'ave, too, so easy! You felt me pushing of you over, didn't you? Coming 'ere spying and sniffing —"

Medford had not changed his position. The very abjectness of the creature at his feet gave him an easy sense of power. But Gosling's last cry had suddenly deflected the course of his speculations. Almodham was here, then; that was certain; but just where was he, and in what shape? A new fear scuttled down Medford's spine.

"So you did want to push me over?" he said. "Why? As the quickest way of joining your master?"

The effect was more immediate than he had foreseen.

Gosling, getting to his feet, stood

there bowed and shrunken in the accusing moonlight.

"Oh, God — and I 'ad you 'arf over! You know I did! And then — it was what you said about Wembley. So help me, sir, I felt you meant it, and it 'eld me back." The man's face was again wet with tears, but this time Medford recoiled from them as if they had been drops splashed up by a falling body from the foul waters below.

Medford was silent.

Gosling continued to ramble on.

"And if only that Perrier 'ad of come. I don't believe it'd ever 'ave crossed your mind, if only you'd 'ave had your Perrier regular, now would it? But you say 'e walks — and I knew he would! Only — what was I to do with him, with you turning up like that the very day?"

Still Medford did not move.

"And 'im driving me to madness, sir, sheer madness, that same morning. Will you believe it? The very week before you come, I was to sail for England and 'ave my 'oliday, a 'ole month, sir — and I was entitled to six, if there was any justice — a 'ole month in 'Ammersmith, sir, in a cousin's 'ouse, and the chance to see Wembley thoroughly; and then 'e 'eard you was coming, sir, and 'e was bored and lonely 'ere, you understand — 'e 'ad to have new excitements provided for 'im or 'e'd go off 'is bat — and when 'e 'eard you were coming, 'e come out of his black mood in a flash and was 'arf crazy with pleasure, and said: 'I'll keep 'im 'ere all winter — a remarkable young man, Gosling — just my kind.' And when I says to him: 'And 'ow about my 'oliday?' he stares at me with those stony eyes of 'is and says: ' 'Oliday? Oh, to be sure; why, next year — we'll see what can be done about it next year.' Next year, sir, as if 'e was doing me a favor! And that's the way it 'ad been for nigh on twelve years.

"But this time, if you 'adn't 'ave come I do believe I'd 'ave got away, for he was getting used to 'aving Selim about 'im and his 'ealth was never better — and, well, I told 'im as much, and 'ow a man 'ad his rights after all, and my youth was going, and me that 'ad served him so well chained up 'ere like 'is watchdog, and always next year and next year — and, well, sir, 'e just laughed, sneering-like, and lit 'is cigarette. 'Oh, Gosling, cut it out,' 'e says.

"He was standing on the very spot where you are now, sir; and he turned to walk into the 'ouse. And it was then I 'it 'im. He was a heavy man, and he fell against the well curb. And just when you were expected any minute — oh, my God!"

Gosling's voice died out in a strangled murmur.

Medford, at his last words, had involuntarily shrunk back a few feet. The two men stood in the middle of the court and stared at each other without speaking. The moon, swinging high above the battlements, sent a searching spear of light down into the guilty darkness of the well.

It is a curious coincidence that this issue of EQMM should contain stories by both Edith Wharton and Dr. S. Weir Mitchell. For there was a connection between these two writers that is not commonly known . . .

A few years after her marriage, Edith Wharton's husband became very ill — a mental condition which required great care and patience on Mrs. Wharton's part, and which placed her under continuing strain. Now, Dr. Mitchell is known to have specialized in neurology and in the treatment of nervous breakdowns. It is the belief of Edmund Wilson, the eminent critic who hates detective stories, that Dr. Mitchell treated Edith Wharton's husband, and in the process advised Mrs. Wharton to write fiction as a means of relieving her own nervous tension.

If this anecdote is true — and we have no reason to doubt it — it raises an exceedingly interesting question about Dr. Mitchell. Did the famous doctor, author of HUGH WYNNE, THE ADVENTURES OF FRANÇOIS, *and other bestsellers of his time, also write to relieve nervous tension? Was fiction Dr. Mitchell's safety-valve, his escape from the emotional pressures, the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to?*

In the light of this theory, read Dr. Mitchell's story titled "A Dilemma." Doesn't the theme of this tale, its very conception, its last paragraph, reveal the dark waters in Dr. Mitchell's subconscious? Add to this speculation — bear in mind it is only that and no more — the contributing factor that Dr. Mitchell himself was the recipient of literary counsel: Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes advised Dr. Mitchell not to do any serious literary work until he, Dr. Mitchell, was well established in the medical profession; and Dr. Mitchell heeded that advice — his first adult fiction was not published until Dr. Mitchell was past fifty years old.

Plato once wrote: "No physician considers his own good in what he prescribes, but the good of his patient." On the other hand, Pope asked: "Who shall decide when doctors disagree?"

A riddle, indeed! As impenetrable as the one you will find in the good doctor's own story . . .

A DILEMMA

by S. WEIR MITCHELL

I WAS just thirty-seven when my Uncle Philip died. A week before that event he sent for me; and here let me say that I had never set eyes on him. He hated my mother, but I do not know why. She told me long

before his last illness that I need expect nothing from my father's brother. He was an inventor, an able and ingenious mechanical engineer, and had made much money by his improvement in turbine-wheels. He was a bachelor; lived alone, cooked his own meals, and collected precious stones, especially rubies and pearls. From the time he made his first money he had this mania. As he grew richer, the desire to possess rare and costly gems became stronger. When he bought a new stone, he carried it in his pocket for a month and now and then took it out and looked at it. Then it was added to the collection in his safe at the Trust Company.

At the time he sent for me I was a clerk, and poor enough. Remembering my mother's words, his message gave me, his sole relative, no new hopes; but I thought it best to go.

When I sat down by his bedside, he began, with a malicious grin:

"I suppose you think me queer. I will explain." What he said was certainly queer enough. "I have been living on an annuity into which I put my fortune. In other words, I have been, as to money, concentric half of my life to enable me to be as eccentric as I pleased the rest of it. Now I repent of my wickedness to you all, and desire to live in the memory of at least one of my family. You think I am poor and have only my annuity. You will be profitably surprised. I have never parted with my precious stones; they will be yours. You are my sole heir. I shall carry with me to the other world the satisfaction of making one man happy.

"No doubt you have always had expectations, and I desire that you should continue to expect. My jewels are in my safe. There is nothing else left."

When I thanked him he grinned all over his lean face, and said:

"You will have to pay for my funeral."

I must say that I never looked forward to any expenditure with more pleasure than to what it would cost me to put him away in the earth. As I rose to go, he said:

"The rubies are valuable. They are in my safe at the Trust Company. Before you unlock the box, be very careful to read a letter which lies on top of it; and be sure not to shake the box." I thought this odd. "Don't come back. It won't hasten things."

He died the next week, and was handsomely buried. The day after, his will was found, leaving me his heir. I opened his safe and found in it nothing but an iron box, evidently of his own making, for he was a skilled workman and very ingenious. The box was heavy and strong, about ten inches long, eight inches wide, and ten inches high.

On it lay a letter to me. It ran thus:

> "DEAR TOM: This box contains a large number of very fine pigeon-blood rubies and a fair lot of diamonds; one is blue — a beauty. There are hundreds of pearls —

one the famous green pearl, and a necklace of blue pearls, for which any woman would sell her soul — or her affections." (I thought of Susan.) "I wish you to continue to have expectations and continuously to remember your dear uncle. I would have left these stones to some charity, but I hate the poor as much as I hate your mother's son — yes, rather more.

"This box contains an interesting mechanism, which will act with certainty as you unlock it, and explode ten ounces of my improved, supersensitive dynamite — no, to be accurate, there are only nine and a half ounces. Doubt me, and open it, and you will be blown to atoms. Believe me, and you will continue to nourish expectations which will never be fulfilled. As a considerate man, I counsel extreme care in handling the box. Don't forget your affectionate

UNCLE."

I stood appalled, the key in my hand. Was it true? Was it a lie? I had spent all my savings on the funeral, and was poorer than ever.

Remembering the old man's oddity, his malice, his cleverness in mechanic arts, and the patent explosive which had helped to make him rich, I began to feel how very likely it was that he had told the truth in this cruel letter.

I carried the iron box away to my lodgings, set it down with care in a closet, laid the key on it, and locked the closet.

Then I sat down, as yet hopeful, and began to exert my ingenuity upon ways of opening the box without being killed. There must be a way.

After a week of vain thinking I bethought me, one day, that it would be easy to explode the box by unlocking it at a safe distance, and I arranged a plan with wires, which seemed as if it would answer. But when I reflected on what would happen when the dynamite scattered the rubies, I knew that I should be none the richer. For hours at a time I sat looking at that box and handling the key.

At last I hung the key on my watchguard; but then it occurred to me that it might be lost or stolen. Dreading this, I hid it, fearful that someone might use it to open the box. This state of doubt and fear lasted for weeks, until I became nervous and began to dread that some accident might happen to that box. A burglar might come and boldly carry it away and force it open and find it was a wicked fraud of my uncle's. Even the rumble and vibration caused by the heavy vans in the street became at last a terror.

Worst of all, my salary was reduced, and I saw that marriage was out of the question.

In my despair I consulted Professor Clinch about my dilemma, and as to some safe way of getting at the rubies. He said that, if my uncle had not lied, there was none that would not ruin the stones, especially the pearls, but

that it was a silly tale and altogether incredible. I offered him the biggest ruby if he wished to test his opinion. He did not desire to do so.

Dr. Schaff, my uncle's doctor, believed the old man's letter, and added a caution, which was entirely useless, for by this time I was afraid to be in the room with that terrible box.

At last the doctor kindly warned me that I was in danger of losing my mind with too much thought about my rubies. In fact, I did nothing else but contrive wild plans to get at them safely. I spent all my spare hours at one of the great libraries reading about dynamite. Indeed, I talked of it until the library attendants, believing me a lunatic or a dynâmite fiend, declined to humor me, and spoke to the police. I suspect that for a while I was "shadowed" as a suspicious, and possibly criminal, character. I gave up the libraries and becoming more and more fearful, set my precious box on a down pillow, for fear of its being shaken; for at this time even the absurd possibility of its being disturbed by an earthquake troubled me. I tried to calculate the amount of shake needful to explode my box.

The old doctor, when I saw him again, begged me to give up all thought of the matter and as I felt how completely I was the slave of one despotic idea, I tried to take the good advice thus given me.

Unhappily, I found, soon after, between the leaves of my uncle's Bible, a numbered list of the stones with their cost. It was dated two years before my uncle's death. Many of the stones were well known, and their enormous value amazed me.

Several of the rubies were described with care, and curious histories of them were given in detail. One was said to be the famous "Sunset Ruby," which had belonged to the Empress-Queen Maria Theresa. One was called the "Blood Ruby," not, as was explained, because of the color, but on account of the murders it had occasioned. Now, as I read, it seemed again to threaten death.

The pearls were described with care as an unequalled collection. Concerning two of them my uncle had written what I might call biographies — for, indeed, they seemed to have done much evil and some good. One, a black pearl, was mentioned in an old bill of sale as She — which seemed queer to me.

It was maddening. Here, guarded by a vision of sudden death, was wealth "beyond the dreams of avarice." I am not a clever or ingenious man; I know little beyond how to keep a ledger, and so I was, and am, no doubt, absurd about many of my notions as to how to solve this riddle.

At one time I thought of finding a man who would take the risk of unlocking the box, but what right had I to subject anyone else to the trial I dared not face? I could easily drop the box from a height somewhere, and if it did not explode could then safely unlock it; but if it did blow up when it fell, goodbye to my rubies. *Mine*, indeed! I was rich, and I was not. I

grew thin and morbid, and so miserable that, being a good Catholic, I at last carried my troubles to my father confessor. He thought it simply a cruel jest of my uncle's, but was not so eager for another world as to be willing to open my box. He, too, counseled me to cease worrying!

Two years have gone by, and I am one of the richest men in the city, and have no more money than will keep me alive.

Susan said I was half-cracked, like Uncle Philip, and broke off our engagement. In my despair I have advertised in the *Journal of Science*, and have had absurd schemes sent me by the dozen. At last, as I talked too much about it, the thing became so well known that when I put the horror in a bank, I was promptly desired to withdraw it. I was in constant fear of burglars, and my landlady gave me notice to leave, because no one would stay in the house with that box. I am now advised to print my story and await advice from the ingenuity of the American mind.

I have moved into the suburbs and hidden the box and changed my name and my occupation. This I did to escape the curiosity of the reporters. I ought to say that when the government officials came to hear of my inheritance, they very reasonably desired to collect the inheritance tax on my uncle's estate.

I was delighted to assist them. I told the collector my story, and showed him Uncle Philip's letter. Then I offered him the key, and asked for time to get half a mile away. That man said he would think it over and come back later. He never returned.

This is all I have to say. I have made a will and left my rubies and pearls to the Society for the Prevention of Human Vivisection. If any man thinks this account a joke or an invention, let him coldly imagine the situation:

Given an iron box, known to contain wealth, said to contain dynamite, arranged to explode when the key is used to unlock it — what would any sane man do?

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(Continued from back cover)

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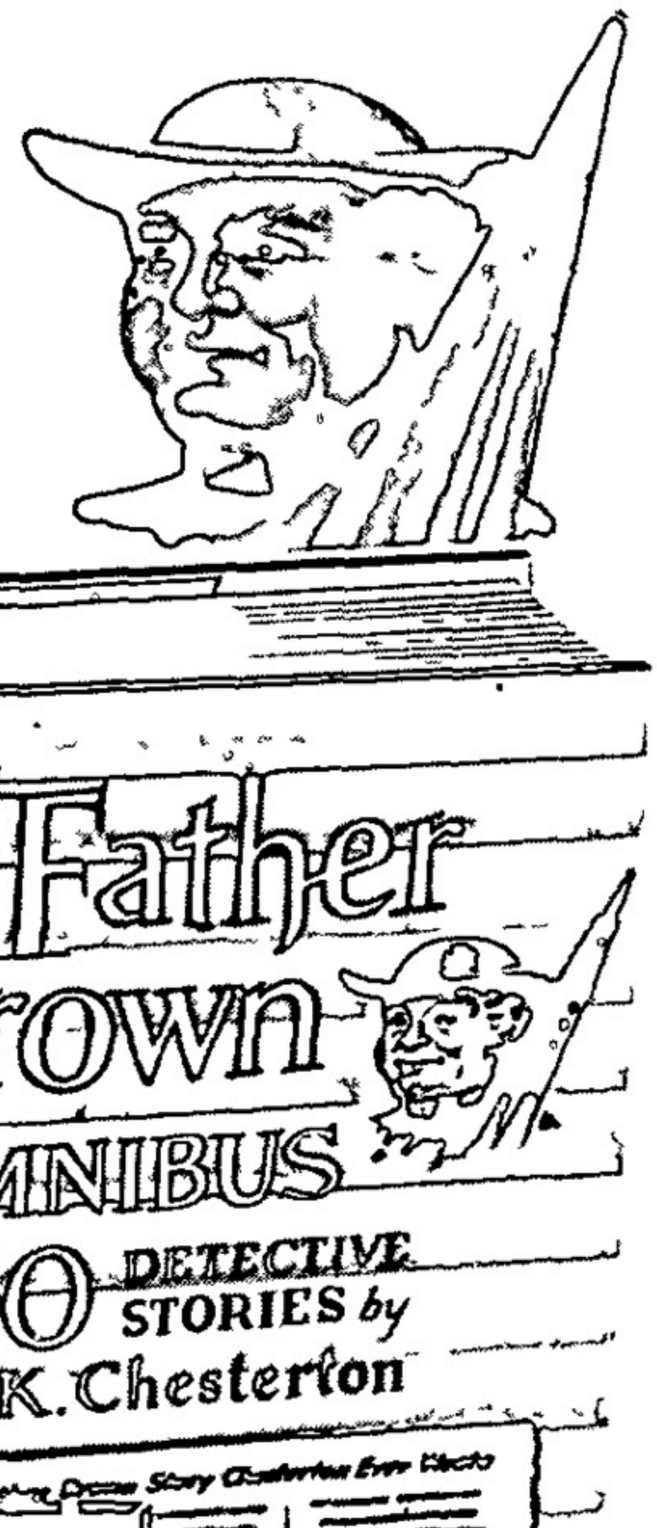

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