

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

An illustration of a woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a teal dress, bound with thick white rope. She is lying on a ship's deck, looking down. The background shows the ship's rigging and ropes. The name 'Salter' is written in the bottom right corner of the illustration.

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The "Try-Out" Murder
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Let Me Help You With Your Murders
The Fire of London

SEPTEMBER

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CLAYTON RAWSON
LOUIS GOLDING
FRANK GRUBER
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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, Publisher

ELLERY QUEEN, Editor

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

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Fifth

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(again with the cooperation of Little, Brown & Co., of Boston)

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10 ADDITIONAL PRIZES

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Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of \$2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, EQMM will award five (5) Second Prizes of \$500 each, and five (5) Third Prizes of \$300 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at EQMM's regular rates.

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

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

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

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1949.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1949. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1950.

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

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WINNER OF A SPECIAL AWARD: LESLIE CHARTERIS

It may strike you as strange, or to use a stronger word, incredible, to learn that Leslie Charteris, creator of the Saint, claims he has no imagination at all, and that he doesn't need one to write stories about the Saint. Yes, we have a letter from Leslie in which he makes that statement, in black and white. And to prove his modest contention, the rarely modest Charteris tells us where he got the idea for "The Arrow of God."

In February 1948 Gregory Peck and Leslie Charteris were cruising the Caribbean in a 60-foot ketch. The jaunt provided more than one misadventure. You may recall, for example, having read in the newspapers or having heard over the radio that the two of them got mixed up with a 50-mile gale, and for a time were reported lost; happily, the report was erroneous. But there was another near-misadventure while they stopped over in Nassau. Gregory Peck was lying on the beach when a flyaway umbrella headed straight for him, point first. It was a narrow escape — Peck might easily have been the victim of one of the strangest spearings on record.

It was this incident which suggested to Charteris "The Arrow of God." To borrow two phrases from H. C. Bailey's Reggie Fortune: "no imagination" — just "simple faith in facts." As Leslie himself comments: "It was one of those fantastic things which I believe are almost impossible to dream up, but I actually saw it happen."

In developing the plot of "The Arrow of God" Charteris deliberately set out to write "the pure detective or puzzle story." This type of story, Charteris maintains, depends for its suspense on the reader's anxiety to beat the detective to the solution. If the clues are as solidly psychological as mechanical, so much the better in Charteris's private-eye philosophy. Emotional jeopardies, especially of the detective, are phony excess-baggage. Give the connoisseur, says Charteris, the classic pattern of Dr. Thorndyke, Father Brown, and Sherlock Holmes, and restrict the detective's involvement to "the simple but universally understandable ambition of seeing that the real criminal is convicted and the innocent suspect is not stuck with it."

THE ARROW OF GOD

by LESLIE CHARTERIS

ONE of Simon Templar's stock criticisms of the classic type of detective story is that the victim of the murder, the reluctant spark-plug of all the entertaining mystery and strife, is usually a mere nonentity who

wanders vaguely through the first few pages with the sole purpose of becoming a convenient body in the library by the end of Chapter One. But whatever his own feelings and problems may have been, the personality which has to provide so many people with adequate motives for desiring him to drop dead, is largely a matter of hearsay, retrospectively brought out in the conventional process of drawing attention to one suspect after another.

"You could almost," Simon has said, "call him a *corpus delicti*. . . . Actually, the physical murder should only be the mid-point of the story: the things that led up to it are at least as interesting as the mechanical solution of who done it . . . Personally, I've killed very few people that I didn't know plenty about first."

Coming from a man who is generally regarded as almost a detective-story character himself, this comment is at least worth recording for reference; but it certainly did not apply to the shuffling off of Mr. Floyd Vosper, which caused a brief commotion on the island of New Providence in the early spring of that year.

Why Simon Templar should have been in Nassau (which, for the benefit of the untraveled, is the city of New Providence, which is an island in the Bahamas) at the time is one of those questions which always arise in stories about him, and which can only be answered by repeating that he liked to travel and was just as likely to show

up there as in Nova Zembla or Namaqualand. As for why he should have been invited to the house of Mrs. Herbert H. Wexall, that is another irrelevancy which is hardly covered by the fact that he could just as well have shown up at the house of Joe Wallenski (of the arsonist Wallenskis) or the White House — he had friends in many places, legitimate and otherwise. But Mrs. Wexall had some international renown as a lion hunter, even if her stalking had been confined to the variety which roars loudest in plush drawing-rooms; and it was not to be expected that the advent of such a creature as Simon Templar would have escaped the attention of her salon safari.

Thus one noontime Simon found himself strolling up the driveway and into what little was left of the life of Floyd Vosper. Naturally he did not know this at the time; nor did he know Floyd Vosper, except by name. In this he was no different from at least fifty million other people in that hemisphere; for Floyd Vosper was not only one of the most widely syndicated pundits of the day, but his books (*Feet of Clay; As I Saw Them; and The Twenty Worst Men in the World*) had all been the selections of one book club or another and still sold by the million in reprints. For Mr. Vosper specialized in the ever-popular sport of shattering reputations. In his journalistic years he had met, and apparently had unique opportunities to study, practically every great name in the national and

international scene, and could unerringly remember everything in their biographies that they would prefer forgotten, and could impale and epitomize all their weaknesses with devastatingly pin-point precision, leaving them naked and squirming on the operating table of his vocabulary. But what this merciless professional iconoclast was like as a person, Simon had never heard or bothered much to wonder about.

So the first impression that Vosper made on him was a voice, a still unidentified voice, a dry and deliberate and peculiarly needling voice, which came from behind a bank of riotous hibiscus and oleander.

"My dear Janet," it said, "you must not let your innocent admiration for Reggie's bulging biceps color your estimate of his perspicacity in world affairs. The title of All-American, I hate to disillusion you, has no reference to statesmanship."

There was a rather strained laugh that must have come from Reggie, and a girl's clear young voice said: "That isn't fair, Mr. Vosper. Reggie doesn't pretend to be a genius, but he's bright enough to have a wonderful job waiting for him on Wall Street."

"I don't doubt that he will make an excellent contact man for the more stupid clients," conceded the voice with the measured nasal gripe. "And I'm sure that his education can cope with the simple arithmetic of the Stock Exchange, just as I'm sure it can grasp the basic figures of your

father's Dun and Bradstreet. This should not dazzle you with his brilliance, any more than it should make you believe that you have some spiritual fascination that lured him to your feet."

At this point Simon rounded a curve in the driveway and caught his first sight of the speakers, all of whom looked up at him with reserved curiosity and two-thirds of them with a certain hint of relief.

There was no difficulty in assigning them to their lines — the young red-headed giant with the pleasantly rugged face and the slim pretty blonde girl, who sat at a wrought-iron table on the terrace in front of the house with a broken deck of cards in front of them which established an interrupted game of gin rummy, and the thin stringy man reclining in a long cane-chair with a cigarette-holder in one hand and a highball in the other.

Simon smiled and said: "Hullo. This is Mrs. Wexall's house, is it?"

The girl said "Yes," and he said: "My name's Templar, and I was invited here."

The girl jumped up and said: "Oh, yes. Lucy told me. I'm her sister, Janet Blaise. This is my fiancé, Reg Herrick. And Mr. Vosper."

Simon shook hands with the two men, and Janet said: "I think Lucy's on the beach. I'll take you around."

Vosper unwound his bony length from the long chair, looking like a slightly dissolute and acidulated mahatma in his white shorts and burnt chocolate tan.

"Let me do it," he said. "I'm sure you two ingenues would rather be alone together. And I need another drink."

He led the way, not into the house but around it, by a flagged path which struck off to the side and meandered through a bower of scarlet poinciana. A breeze rustled in the leaves and mixed flower scents with the sweetness of the sea. Vosper smoothed down his sparse gray hair; and Simon was aware that the man's beady eyes and sharp thin nose were cocked towards him with brash speculation, as if he were already measuring another target for his tongue.

"Templar," he said. "Of course, you must be the Saint — the fellow they call the Robin Hood of modern crime."

"I see you read the right papers," said the Saint pleasantly.

"I read all the papers," Vosper said, "in order to keep in touch with the vagaries of vulgar taste. I've often wondered why the Robin Hood legend should have so much romantic appeal. Robin Hood, as I understand it, was a bandit who indulged in some well-publicized charity — but not, as I recall, at the expense of his own stomach. A good many unscrupulous promoters have also become generous — and with as much shrewd publicity — when their ill-gotten gains exceeded their personal spending capacity, but I don't remember that they succeeded in being glamorized for it."

"There may be some difference," Simon suggested, "in who was robbed to provide the surplus spoils."

"Then," Vosper said challengingly, "you consider yourself an infallible judge of who should be penalized and who should be rewarded."

"Oh, no," said the Saint modestly. "Not at all. No more, I'm sure, than you would call yourself the infallible judge of all the people whom you dissect so definitively in print."

He felt the other's probing glance stab at him suspiciously and almost with puzzled incredulity, as if Vosper couldn't quite accept the idea that anyone had actually dared to cross swords with him, and moreover might have scored on the riposte — or if it had happened at all, that it had been anything but a semantic accident. But the Saint's easy inscrutable poise gave no clue to the answer at all; and before anything further could develop there was a paragraphic distraction.

This took the form of a man seated on top of a truncated column which for reasons best known to the architect had been incorporated into the design of a wall which curved out from the house to encircle a portion of the shore like a possessive arm. The man had long curly hair that fell to his shoulders, which with his delicate ascetic features would have made him look more like a woman if it had not been complemented with an equally curly and silken beard. He sat cross-legged and upright, his hands folded symmetrically in his

lap, staring straight out into the blue sky a little above the horizon, so motionless and almost rigid that he might easily have been taken for a tinted statue except for the fluttering of the long flowing white robe he wore.

After rolling with the first reasonable shock of the apparition, Simon would have passed on politely without comment, but the opportunity was irresistible for Vosper to display his virtuosity again, and perhaps also to recover from his momentary confusion.

"That fugitive from a Turkish bath," Vosper said, in the manner of a tired guide to a geek show, "calls himself Astron. He's a nature boy from the Dardanelles who just concluded a very successful season in Hollywood. He wears a beard to cover a receding chin, and long hair to cover a hole in the head. He purifies his soul with a diet of boiled grass and prune juice. Whenever this diet permits him, he meditates. After he was brought to the attention of the Western world by some engineers of the Anglo-Mongolian Oil Company, whom he cured of stomach ulcers by persuading them not to spike their ration of sacramental wine with rubbing alcohol, he began to meditate about the evils of earthly riches."

"Another member of our club?" Simon prompted innocuously.

"Astron maintains," Vosper said, leaning against the pillar and giving out as oracularly as if the object of his dissertation were not sitting on it

at all, "that the only way for the holders of worldly wealth to purify themselves is to get rid of as much of it as they can spare. Being himself so pure that it hurts, he is unselfishly ready to become the custodian of as much corrupting cabbage as they would like to get rid of. Of course, he would have no part of it himself, but he will take the responsibility of parking it in a shrine in the Sea of Marmora which he plans to build as soon as there is enough kraut in the kitty."

The figure on the column finally moved. Without any waste motion it simply expanded its crossed legs like a lazy tongs until it towered at its full height over them.

"You have heard the blasphemer," it said. "But I say to you that his words are dust in the wind, as he himself is dust among the stars that I see."

"I'm a blasphemer," Vosper repeated to the Saint, with a sort of derisive pride combined with the ponderous bonhomie of a vaudeville oldtimer in a routine with a talking dog. He looked back up at the figure of the white-robed mystic towering above him, and said: "So if you have this direct pipeline to the Almighty, why don't you strike me dead?"

"Life and death are not in my hands," Astron said, in a calm and confident voice. "Death can only come from the hands of the Giver of all Life. In His own good time He will strike you down, and the arrow of God will silence your mockeries. This I have seen in the stars."

"Quaint, isn't he?" Vosper said, and opened the gate between the wall and the beach.

Beyond the wall a few steps led down to a kind of Grecian courtyard open on the seaward side, where the paving merged directly into the white sand of the beach. The courtyard was furnished with gaily colored lounging chairs and a well-stocked pushcart bar, to which Vosper immediately directed himself.

"You have visitors, Lucy," he said, without letting it interfere with the important work of reviving his highball.

Out on the sand, on a towel spread under an enormous beach umbrella, Mrs. Herbert Wexall rolled over and said: "Oh, Mr. Templar."

Simon went over and shook hands with her as she stood up. It was hard to think of her as Janet Blaise's sister, for there were at least twenty years between them and hardly any physical resemblances. She was a big woman with an open homely face and patchily sunbleached hair and a sloppy figure, but she made a virtue of those disadvantages by the cheerfulness with which she ignored them. She was what is rather inadequately known as "a person," which means that she had the personality to dispense with appearances and the money to back it up.

"Good to see you," she said, and turned to the man who had been sitting beside her, as he struggled to his feet. "Do you know Arthur Gresson?"

Mr. Gresson was a full head shorter than the Saint's six foot two, but he weighed a good deal more. Unlike anyone else that Simon had encountered on the premises so far, his skin looked as if it was unaccustomed to exposure. His round body and his round balding brow, under a liberal sheen of oil, had the hot rosy blush which the kiss of the sun evokes in virgin epidermis.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Templar." His hand was soft and earnestly adhesive.

"I expect you'd like a drink," Lucy Wexall said. "Let's keep Floyd working."

They joined Vosper at the bar wagon, and after he had started to work on the orders she turned back to the Saint and said: "After this formal service, just make yourself at home. I'm so glad you could come."

"I'm sure Mr. Templar will be happy," Vosper said. "He's a man of the world like me. We enjoy Lucy's food and liquor, and in return we give her the pleasure of hitting the society columns with our names. A perfectly business-like exchange."

"That's progress for you," Lucy Wexall said breezily. "In the old days I'd have had a court jester. Now all I get is a professional stinker."

"That's no way to refer to Arthur," Vosper said, handing Simon a long cold glass. "For your information, Templar, Mr. Gresson — Mr. Arthur *Granville* Gresson — is a promoter. He has a long history of selling phony oil stock behind him. He is

just about to take Herb Wexall for another sucker; but since Herb married Lucy he can afford it. Unless you're sure you can take Janet away from Reggie, I advise you not to listen to him."

Arthur Gresson's elbow nudged Simon's ribs.

"What a character!" he said, almost proudly.

"I only give out with facts," Vosper said. "My advice to you, Templar, is, never be an elephant. Resist all inducements. Because when you reach back into that memory, you will only be laughed at, and the people who should thank you will call you a stinker."

Gresson giggled, deep from his round pink stomach.

"Would you like to get in a swim before lunch?" Lucy Wexall said. "Floyd, show him where he can change."

"A pleasure," Vosper said. "And probably a legitimate part of the bargain."

He thoughtfully refilled his glass before he steered Simon by way of the veranda into the beachward side of the house, and into a bedroom. He sat on the bed and watched unblinkingly while Simon stripped down and pulled on the trunks he had brought with him.

"It must be nice to have the Body Beautiful," he observed. "Of course, in your business it almost ranks with plant and machinery, doesn't it?"

The Saint's blue eyes twinkled.

"The main difference," he agreed

good-humoredly, "is that if I get a screw loose it may not be so noticeable."

As they were starting back through the living room, a small birdlike man in a dark and (for the setting outside the broad picture window) incongruous business suit bustled in by another door. He had the bright baggy eyes behind rimless glasses, the slack but fleshless jowls, and the wide tight mouth which may not be common to all lawyers, bankers, and business executives, but which is certainly found in very few other vocations; and he was followed by a statuesque brunette whose severe tailoring failed to disguise an outstanding combination of curves, who carried a notebook and a sheaf of papers.

"Herb!" Vosper said. "I want you to meet Lucy's latest addition to the menagerie which already contains Astron and me — Mr. Simon Templar, known as the Saint. Templar — your host, Mr. Wexall."

"Pleased to meet you," said Herbert Wexall, shaking hands briskly.

"And this is Pauline Stone," Vosper went on, indicating the nubile brunette. "The tired business man's consolation. Whatever Lucy can't supply, she can."

"How do you do," said the girl stoically.

Her dark eyes lingered momentarily on the Saint's torso, and he noticed that her mouth was very full and soft.

"Going for a swim?" Wexall said, as if he had heard nothing. "Good. Then I'll see you at lunch shortly."

He trotted busily on his way, and Vosper ushered the Saint to the beach by another flight of steps that led directly down from the veranda. The house commanded a small half-moon bay, and both ends of the crescent of sand were guarded naturally by abrupt rises of jagged coral rock.

"Herbert is the living example of how really stupid a successful business man can be," Vosper said tirelessly. "He was just an office boy of some kind in the Blaise outfit when he got smart enough to woo and win the boss's daughter. And from that flying start he was clever enough to really pay his way by making Blaise Industries twice as big as even the old man himself had been able to do. And yet he's dumb enough to think that Lucy won't catch on to the extra-curricular functions of that busy secretary sooner or later — or that when she does he won't be out on a cold doorstep in the rain . . . No, I'm not going in. I'll hold your drink for you."

Simon ran down into the surf and churned seawards for a couple of hundred yards, then turned over and paddled lazily back, coordinating his impressions with idle amusement. The balmy water was still refreshing after the heat of the morning, and when he came out the breeze had become brisk enough to give him the luxury of a fleeting shiver as the wetness started to evaporate from his tanned skin.

He crossed the sand to the Greek patio, where Floyd Vosper was on

duty again at the bar in a strategic position to keep his own needs supplied with a minimum of effort. Discreet servants were setting up a buffet table. Janet Blaise and Reg Herrick had transferred their gin-rummy game and were playing at a table right under the column where Astron had resumed his seat and his cataleptic meditations — a weird juxtaposition of which the three members all seemed equally unconscious.

Simon took Lucy Wexall a Martini and said with another glance at the tableau: "Where did you find him?"

"The people who brought him to California sent him to me when he had to leave the States. They gave me such a good time when I was out there, I couldn't refuse to do something for them. He's writing a book, you know, and of course he can't go back to that dreadful place he came from; wherever it is, before he has a chance to finish it in reasonable comfort."

Simon avoided discussing this assumption, but he said: "What's it like, having a resident prophet in the house?"

"He's very interesting. And quite as drastic as Floyd, in his own way, in summing up people. You ought to talk to him."

Arthur Gresson came over with an hors d'oeuvre plate of smoked salmon and stuffed eggs from the buffet. He said: "Anyone you meet at Lucy's is interesting, Mr. Templar. But if you don't mind my saying so, you have it all over the rest of 'em. Who'd ever

think we'd find the Saint looking for crime in the Bahamas?"

"I hope no one will think I'm looking for crime," Simon said deprecatingly, "any more than I take it for granted that you're looking for oil."

"That's where you'd be wrong," Gresson said. "As a matter of fact, I am."

The Saint raised an eyebrow.

"Well, I can always learn something. I'd never heard of oil in the Bahamas."

"I'm not a bit surprised. But you will, Mr. Templar, you will." Gresson sat down, pillowing his round stomach on his thighs. "Just think for a moment about some of the places you have heard of, where there is certainly oil. Let me mention them in a certain order: Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, and the recent strike in the Florida Everglades. We might even include Venezuela in the south. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Hm-mm," said the Saint thoughtfully.

"A pattern," Gresson said. "A vast central pool of oil somewhere under the Gulf of Mexico, with oil wells dipping into it from the edges of the bowl, where the geological strata have also been forced up. Now think of the islands of the Caribbean as the eastern edge of the same bowl. Why not?"

"It's an interesting theory," said the Saint.

"Mr. Wexall thinks so too, and I hope he's going into partnership with me."

"Herbert can afford it," intruded

the metallic sneering voice of Floyd Vosper. "But before you decide to buy in, Templar, you'd better check with New York about the time when Mr. Gresson thought he could dig gold in the Catskills."

"Shut up, Floyd," said Mrs. Wexall, "and get me another Martini."

Arthur Gresson chuckled in his paunch like a happy Buddha:

"What a guy!" he said. "What a ribber. And he gets everyone mad. He kills me!"

Herbert Wexall came down from the veranda and beamed around. As a sort of tacit announcement that he had put aside his work for the day, he had changed into a sport shirt on which various exotic fish were depicted wandering through vines of seaweed, but he retained his business trousers and business shoes and business face.

"Well," he said, inspecting the buffet and addressing the world at large. "Let's come and get it whenever we're hungry."

As if a spell had been snapped, Astron removed himself from the contemplation of the infinite, descended from his pillar, and began to help himself to cottage cheese and caviar on a foundation of lettuce leaves.

Simon drifted in the same direction, and found Pauline Stone beside him, saying: "What do you feel like, Mr. Templar?"

Her indication of having come off duty was a good deal more radical

than her employer's. In fact, the bathing suit which she had changed into seemed to be based more on the French minimums of the period than on any British tradition. There was no doubt that she filled it opulently; and her question amplified its suggestiveness with undertones which the Saint felt it wiser not to challenge at that moment.

"There's so much to drool over," he said, referring studiously to the buffet table. "But that green turtle aspic looks pretty good to me."

She stayed with him when he carried his plate to a table as thoughtfully diametric as possible from the berth chosen by Floyd Vosper, even though Astron had already settled there in temporary solitude. They were promptly joined by Reg Herrick and Janet Blaise, and slipped at once into an easy exchange of banalities.

But even then it was impossible to escape Vosper's tongue. It was not many minutes before his saw-edged voice whined across the patio above the general level of harmless chatter:

"When are you going to tell the Saint's fortune, Astron? That ought to be worth hearing."

There was a slightly embarrassed lull, and then everyone went on talking again; but Astron looked at the Saint with a gentle smile and said quietly: "You are a seeker after truth, Mr. Templar, as I am. But when instead of truth you find falsehood, you will destroy it with a sword. I only say, This is falsehood, and God will destroy it. Do not come too

close, lest you be destroyed with it."

"Okay," Herrick growled, just as quietly. "But if you're talking about Vosper, it's about time someone destroyed it."

"Sometimes," Astron said, "God places his arrow in the hand of a man."

For a few moments that seemed unconscionably long nobody said anything; and then before the silence spread beyond their small group the Saint said casually: "Talking of arrows — I hear that the sport this season is to go hunting sharks with a bow and arrow."

Herrick nodded with a healthy grin,

"It's a lot of fun. Would you like to try it?"

"Reggie's terrific," Janet Blaise said. "He shoots like a regular Howard Hill, but of course he uses a bow that nobody else can pull."

"I'd like to try," said the Saint, and the conversation slid harmlessly along the tangent he had provided.

After lunch everyone went back to the beach, with the exception of Astron, who retired to put his morning's meditations on paper. Chatter surrendered to an afternoon torpor which even subdued Vosper.

An indefinite while later, Herrick aroused with a yell and plunged roaring into the sea, followed by Janet Blaise. They were followed by others, including the Saint. An interlude of aquatic brawling developed somehow into a pick-up game of touch football on the beach, which was delightfully confused by recurrent arguments

about who was supposed to be on which of the unequal sides. This boisterous nonsense churned up enough sand for the still freshening breeze to spray over Floyd Vosper, who by that time had drunk enough to be trying to sleep under the big beach umbrella, to finally get the misanthropic oracle back on his feet.

"Perhaps," he said witheringly, "I had better get out of the way of you perennial juveniles before you convert me into a dune."

He stalked off along the beach and lay down again about a hundred yards away. Simon noticed him still there, flat on his face and presumably unconscious, when the game eventually broke up through a confused water-polo phase to leave everyone gasping and laughing and dripping on the patio with no immediate resurge of inspiration. It was the last time he saw the unpopular Mr. Vosper alive.

"Well," Arthur Gresson observed, mopping his short round body with a towel, "at least one of us seems to have enough sense to know when to lie down."

"And to choose the only partner who'd do it with him," Pauline added vaguely.

Herbert Wexall glanced along the beach in the direction that they both referred to, then glanced for further inspiration at the waterproof watch he was still wearing.

"It's almost cocktail time," he said. "How about it, anyone?"

His wife shivered, and said: "It's going to blow like a son-of-a-gun any

minute. Let's all go in and get some clothes on first — then we'll be set for the evening. You'll stay for supper of course, Mr. Templar?"

"I hadn't planned to make a day of it," Simon protested diffidently, and was promptly overwhelmed from all quarters.

He found his way back to the room where he had left his clothes without the benefit of Floyd Vosper's chatty courier service, and made leisured and satisfactory use of the fresh-water shower and monogrammed towels. Even so, when he sauntered back into the living room, he almost had the feeling of being lost in a strange and empty house, for all the varied individuals who had peopled the stage so vividly and vigorously a short time before had vanished into other and unknown seclusions and had not yet returned.

He lighted a cigarette and strolled idly towards the picture window that overlooked the veranda and the sea. Everything around his solitude was so still, excepting the subsonic suggestion of distant movements within the house, that he was tempted to walk on tiptoe; and yet outside the broad pane of plate glass the fronds of coconut palms were fluttering in a thin febrile frenzy, and there were lacings of white cream on the incredible jade of the short waves simmering on the beach.

He noticed, first, in what should have been a lazily sensual survey of the panorama, that the big beach umbrella was no longer where he had

first seen it, down to his right outside the pseudo-Grecian patio. He saw, as his eye wandered on, that it had been moved a hundred yards or so to his left — in fact, to the very place where Floyd Vosper was still lying. It occurred to him first that Vosper must have moved it himself, except that no shade was needed in the brief and darkening twilight. After that he noticed that Vosper seemed to have turned over on his back; and then at last as the Saint focused his eyes he saw with a weird thrill that the shaft of the umbrella stood straight up out of the left side of Vosper's scrawny brown chest, not in the sand beside him at all, but like a gigantic pin that had impaled a strange and inelegant insect — or, in a fantastic phrase that was not Simon's at all, like the arrow of God.

Major Rupert Fanshore, the senior Superintendent of Police, which made him third in the local hierarchy after the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, paid tribute to the importance of the case by taking personal charge of it. He was a slight pinkish blond man with rather large and very bright blue eyes and such a discreetly modulated voice that it commanded rapt attention through the basic effort of trying to hear what it was saying. He sat at an ordinary writing desk in the living room, with a Bahamian sergeant standing stiffly beside him, and contrived to turn the whole room into an office in which seven previously happy-go-

lucky adults wriggled like guilty schoolchildren whose teacher has been found libelously caricatured on their blackboard.

He said, with wholly impersonal conciseness: "Of course, you all know by now that Mr. Vosper was found on the beach with the steel spike of an umbrella through his chest. My job is to find out how it happened. To start with, the topography suggests that the person responsible came from, or through, this house. I've heard all your statements, and all they seem to amount to is that each of you was going about his own business at the time when this might have happened."

"All I know," Herbert Wexall said, "is that I was in my study, reading and signing the letters that I dictated this morning."

"And I was getting dressed," said his wife.

"So was I," said Janet Blaise.

"I guess I was in the shower," said Reginald Herrick.

"I was having a bubble bath," said Pauline Stone.

"I was still working," said Astron.

"This morning I started a new chapter of my book — in my mind, you understand. I do not write by putting everything on paper. For me it is necessary to meditate, to feel, to open flood-gates in my mind, so that I can receive the wisdom that comes from beyond the —"

"Quite," Major Fanshore assented politely. "The point is that none of you have alibis, if you need them."

You were all going about your own business, in your own rooms. Mr. Templar was changing in the late Mr. Vosper's room —"

"I wasn't here," Arthur Gresson said recklessly. "I drove back to my own place — I'm staying at the Fort Montagu Beach Hotel. I wanted a clean shirt. I drove back there, and when I came back here all this had happened."

"There's not much difference," Major Fanshiresaid. "Dr. Rassin tells me we couldn't establish the time of death within an hour or two, anyway . . . So the next thing we come to is the question of motive. Did anyone here," Fanshiresaid almost innocently, "have any really serious trouble with Mr. Vosper?"

There was an uncomfortable silence, which the Saint finally broke by saying: "I'm an outsider, so I'll take the rap. I'll answer for everyone."

The Superintendent cocked his bright eyes.

"Very well, sir. What would you say?"

"My answer," said the Saint, "is — everybody."

There was another silence, but a very different one, in which it seemed, surprisingly, as if all of them relaxed as unanimously as they had stiffened before. And yet, in its own way, this relaxation was as self-conscious and uncomfortable as the preceding tension had been. Only the Saint, who had every attitude of the completely careless onlooker, and Major Fan-

shire, whose deferential patience was impregably correct, seemed immune to the interplay of hidden strains.

"Would you care to go any further?" Fanshiresaid.

"Certainly," said the Saint. "I'll go anywhere. I can say what I like, and I don't have to care whether anyone is on speaking terms with me tomorrow. I'll go on record with my opinion that the late Mr. Vosper was one of the most unpleasant characters I've ever met. I'll make the statement, if it isn't already general knowledge, that he made a specialty of needling everyone he spoke to or about. He goaded everyone with nasty little things that he knew, or thought he knew, about them. I wouldn't blame anyone here for wanting, at least theoretically, to kill him."

"I'm not exactly concerned with your interpretation of blame," Fanshiresaid detachedly. "But if you have any facts, I'd like to hear them."

"I have no facts," said the Saint coolly. "I only know that in the few hours I've been here, Vosper made statements to me, a stranger, about everyone here, any one of which could be called fighting words."

"You will have to be more specific," Fanshiresaid.

"Okay," said the Saint. "I apologize in advance to anyone it hurts. Remember, I'm only repeating the kind of thing that made Vosper a good murder candidate . . . I am now specific. In my hearing he called Reg Herrick a dumb athlete who was trying to marry Janet Blaise for her

money. He suggested that Janet was a stupid juvenile for taking him seriously. He called Astron a commercial charlatan. He implied that Lucy Wexall was a dope and a snob. He inferred that Herb Wexall had more use for his secretary's sex than for her stenography, and he thought out loud that Pauline was amenable. He called Mr. Gresson a crook to his face."

"And during all this," Fanshire said, with an inoffensiveness that had to be heard to be believed, "he said nothing about you?"

"He did indeed," said the Saint. "He analyzed me, more or less, as a flamboyant phony."

"And you didn't object to that?"

"I hardly could," Simon replied blandly, "after I'd hinted to him that I thought he was even phonier."

It was a line on which a stage audience could have tittered, but the tensions of the moment let it sink with a slow thud.

Fanshire drew down his upper lip with one forefinger and nibbled it inscrutably.

"I expect this bores you as much as it does me, but this is the job I'm paid for. I've got to say that all of you had the opportunity, and from what Mr. Templar says you could all have had some sort of motive. Well, now I've got to look into what you might call the problem of physical possibility."

Simon Templar lighted a cigarette. It was the only movement that anyone made, and after that he was the most intent listener of them all as Fanshire went on: "Dr. Rassin says,

and I must say I agree with him, that to drive that umbrella shaft clean through a man's chest must have taken quite exceptional strength. It seems to be something that no woman, and probably no ordinary man, could have done."

His pale bright eyes came to rest on Herrick as he finished speaking, and the Saint found his own eyes following others in the same direction.

The picture formed in his mind: the young giant towering over a prostrate Vosper, the umbrella raised in his mighty arms like a fantastic spear and the setting sun flaming on his red head, like an avenging angel, as he thrust downwards with all the power of those herculean shoulders . . . and then, as Herrick's face began to flush under the awareness of so many stares, Janet Blaise suddenly cried out: "No! No — it couldn't have been Reggie!"

Fanshire's gaze transferred itself to her curiously, and she said in a stammering rush: "You see, it's silly, but we didn't quite tell the truth, I mean about being in our own rooms. As a matter of fact, Reggie was in my room most of the time. We were — talking."

The Superintendent cleared his throat and continued to gaze at her stolidly for a while. He didn't make any comment. But presently he looked at the Saint in the same dispassionately thoughtful way that he had first looked at Herrick.

Simon said calmly: "Yes, I was just wondering myself whether I could

have done it. And I had a rather interesting thought."

"Yes, Mr. Templar?"

"Certainly it must take quite a lot of strength to drive a spike through a man's chest with one blow. But now remember that this wasn't just a spike, or a spear. It had an enormous great umbrella on top of it. Now think what would happen if you were stabbing down with a thing like that?"

"Well, what would happen?"

"The umbrella would be like a parachute. It would be like a sort of sky anchor holding the shaft back. The air resistance would be so great that I'm wondering how anyone, even a very strong man, could get much momentum into the thrust. And the more force he put into it, the more likely he'd be to lift himself off the ground, rather than drive the spike down."

Fanshire digested this, blinking, and took his full time to do it.

"That certainly is a thought," he admitted. "But damn it," he exploded, "we know it was done. So it must have been possible."

"There's something entirely backwards about that logic," said the Saint. "Suppose we say, if it was impossible, maybe it wasn't done."

"Now you're being a little ridiculous," Fanshire snapped. "We saw —"

"We saw a man with the sharp iron-tipped shaft of a beach umbrella through his chest. We jumped to the natural conclusion that somebody

stuck it into him like a sword. And that may be just what a clever murderer meant us to think."

Then it was Arthur Gresson who shattered the fragile silence by leaping out of his chair like a bouncing ball.

"I've got it!" he yelled. "Believe me, everybody, I've got it! This'll kill you!"

"I hope not," Major Fanshire said drily. "But what is it?"

"Listen," Gresson said. "I knew something rang a bell somewhere, but I couldn't place it. Now it all comes back to me. This is something I only heard at the hotel the other day, but some of you must have heard it before. It happened about a year ago, when Gregory Peck was visiting here. He stayed at the same hotel where I am, and one afternoon he was on the beach, and the wind came up, just like it did today, and it picked up one of those beach umbrellas and carried it right to where he was lying, and the point just grazed his ribs and gave him a nasty gash, but what the people who saw it happen were saying was that if it'd been just a few inches the other way, it could have gone smack into his heart, and you'd've had a film star killed in the most sensational way that ever was. Didn't you ever hear about that, Major?"

"Now that you mention it," Fanshire said slowly, "I think I can hear something about it."

"Well," Gresson said, "*what happened again this afternoon, to someone who wasn't as lucky as Peck?*"

There was another of those electric silences of assimilation, out of which Lucy Wexall said: "Yes, I heard about that." And Janet said: "Remember, I told you about it! I was visiting some friends at the hotel that day, and I didn't see it happen, but I was there for the commotion."

Gresson spread out his arms, his round face gleaming with excitement and perspiration.

"That's got to be it!" he said. "You remember how Vosper was lying under the umbrella outside the patio when we started playing touch football, and he got sore because we were kicking sand over him, and he went off to the other end of the beach? But he didn't take the umbrella with him. The wind did that, after we all went off to change. And this time it didn't miss!"

Suddenly Astron stood up beside him; but where Gresson had risen like a jumping bean, this was like the growth and unfolding of a tree.

"I have heard many words," Astron said, in his firm gentle voice, "but now at last I think I am hearing truth. No man struck the blasphemer down. The arrow of God smote him, in his wickedness and his pride, as it was written long ago in the stars."

"You can say that again," Gresson proclaimed triumphantly. "He sure had it coming."

Again the Saint drew at his cigarette and created his own vision behind half-closed eyes. He saw the huge umbrella plucked from the sand by the invisible fingers of the wind,

picked up and hurled spinning along the deserted twilight beach, its great mushroom spread of gaudy canvas no longer a drag now but a sail for the wind to get behind, the whole thing transformed into a huge unearthly dart flung with literally superhuman power — the arrow of God indeed. A fantastic, an almost unimaginable solution; and yet it did not have to be imagined because there were witnesses that it had almost happened once before . . .

Fanshire was saying: "By Jove, that's the best suggestion I've heard yet — without any religious implication, of course. It sounds as if it could be the right answer!"

Simon's eyes opened on him fully for an instant, almost pityingly, and then closed completely as the true and right and complete answer rolled through the Saint's mind like a long peaceful wave.

"I have one question to ask," said the Saint.

"What's that?" Fanshire said, too polite to be irritable, yet with a trace of impatience, as if he hated the inconvenience of even defending such a divinely tailored theory.

"Does anyone here have a gun?" asked the Saint.

There was an almost audible creaking of knitted brows, and Fanshire said: "Really, Mr. Templar, I don't quite follow you."

"I only asked," said the Saint imperturbably, "if anyone here had a gun. I'd sort of like to know the answer before I explain why."

"I have a revolver," Wexall said with some perplexity. "What about it?"

"Could we see it, please?" said the Saint.

"I'll get it," said Pauline Stone.

She got up and left the room.

"You know I have a gun, Fanshire," Wexall said. "You gave me my permit. But I don't see —"

"Neither do I," Fanshire said.

The Saint said nothing. He devoted himself to his cigarette, with impregnable detachment, until the voluptuous secretary came back. Then he put out the cigarette and extended his hand.

Pauline looked at Wexall, hesitantly, and at Fanshire. The Superintendent nodded a sort of grudging acquiescence. Simon took the gun and broke it expertly.

"A Colt .38 Detective Special," he said. "Unloaded." He sniffed the barrel. "But fired quite recently," he said, and handed the gun to Fanshire.

"I used it myself this morning," Lucy Wexall said cheerfully. "Janet and Reg and I were shooting at the Portuguese men-of-war. There were quite a lot of them around before the breeze came up."

"I wondered what the noise was," Wexall said vaguely.

"I was coming up the drive when I heard it first," Gresson said, "and I thought the next war had started."

"This is all very interesting," Fanshire said, removing the revolver barrel from the proximity of his nostrils with a trace of exasperation,

"but I don't see what it has to do with the case. Nobody has been shot —"

"Major Fanshire," said the Saint quietly, "may I have a word with you, outside? And will you keep that gun in your pocket so that at least we can hope there will be no more shooting?"

The Superintendent stared at him for several seconds, and at last unwillingly got up.

"Very well, Mr. Templar." He stuffed the revolver into the side pocket of his rumpled white jacket, and glanced back at his impassive Bahamian sentinel. "Sergeant, see that nobody leaves here, will you?"

He followed Simon out on to the veranda and said almost peremptorily: "Come now, what's this all about?"

It was so much like a flash of a faraway Scotland Yard Inspector that the Saint had to control a smile. But he took Fanshire's arm and led him persuasively down the front steps to the beach. Off to their left a tiny red glow-worm blinked low down under the silver stars.

"You still have somebody watching the place where the body was found?" Simon asked.

"Of course," Fanshire grumbled. "As a matter of routine. But the sand's much too soft to show any footprints, and —"

"Will you walk over there with me?"

Fanshire sighed briefly, and trudged beside him. His politeness was dogged but unflinching. He was a type that had

been schooled from adolescence never to give up, even to the ultimate in ennui. In the interests of total fairness he would be game to the last yawn.

He did go so far as to say: "I don't know what you're getting at, but why *couldn't* it have been an accident?"

"I never heard a better theory in my life," said the Saint equably, "with one insuperable flaw."

"What's that?"

"Only," said the Saint, very gently, "that the wind wasn't blowing the right way."

Major Fanshires kept his face straight ahead to the wind and said nothing more after that until they reached the glow-worm that they were making for and it became a cigarette-end that a constable dropped as he came to attention.

The place where Floyd Vosper had been lying was marked off in a square of tape, but there was nothing out of the ordinary about it except some small stains that showed almost black under the flashlight which the constable produced.

"May I mess up the scene a bit?" Simon asked.

"I don't see why not," Fanshires said doubtfully.

Simon went down on his knees and began to dig with his hands, around and under the place where the stains were. Minutes later he stood up, with sand trickling through his fingers, and showed Fanshires the mushroomed scrap of metal that he had found.

"A .38 bullet," Fanshires said, and whistled.

"And I think you'll be able to prove it was fired from the gun you have in your pocket," said the Saint. "Also you'd better have a sack of sand picked up from where I was digging. I think a laboratory examination will find that it also contains fragments of bone and human flesh."

"You'll have to explain this to me," Fanshires said quite humbly.

Simon dusted his hands and lighted a cigarette.

"Vosper was lying on his face when I last saw him," he said, "and I think he was as much passed out as sleeping. With the wind and the surf and the soft sand it was easy for the murderer to creep up on him and shoot him in the back. But the murderer didn't want you looking for guns and comparing bullets. The umbrella was the inspiration. I don't have to remind you that the exit hole of a bullet is much larger than the entrance. By turning Vosper's body over, the murderer found a hole in his chest into which it couldn't have been too difficult to force the umbrella shaft—thus obliterating the original wound and confusing everybody in one simple operation."

"Let's get back to the house," said the Superintendent abruptly.

After a while, as they walked, Fanshires said: "It's going to feel awfully funny, having to arrest Herbert Wexall."

"Good God!" said the Saint, in honest astonishment. "You weren't thinking of doing that?"

Fanshires stopped and blinked at

him under the still distant light of the uncurtained windows.

"Why not?"

"Did Herbert seem at all guilty when he admitted he had a gun? Did he seem at all uncomfortable — I don't mean just puzzled, as you were — about having it produced? Was he ready with the explanation of why it smelled of being quite recently fired?"

"But if anyone else used Wexall's gun," Fanshires pondered laboriously, "why should they go to such lengths to make it look as if no gun was used at all, when Wexall would obviously have been suspected from the very first?"

"Because it was somebody who didn't want Wexall to take the rap," said the Saint. "Because Wexall is the goose who could still lay golden eggs — but he wouldn't do much laying on the end of a rope, or whatever you do to murderers here."

The Superintendent pulled out a handkerchief and mopped the perspiration off his face.

"My God," he said, "you mean you think Lucy —"

"I think we have to go all the way back to the prime question of motive," said the Saint. "Floyd Vosper was a nasty man who made dirty cracks about everyone here. But his cracks were dirtiest because he always had a wickedly good idea what he was talking about. Nevertheless very few people become murderers because of a dirty crack. Very few people kill other people on points of principle. Vosper

called us all variously dupes, phonies, cheaters, and fools. But since he had roughly the same description for all of us, we could all laugh it off. There was only one person about whom he made the unforgivable accusation . . . Now shall we rejoin the mob and finish up?"

"You'd better do this your own way," Fanshires muttered almost inaudibly.

Simon Templar took him up the steps to the veranda and back through the French doors into the living room, where all eyes turned to them in deathly silence.

"A paraffin test will prove who fired that revolver in the last twenty-four hours, aside from those who have already admitted it," Simon said, as if there had been no interruption. "And you'll remember, I'm sure, who supplied that very handy theory about the Arrow of God doing away with Vosper."

"Astron!" Fanshires gasped.

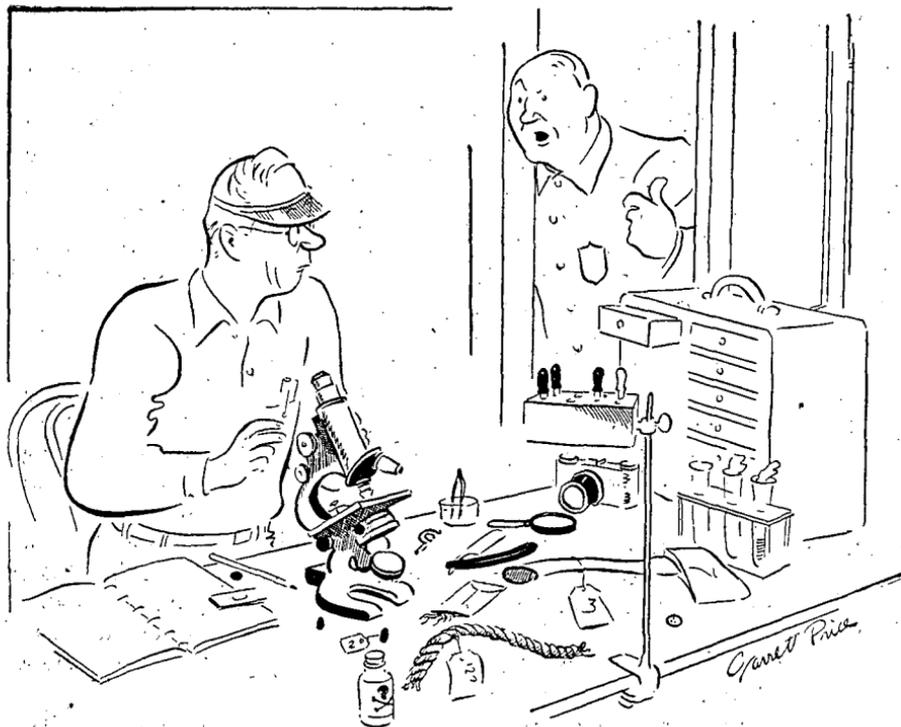
"Oh, no," said the Saint, a little tiredly. "He only said that God sometimes places his arrow in the hands of a man. And I feel quite sure that a wire to New York will establish that there is actually a criminal file under the name of Granville, with fingerprints and photos that should match Mr. Gresson's — as Vosper's fatally elephantine memory remembered . . . That was the one crack he shouldn't have made — mentioning Granville as Gresson's middle name — because it was the only one that was more than gossip or shrewd in-

sult, the only one that could be easily proved, and the only one that had a chance of upsetting an operation which was all set — if you'll excuse the phrase I use — to make a big killing."

Major Fanshire fingered his upper lip and looked at Simon Templar

inquiringly, as if for guidance.

"I don't know," he began; and then, as Arthur Granville Gresson began to rise like a floating balloon from his chair, and the ebony-faced sergeant moved to intercept him like a stolid, well-disciplined automaton, he knew.



"Darn it, Ed, the suspect has confessed."

QUESTION NO. 3

by LOUIS GOLDING

YOU shouldn't give such provoking questions in your examinations, dear Reverend Professor, really you shouldn't. They might have put ideas into my head, you know, if they weren't already there — ideas for answering question Number Three as I'm answering it now.

Is Murder an Essence or a Motive between you and me, in our own little neo-Georgian drama? Well, we're going to have a heart-to-heart talk about it, me scratching away here in the examination room in Oxford, and you in the train pounding up northward, all the long miles to Durham. I've been badgering you for months and months for this heart-to-heart talk, and you wouldn't touch me with a bargepole, would you? Well, before you're much older you'll be wishing you'd done something about it, Professor.

Don't get scared. I'm not climbing along the footboard towards your carriage with a knife between my teeth. I won't come in disguised as a waiter when you ring for your afternoon cup of tea, with a gun under the tray. It's not going to be as simple as that.

I can't tell you how I'm enjoying myself. Here they are all round me, the gay little chaps from Balliol and the tough cotton-brokers from

Queen's and the scented la-di-das from Magdalen, puffing and grunting away with their answer to question Number Three, while you and I are really getting to know each other. Do you know, the tip of your nose becomes dead-white when you become excited? It looks extremely silly. Perhaps someone's told you already? Does it look like that when you get frightened, too?

It must be looking like that now, I should think. For you're frightened, aren't you? Don't deny it. You feel as if you've got a coil of quicksilver in your guts. It must be a bit of a shock, sitting back there in your corner-seat like God Almighty, marking up your examination papers, beta gamma, beta plus, and then all of a sudden to come up against this, against me, of all people!

What's it like? Is it like swallowing a poison by mistake and finding out when it's too late to do anything about it? Or like having a shave and the razor is at your throat, and then you realize the barber has gone stark staring mad? Or is it worse than that, because it's nothing quite so straightforward? It's a shadow, eh, and you don't know what the shadow's going to be up to?

Oh, I've got it all set out nicely. Things may go a bit wrong, but not

much. It's only a question of whether you'll be reading this between Peterborough and Grantham or between Grantham and York. You'll be reading it somewhere on the journey between London and Durham, there's not much doubt of that, according to my reasoning.

It's the only chance you'll have of going through the papers between now and Monday morning, when you've got to be back in Oxford again to take the *viva voces*.

Well, suppose you're a bit too tired to read the stuff on the journey up to Durham. You're not going to have a minute to yourself while you're actually there, what with your sermon in the morning and your address in the afternoon and your sermon in the evening. And then it'll be time for you to tumble into the train again, won't it?

Somebody, of course, might have got through to you with a telephone message during the day, though that would be a rather cruel thing to do to a parson who's been hard at it reading examination papers all week. But I don't think they will, somehow. They'll know you'll be heading straight back for it.

Or you might get a glimpse at a Sunday newspaper. But I don't think that's likely, either. So if you've not read this on the journey from London to Durham, you'll be reading it on the journey from Durham to London. You won't cheat me this time, I think!

Don't fumble up towards the com-

munication-cord, Professor! It's too late!

Do I sound rather well-informed about your movements? I've made it my business to be well-informed for quite a long time now. But it's only last night I got this dope about your Durham job, I'll admit that readily. It was your son Stephen who told me, as we left the examination room and walked up the High together, after the afternoon paper.

He's a good chap, that boy of yours. I can't quite see how a rat like you fathered him. Perhaps you didn't.

You'll be saying to yourself that all this bears out everything you've ever said about me to your son Stephen and your daughter Jill, and the dons, and everybody in Oxford. You won't be very coherent about it, of course, but that's the sort of idea that'll be going through your head in a hectic sort of way. I'm morbid. I'm diseased. I'm decadent. I'm mad.

You went so far as that in order to persuade Jill to give me up. She told me so herself, poor dear. I'm mad, eh? Does this letter sound mad? I mean this answer — answer Number Three. Just an answer in an examination paper.

And what if it does sound mad? And what if I am mad? There was one person in all the world who might have kept me sane. That was Jill, and very well you know it. She was my one hope in all the world.

But you weren't having any. I was ill-balanced. That was how you put it first. Slowly you poisoned her

against me. You wanted her to marry that bull-faced lordling from the House. In addition to everything else, you're a snob. I came from a day school. He came from Eton. He's a member of the Bullingdon. I'm a member of the Union. You poisoned her against me so as to rake a title into your family.

You went on so long she at last believed you. She thinks I'm bats, I've got a screw loose. She's afraid of me, though she loves me nearly as much as I love her. As I've always loved her, as I'll go on loving her . . .

Are you wriggling a bit in your seat there, Professor? Is Murder an Essence or a Motive in Elizabethan Drama? Would it be an Essence or only a Motive if I murdered His Nibs from the House? And what would it be if I murdered Jill?

I've considered both possibilities, of course. I've also considered the possibility of murdering you. I was working it out again only yesterday, during the Milton paper.

And then came my little talk with Stephen. I don't see why it was necessary to try and poison Stephen against me, too. Anyhow, he didn't believe it. I'm not sure that you believe it, either. The only person who

really believes it is Jill — damn your eyes!

Be patient: I have not much more to say, Professor.

We've been seeing quite a lot of each other lately, Stephen and I, though you forbade him to have anything to do with me. He lied to you. He thought it would save trouble and pain all round if he said he wasn't seeing me any more. But he did. We've been pallier than before, lately. He feels as if he's got something to make up to me. He feels guilty somehow.

We've even arranged to go out together this very afternoon. We'll be getting into a canoe just about the time you get to Peterborough. We'll paddle about for a little time, just about time for you to get to Grantham. You'll be well settled by then. You'll have the examination papers all cosy on your knee.

Then I think we'll paddle along to the backwater below Denter's farm. You know it, probably. I shouldn't be surprised if there's a bit of an accident. It's a pity neither of us can swim. There won't be much chance for either of us, I suppose. You remember how thick and clammy the weeds are there?

WINNER OF A SPECIAL AWARD:
CLAYTON RAWSON

We are beginning to think that it is impossible for us to introduce a story by Clayton Rawson without somehow mentioning John Dickson Carr. Is it because Messrs. Carr and Rawson are virtually the only survivors of that criminological coterie who still plot and write in terms of the "miracle problem" — the "locked room," the "impossible crime," and the "murder as if by magic" . . .

Be that as it may, some years ago John Dickson Carr wrote to Clayton Rawson, admitting that one of his (Carr's) favorite dream-plots was to have a person go into an ordinary phone booth — and vanish! Naturally, the phone booth could not be a phony: no sliding panels, no trap-doors, no collapsible floor or ceiling; and just as naturally, to make the problem an authentic manhunting miracle, the phone booth would have to be under constant observation from the moment the person entered until that delectable and detectable moment when the observer peeks in and finds the booth empty. Carr confessed that he was irresistibly attracted to such a situation, but that he had never been able to work out a satisfying solution.

Last year Messrs. Carr and Rawson were sitting in your Editors' library, and Rawson talked about one of his favorite dream-plots: a detective questions a suspect in the suspect's apartment; the apartment is furnished in the usual way: sofa, chairs, rug, piano, fireplace equipment, and so on; the detective leaves, but when he returns a short time later, every stick of furniture has vanished! Naturally, the apartment could not be a phony: no sliding panels, no trap-doors, no collapsible floor or ceiling; and just as naturally, to make the problem an authentic manhunting marvel, the doors and windows would have to be under constant observation. Rawson confessed that he was irresistibly attracted to such a situation, but that he had never been able to work out a satisfying solution.

Well, we all sat there, pecking away at both puzzles, when your Editors saw a strange gleam flash in Carr's eyes, and then an equally strange gleam flash in Rawson's eyes. We were concentrating like mad trying to improvise a gimmick which would either make a human being disappear in a phone booth, or make a van-load of furniture dissolve into thin air; but we could come up with nothing. Yet, there were Messrs. Carr and Rawson, both with perceptible gleams in their eyes.

Carr shot a sidelong glance at Rawson, only to catch Rawson shooting a sidelong glance at him. Then Carr remarked, almost casually: You know, I think I see a way of pulling off that disappearing furniture trick. Then,

just as casually, Rawson remarked: You know, I think I see a way of making a man vanish in a phone booth.

Well, fair exchange is no robbery. Right there in front of our amazed eyes, we saw Carr and Rawson swap ideas! Carr gave Rawson permission to write a story based on the phone-booth miracle, and in return, Rawson gave Carr permission to write a story on the vanishing-furniture miracle. Yes, we actually witnessed that titanic 'tec trade!

So, we now bring you one of the results of bloodhound barter. "Off the Face of the Earth" is the Rawson solution to the problem of the man who went into a phone booth and "was never more seen in this world." The Carr solution to the problem of furniture becoming invisible has not yet reached us. We can only hope that John is working on that whopping wonder now, and that we shall be able to bring it to you next year . . .

OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH

by CLAYTON RAWSON

THE lettering in neat gilt script on the door read: *Miracles For Sale*, and beneath it was the familiar rabbit-from-a-hat trademark. Inside, behind the glass showcase counter, in which was displayed as unlikely an assortment of objects as could be got together in one spot, stood The Great Merlini.

He was wrapping up half a dozen billiard balls, several bouquets of feather flowers, a dove pan, a Talking Skull, and a dozen decks of cards for a customer who snapped his fingers and nonchalantly produced the needed number of five-dollar bills from thin air. Merlini rang up the sale, took half a carrot from the cash drawer, and gave it to the large white rabbit who watched proceedings with a pink

skeptical eye from the top of a nearby escape trunk. Then he turned to me.

"Clairvoyance, mind-reading, extrasensory perception," he said. "We stock only the best grade. And it tells me that you came to pick up the two Annie Oakleys I promised to get you for that new hit musical. I have them right here."

But his occult powers slipped a bit. He looked in all his coat pockets one after another, found an egg, a three-foot length of rope, several brightly-colored silk handkerchiefs, and a crumpled telegram reading: NEED INVISIBLE MAN AT ONCE. SHIP UNIONTOWN BY MONDAY. — NEMO THE ENIGMA. Then he gave a surprised blink and scowled darkly at a sealed envelope that he

had fished out of his inside breast pocket.

"That," I commented a bit sarcastically, "doesn't look like a pair of theater tickets."

He shook his head sadly. "No. It's a letter my wife asked me to mail a week ago."

I took it from him. "There's a mail chute by the elevators about fifteen feet outside your door. I'm no magician, but I can remember to put this in it on my way out." I indicated the telegram that lay on the counter. "Since when have you stocked a supply of invisible men? That I would like to see."

Merlini frowned at the framed slogan: *Nothing Is Impossible* which hung above the cash register. "You want real miracles, don't you? We guarantee that our invisible man can't be seen. But if you'd like to see how impossible it is to see him, step right this way."

In the back, beyond his office, there is a larger room that serves as workshop, shipping department and, on occasion, as a theater. I stood there a moment later and watched Merlini step into an upright coffin-shaped box in the center of the small stage. He faced me, smiled, and snapped his fingers. Two copper electrodes in the side walls of the cabinet spat flame, and a fat, green, electric spark jumped the gap just above his head, hissing and writhing. He lifted his arms; the angry stream of energy bent, split in two, fastened on his fingertips, and then disappeared as he grasped the

gleaming spherical electrodes, one with each hand.

For a moment nothing happened; then, slowly, his body began to fade into transparency as the cabinet's back wall became increasingly visible through it. Clothes and flesh melted until only the bony skeletal structure remained. Suddenly, the jawbone moved and its grinning white teeth clicked as Merlini's voice said:

"You must try this, Ross. On a hot day like today, it's most comfortable."

As it spoke, the skeleton also wavered and grew dim. A moment later it was gone and the cabinet was, or seemed to be, empty. If Merlini still stood there, he was certainly invisible.

"Okay, Gypsy Rose Lee," I said. "I have now seen the last word in strip-tease performances." Behind me I heard the office door open and I looked over my shoulder to see Inspector Gavigan giving me a fishy stare. "You'd better get dressed again," I added. "We have company."

The Inspector looked around the room and at the empty stage, then at me again, cautiously this time. "If you said what I think you did—"

He stopped abruptly as Merlini's voice, issuing from nowhere, chuckled and said, "Don't jump to conclusions, Inspector. Appearances are deceptive. It's not an indecent performance, nor has Ross gone off his rocker and started talking to himself. I'm right here. On the stage."

Gavigan looked and saw the skeleton shape taking form within the cabinet. He closed his eyes, shook his

head, then looked again. That didn't help. The grisly spectre was still there and twice as substantial. Then, wraith-like, Merlini's body began to form around it and, finally, grew opaque and solid. The magician grinned broadly, took his hands from the electrodes, and bowed as the spitting, green discharge of energy crackled once more above him. Then the stage curtains closed.

"You should be glad that's only an illusion," I told Gavigan. "If it were the McCoy and the underworld ever found out how it was done, you'd face an unparalleled crime wave and you'd never solve a single case."

"It's the Pepper's Ghost illusion brought up to date," Merlini said as he stepped out between the curtains and came toward us. "I've got more orders than I can fill. It's a sure-fire carnival draw." He frowned at Gavigan. "But *you* don't look very entertained."

"I'm not," the Inspector answered gloomily. "Vanishing into thin air may amuse some people. Not me. Especially when it really happens. Off stage in broad daylight. In Central Park."

"Oh," Merlini said. "I see. So that's what's eating you. Helen Hope, the chorus girl who went for a walk last week and never came back. She's still missing then, and there are still no clues?"

Gavigan nodded. "It's the Dorothy Arnold case all over again. Except for one thing we haven't let the newspapers know about — Bela Zyyzk."

"Bela what?" I asked.

Gavigan spelled it.

"Impossible," I said. "He must be a typographical error. A close relative of Etoain Shrdlu."

The Inspector wasn't amused. "Relatives," he growled. "I wish I could find some. He not only claims he doesn't have any — he swears he never has had any! And so far we haven't been able to prove different."

"Where does he come from?" Merlini asked. "Or won't he say?"

"Oh, he talks all right," Gavigan said disgustedly. "Too much. And none of it makes any sense. He says he's a momentary visitor to this planet — from the dark cloud of Antares. I've seen some high, wide, and fancy screwballs in my time, but this one takes the cake — candles and all."

"Helen Hope," Merlini said, "vanishes off the face of the earth. And Zyyzk does just the opposite. This gets interesting. What else does he have to do with her disappearance?"

"Plenty," Gavigan replied. "A week ago Tuesday night she went to a Park Avenue party at Mrs. James Dewitt-Smith's. She's another candidate for Bellevue. Collects Tibetan statuary, medieval relics, and crackpots like Zyyzk. He was there that night — reading minds."

"A visitor from outer space," Merlini said, "and a mindreader to boot. I won't be happy until I've had a talk with that gentleman."

"I have talked with him," the Inspector growled. "And I've had indi-

gestion ever since. He does something worse than read minds. He makes predictions." Gavigan scowled at Merlini. "I thought fortune tellers always kept their customers happy by predicting good luck?"

Merlini nodded. "That's usually standard operating procedure. Zyyzk does something else?"

"He certainly does. He's full of doom and disaster. A dozen witnesses testify that he told Helen Hope she'd vanish off the face of the earth. And three days later that's exactly what she does do."

"I can see," Merlini said, "why you view him with suspicion. So you pulled him in for questioning and got a lot of answers that weren't very helpful?"

"Helpful!" Gavigan jerked several typewritten pages from his pocket and shook them angrily. "Listen to this. He's asked: 'What's your age?' and we get: 'According to which time — solar, sidereal, galactic, or universal?' Murphy of Missing Persons, who was questioning him, says: 'Any kind. Just tell us how old you are.' And Zyyzk replies: 'I can't answer that. The question, in that form, has no meaning.'" The Inspector threw the papers down disgustedly.

Merlini picked them up, riffled through them, then read some of the transcript aloud. "Question: How did you know that Miss Hope would disappear? Answer: Do you understand the basic theory of the fifth law of interdimensional reaction? Murphy: Huh? Zyyzk: Explanations are useless.

You obviously have no conception of what I am talking about."

"He was right about that," Gavigan muttered. "Nobody does."

Merlini continued. "Question: Where is Miss Hope now? Answer: Beyond recall. She was summoned by the Lords of the Outer Darkness." Merlini looked up from the papers. "After that, I suppose, you sent him over to Bellevue?"

The Inspector nodded. "They had him under observation a week. And they turned in a report full of eight-syllable jawbreakers all meaning he's crazy as a bedbug — but harmless. I don't believe it. Anybody who predicts in a loud voice that somebody will disappear into thin air at twenty minutes after four on a Tuesday afternoon, just before it actually happens, knows plenty about it!"

Merlini is a hard man to surprise, but even he blinked at that. "Do you mean to say that he foretold the exact time, too?"

"Right on the nose," Gavigan answered. "The doorman of her apartment-house saw her walk across the street and into Central Park at four-eighteen. We haven't been able to find anyone who has seen her since. And don't tell me his prediction was a long shot that paid off."

"I won't," Merlini agreed. "Whatever it is, it's not coincidence. Where's Zyyzk now? Could you hold him after that psychiatric report?"

"The D.A.," Gavigan replied, "took him into General Sessions before Judge Keeler and asked that he

be held as a material witness." The Inspector looked unhappier than ever. "It would have to be Keeler."

"What did he do?" I asked. "Deny the request?"

"No. He granted it. That's when Zyyzk made his second prediction. Just as they start to take him out and throw him back in the can, he makes some funny motions with his hands and announces, in that confident manner he's got, that the Outer Darkness is going to swallow Judge Keeler up, too!"

"And what," Merlini wanted to know, "is wrong with that? Knowing how you've always felt about Francis X. Keeler, I should think that prospect would please you."

Gavigan exploded. "Look, blast it! I have wished dozens of times that Judge Keeler would vanish into thin air, but that's exactly what I don't want to happen right now. We've known at headquarters that he's been taking fix money from the Castelli mob ever since the day he was appointed to the bench. But we couldn't do a thing. Politically he was dynamite. One move in his direction and there'd be a new Commissioner the next morning, with demotions all down the line. But three weeks ago the Big Guy and Keeler had a scrap, and we get a tip straight from the feed box that Keeler is fair game. So we start working overtime collecting the evidence that will send him up the river for what I hope is a ninety-nine-year stretch. We've been afraid he might tumble and try to pull another

'Judge Crater.' And now, just when we're almost, but not quite, ready to nail him and make it stick, this has to happen."

"Your friend, Zyyzk," Merlini said, "becomes more interesting by the minute. Keeler is being tailed, of course?"

"Twenty-four hours a day, ever since we got the word that there'd be no kick-back." The phone on Merlini's desk rang as Gavigan was speaking. "I get hourly reports on his movements. Chances are that's for me now."

It was. In the office, we both watched him as he took the call. He listened a moment, then said, "Okay. Double the number of men on him immediately. And report back every fifteen minutes. If he shows any sign of going anywhere near a railroad station or airport, notify me at once."

Gavigan hung up and turned to us. "Keeler made a stop at the First National and spent fifteen minutes in the safety-deposit vaults. He's carrying a suitcase, and you can have one guess as to what's in it now. This looks like the payoff."

"I take it," Merlini said, "that, this time, the Zyyzk forecast did not include the exact hour and minute when the Outer Darkness would swallow up the Judge?"

"Yeah. He sidestepped that. All he'll say is that it'll happen before the week is out."

"And today," Merlini said, "is Friday. Tell me this. The Judge seems

to have good reasons for wanting to disappear which Zyyzk may or may not know about. Did Miss Hope also have reasons?"

"She had one," Gavigan replied. "But I don't see how Zyyzk could have known it. We can't find a thing that shows he ever set eyes on her before the night of that party. And her reason is one that few people knew about." The phone rang again and Gavigan reached for it. "Helen Hope is the girl friend Judge Keeler visits the nights he doesn't go home to his wife!"

Merlini and I both tried to assimilate that and take in what Gavigan was telling the telephone at the same time. "Okay, I'm coming. And grab him the minute he tries to go through a gate." He slammed the receiver down and started for the door.

"Keeler," he said over his shoulder, "is in Grand Central. There's room in my car if you want to come."

He didn't need to issue that invitation twice. On the way down in the elevator Merlini made one not very helpful comment.

"You know," he said thoughtfully, "if the Judge does have a reservation on the extra-terrestrial express — destination: the Outer Darkness — we don't know what gate that train leaves from."

We found out soon enough. The Judge stepped through it just two minutes before we hurried into the station and found Lieutenant Malloy exhibiting all the symptoms of having

been hit over the head with a sledge hammer. He was bewildered and dazed, and had difficulty talking coherently.

Sergeant Hicks, a beefy, unimaginative, elderly detective who had also seen the thing happen looked equally groggy.

Usually, Malloy's reports were as dispassionate, precise, and factual as a logarithmic table. But not today. His first paragraph bore a much closer resemblance to a first-person account of a dope-addict's dream.

"Malloy," Gavigan broke in icily. "Are you tight?"

The Lieutenant shook his head sadly. "No, but the minute I go off duty, I'm going to get so plas —"

Gavigan cut in again. "Are all the exits to this place covered?"

Hicks replied, "If they aren't, somebody is sure going to catch it."

Gavigan turned to the detective who had accompanied us in the Inspector's car. "Make the rounds and double-check that, Brady. And tell headquarters to get more men over here fast."

"They're on the way now," Hicks said. "I phoned right after it happened. First thing I did."

Gavigan turned to Malloy. "All right. Take it easy. One thing at a time — and in order."

"It don't make sense that way either," Malloy said hopelessly. "Keeler took a cab from the bank and came straight here. Hicks and I were right on his tail. He comes down to the lower level and goes into the Oyster

Bar and orders a double brandy. While he's working on that, Hicks phones in for reinforcements with orders to cover every exit. They had time to get here, too; Keeler had a second brandy. Then, when he starts to come out, I move out to the center of the station floor by the information booth so I'm ahead of him and all set to make the pinch no matter which gate he heads for. Hicks stands pat, ready to tail him if he heads upstairs again.

"At first, that's where I think he's going because he starts up the ramp. But he stops here by this line of phone booths, looks in a directory and then goes into a booth halfway down the line. And as soon as he closes the door, Hicks moves up and goes into the next booth to the left of Keeler's." Malloy pointed. "The one with the Out-of-Order sign on it."

Gavigan turned to the Sergeant. "All right. You take it."

Hicks scowled at the phone booth as he spoke. "The door was closed and somebody had written 'Out of Order' on a card and stuck it in the edge of the glass. I lifted the card so nobody'd wonder why I was trying to use a dead phone, went in, closed the door and tried to get a load of what the Judge was saying. But it's no good. He was talking, but so low I couldn't get it. I came out again, stuck the card back in the door and walked back toward the Oyster Bar so I'd be set to follow him either way when he came out. And I took a gander into the Judge's booth as I went past. He was

talking with his mouth up close to the phone."

"And then," Malloy continued, "we wait. And we wait. He went into that booth at five ten. At five twenty I get itchy feet. I begin to think maybe he's passed out or died of suffocation or something. Nobody in his right mind stays in a phone booth for ten minutes when the temperature is ninety like today. So I start to move in just as Hicks gets the same idea. He's closer than I am, so I stay put."

"Hicks stops just in front of the booth and lights a cigarette, which gives him a chance to take another look inside. Then I figure I must be right about the Judge having passed out. I see the match Hicks is holding drop, still lighted, and he turns quick and plasters his face against the glass. I don't wait. I'm already on my way when he turns and motions for me."

Malloy hesitated briefly. Then, slowly and very precisely, he let us have it. "I don't care if the Commissioner himself has me up on the carpet, one thing I'm sure of — *I hadn't taken my eyes off that phone booth for one single split second since the Judge walked into it.*"

"And neither," Hicks said with equal emphasis, "did I. Not for one single second."

"I did some fancy open-field running through the commuters," Malloy went on, "skidded to a stop behind Hicks and looked over his shoulder."

Gavigan stepped forward to the closed door of the booth and looked in.

"And what you see," Malloy finished, "is just what I saw. You can ship me down to Bellevue for observation, too. It's impossible. It doesn't make sense. I don't believe it. But that's exactly what happened."

For a moment Gavigan didn't move. Then, slowly, he pulled the door open.

The booth was empty.

The phone receiver dangled off the hook, and on the floor there was a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles, one lens smashed.

"Keeler's glasses," Hicks said. "He went into that booth and I had my eyes on it every second. He never came out. And he's not in it."

"And that," Malloy added in a tone of utter dejection, "isn't the half of it. I stepped inside, picked up the phone receiver Keeler had been using, and said, 'Hello' into the mouthpiece. There was a chance the party he'd been talking to might still be on the other end." Malloy came to a full stop.

"Well?" Gavigan prodded him. "Let's have it. Somebody answered?"

"Yes. Somebody said: '*This is the end of the trail, Lieutenant.*' Then — hung up."

"You didn't recognize the voice?"

"Yeah, I recognized it. That's the trouble. It was — *Judge Keeler!*"

Silence.

Then, quietly, Merlini asked, "You are quite certain that it was his voice, Malloy?"

The Lieutenant exploded. "I'm not sure of anything any more. But if

you've ever heard Keeler — he sounds like a bullfrog with a cold — you'd know it couldn't be anyone else."

Gavigan's voice, or rather, a hollow imitation of it, cut in. "Merlini. Either Malloy and Hicks have both gone completely off their chumps or this is the one phone booth in the world that has two exits. The back wall is sheet metal backed by solid marble, but if there's a loose panel in one of the side walls, Keeler could have moved over into the empty booth that is supposed to be out of order . . ."

"Is supposed to be . . ." Malloy repeated. "So that's it! The sign's a phony. That phone isn't on the blink, and his voice —" Malloy took two swift steps into the booth. He lifted the receiver, dropped a nickel, and waited for the dial tone. He scowled. He jiggled the receiver. He repeated the whole operation.

This specimen of Mr. Bell's invention was definitely not working.

A moment or two later Merlini reported another flaw in the Inspector's theory. "There are," he stated after a quick but thorough inspection of both booths, "no sliding panels, hinged panels, removable sections, trapdoors, or any other form of secret exit. The sidewalls are single sheets of metal, thin but intact. The back wall is even more solid. There is one exit and one only — the door through which our vanishing man entered."

"He didn't come out," Sergeant Hicks insisted again, sounding like a cracked phonograph record endlessly repeating itself. "I was watching that

door every single second. Even if he turned himself into an invisible man like in a movie I saw once, he'd still have had to open the door. And the door didn't budge. I was watching it every single —"

"And that," Merlini said thoughtfully, "leaves us with an invisible man who can also walk through closed doors. In short — a ghost. Which brings up another point. Have any of you noticed that there are a few spots of something on those smashed glasses that look very much like — blood?"

Malloy growled. "Yeah, but don't make any cracks about there being another guy in that booth who sapped Keeler — that'd mean *two* invisible men . . ."

"If there can be one invisible man," Merlini pointed out, "then there can be two."

Gavigan said, "Merlini, that vanishing gadget you were demonstrating when I arrived . . . It's just about the size and shape of this phone booth. I want to know —"

The magician shook his head. "Sorry, Inspector. That method wouldn't work here under these conditions. It's not the same trick. Keeler's miracle, in some respects, is even better. He should have been a magician; he's been wasting his time on the bench. Or has he? I wonder how much cash he carried into limbo with him in that suitcase?" He paused, then added, "More than enough, probably, to serve as a motive for murder."

And there, on that ominous note,

the investigation stuck. It was as dead an end as I ever saw. And it got deader by the minute. Brady, returning a few minutes later, reported that all station exits had been covered by the time Keeler left the Oyster Bar and that none of the detectives had seen hide nor hair of him since.

"Those men stay there until further notice," Gavigan ordered. "Get more men — as many as you need — and start searching this place. I want every last inch of it covered. And every phone booth, too. If it was Keeler's voice Malloy heard, then he was in one of them, and —"

"You know, Inspector," Merlini interrupted, "this case not only takes the cake but the marbles, all the blue ribbons, and a truck load of loving cups too. That is another impossibility."

"What is?"

"The voice on the telephone. Look at it. If Keeler left the receiver in this booth off as Malloy and Hicks found it, vanished, then reappeared in another booth and tried to call this number, he'd get a busy signal. He couldn't have made a connection. And if he left the receiver on the hook, he could have called this number, but someone would have had to be here to lift the receiver and leave it off as it was found. It keeps adding up to two invisible men no matter how you look at it."

"I wish," Malloy said acidly, "that you'd disappear, too."

Merlini protested. "Don't. You sound like Zyzk."

"That guy," Gavigan predicted darkly, "is going to wish he never heard of Judge Keeler."

Gavigan's batting average as a prophet was zero. When Zyyzk, whom the Inspector ordered brought to the scene and who was delivered by squad car twenty minutes later, discovered that Judge Keeler had vanished, he was as pleased as punch.

An interstellar visitor from outer space should have three eyes, or at least green hair. Zyyzk, in that respect, was a disappointment. He was a pudgy little man in a wrinkled gray suit. His eyes, two only, were a pale, washed-out blue behind gold-rimmed bi-focals, and his hair, the color of weak tea, failed miserably in its attempt to cover the top of his head.

His manner, however, was charged with an abundant and vital confidence, and there was a haughty, imperious quality in his high, thin voice which hinted that there was much more to Mr. Zyyzk than met the eye.

"I issued distinct orders," he told Gavigan in an icy tone, "that I was never, under any circumstances, to be disturbed between the sidereal hours of five and seven post-meridian. You know that quite well, Inspector. Explain why these idiots have disobeyed. At once!"

If there is any quicker way of bringing an inspector of police to a boil, I don't know what it is. The look Gavigan gave the little man would have wrecked a Geiger counter. He opened his mouth. But the searing

blast of flame which I expected didn't issue forth. He closed his mouth and swallowed. The Inspector was speechless.

Zyyzk calmly threw more fuel on the fire. "Well," he said impatiently tapping his foot. "I'm waiting."

A subterranean rumble began deep in Gavigan's interior and then, a split second before he blew his top, Merlini said quietly, "I understand, Mr. Zyyzk, that you read minds?"

Zyyzk, still the Imperial Roman Emperor, gave Merlini a scathing look. "I do," he said. "And what of it?"

"For a mind-reader," Merlini told him, "you ask a lot of questions. I should think you'd know why you've been brought here."

That didn't bother the visitor from Outer Space. He stared intently at Merlini for a second, glanced once at Gavigan, then closed his eyes. The fingertips of one white hand pressed against his brow. Then he smiled.

"I see. Judge Keeler."

"Keeler?" Gavigan pretended surprise. "What about him?"

Zyyzk wasn't fooled. He shook his head. "Don't try to deceive me, Inspector. It's childish. The Judge has vanished. Into the Outer Darkness — as I foretold." He grinned broadly. "You will, of course, release me now."

"I'll — I'll *what*?"

Zyyzk spread his hands. "You have no choice. Not unless you want to admit that I could sit in a police cell surrounded on all sides by steel bars and cause Judge Keeler to vanish

off the face of the earth by will power alone. Since that, to your limited, earthly intelligence, is impossible, I have an impregnable alibi. Good day, Inspector."

The little man actually started to walk off. The detectives who stood on either side were so dazed by his treatment of the Inspector that Zyyzk had gone six feet before they came to life again and grabbed him.

Whether the strange powers he claimed were real or not, his ability to render Gavigan speechless was certainly uncanny: The Inspector's mouth opened, but again nothing came out.

Merlini said, "You admit then that you are responsible for the Judge's disappearance?"

Zyyzk, still grinning, shook his head. "I predicted it. Beyond that I admit nothing."

"But you know how he vanished?"

The little man shrugged. "In the usual way, naturally. Only an adept of the seventh order would understand."

Merlini suddenly snapped his fingers and plucked a shiny silver dollar from thin air. He dropped it into his left hand, closed his fingers over it and held his fist out toward Zyyzk. "Perhaps Judge Keeler vanished — like this." Slowly he opened his fingers. The coin was gone.

For the first time a faint crack appeared in the polished surface of Zyyzk's composure. He blinked. "Who," he asked slowly, "are you?"

"An adept," Merlini said solemnly,

"of the eighth order. One who is not yet satisfied that you are what you claim to be." He snapped his fingers again, almost under Zyyzk's nose, and the silver dollar reappeared. He offered it to Zyyzk. "A test," he said. "Let me see you send that back into the Outer Darkness from which I summoned it."

Zyyzk no longer grinned. He scowled and his eyes were hard. "It will go," he said, lifting his hand and rapidly tracing a cabalistic figure in the air. "And you with it!"

"Soon?" Merlini asked.

"Very soon. Before the hour of nine strikes again you will appear before the Lords of the Outer Darkness in far Antares. And there —"

Gavigan had had enough. He passed a miracle of his own. He pointed a cabalistic but slightly shaking finger at the little man and roared an incantation that had instant effect.

"Get him out of here!"

In the small space of time that it took them to hurry down the corridor and around a corner, Zyyzk and the two detectives who held him both vanished.

Gavigan turned on Merlini. "Isn't one lunatic enough without you acting like one, too?"

The magician grinned. "Keep your eyes on me, Inspector. If I vanish, as predicted, you may see how Keeler did it. If I don't, Zyyzk is on the spot and he may begin to make more sense."

"That," Gavigan growled, "is impossible."

Zyyzk, as far as I was concerned, wasn't the only thing that made no sense. The Inspector's men turned Grand Central station inside out and the only trace of Judge Keeler to be found were the smashed spectacles on the floor of that phone booth. Gavigan was so completely at a loss that he could think of nothing else to do but order the search made again.

Merlini, as far as I could tell, didn't seem to have any better ideas. He leaned against the wall opposite the phone booth and scowled darkly at its empty interior. Malloy and Hicks looked so tired and dispirited that Gavigan told them both to go home and sleep it off. An hour later, when the second search had proved as fruitless as the first, Gavigan suddenly told Lieutenant Doran to take over, turned, and started to march off.

Then Merlini woke up. "Inspector," he asked, "where are you going?"

Gavigan turned, scowling. "Anywhere," he said, "where I don't have to look at telephone booths. Do you have any suggestions?"

Merlini moved forward. "One, yes. Let's eat."

Gavigan didn't look as if he could keep anything in his stomach stronger than weak chicken broth, but he nodded absently. We got into Gavigan's car and Brady drove us cross-town, stopping, at Merlini's direction, in front of the Williston building.

The Inspector objected, "There aren't any decent restaurants in this neighborhood. Why —"

"Don't argue," Merlini said as he got out. "If Zyyzk's latest prediction comes off, this will be my last meal on earth. I want to eat here. Come on." He crossed the pavement toward a flashing green and purple neon sign that blinked: *Johnson's Cafeteria. Open All Night.*

Merlini was suddenly acting almost as strangely as Zyyzk. I knew very well that this wasn't the sort of place he'd pick for his last meal and, although he claimed to be hungry, I noticed that all he put on his tray was crackers and a bowl of soup. Pea soup at that — something he heartily disliked.

Then, instead of going to a table off in a corner where we could talk, he chose one right in the center of the room. He even selected our places for us. "You sit there, Inspector. You there, Ross. And excuse me a moment. I'll be right back." With that he turned, crossed to the street door through which we had come, and vanished through it.

"I think," I told Gavigan, "that he's got a bee in his bonnet."

The Inspector grunted. "You mean bats. In his belfry." He gave the veal cutlet on his plate a glum look.

Merlini was gone perhaps five minutes. When he returned, he made no move to sit down. He leaned over the table and asked, "Either of you got a nickel?"

I found one and handed it to him. Suspiciously, Gavigan said, "I thought you wanted to eat?"

"I must make a phone call first,"

the magician answered. "And with Zyyzk's prediction hanging over me, I'd just as soon you both watched me do it. Look out the window behind me, watch that empty booth — the second from the right. And keep your eyes on it every second." He glanced at his wrist watch. "If I'm not back here in exactly three minutes, you'd better investigate."

I didn't like the sound of that. Neither did Gavigan. He started to object. "Now, wait a minute. You're not going —"

But Merlini had already gone. He moved with long strides toward the street door, and the Inspector half rose from his chair as if to go after him. Then, when Gavigan saw what lay beyond the window, he stopped. The window we both faced was in a side wall at right angles to the street, and it opened, not to the outside, but into the arcade that runs through the Williston building.

Through the glass we could see a twenty-foot stretch of the arcade's opposite wall and against it, running from side to side, was a row of half a dozen phone booths.

I took a quick look at the clock on the wall above the window just as Merlini vanished through the street door. He reappeared at once in the arcade beyond the window, went directly to the second booth from the right, and went inside. The door closed.

"I don't like this," I said. "In three minutes the time will be exactly —"

"Quiet!" Gavigan commanded.

"— exactly nine o'clock," I finished. "Zyyzk's deadline!"

"He's not going to pull this off," Gavigan said. "You keep your eyes on that booth. I'm going outside and watch it from the street entrance. When the time's up, join me."

I heard his chair scrape across the floor as he got up, but I kept my eyes glued to the scene beyond the window — more precisely to one section of it — the booth into which Merlini had gone. I could see the whole face of the door from top to bottom and the dim luminescence of the light inside.

Nothing happened.

The second hand on the wall clock moved steadily, but much too slowly. At five seconds to the hour I found myself on my feet. And when the hand hit twelve I moved fast. I went through the door, turned left, and found Gavigan just inside the arcade entrance, his eyes fixed on the booth.

"Okay," he said without turning his head. "Come on."

We hurried forward together. The Inspector jerked the door of the second booth open. The light inside blinked out.

Inside, the telephone receiver dangled, still swaying, by its cord.

The booth was empty.

Except for one thing. I bent down and picked it up off the floor — Merlini's shiny silver dollar.

Gavigan swore. Then he pushed me aside, stepped into the booth and lifted the receiver. His voice was none too steady. He said one word into the phone.

"Hello?"

Leaning in behind him, I heard the voice that replied — Merlini's voice making a statement that was twice as impossible as anything that had happened yet.

"Listen carefully," it said. "And don't ask questions now. I'm at 1462-12 Astoria Avenue, the Bronx. Got that? 1462-12 Astoria. Keeler's here — and a murderer! *Hurry!*"

The tense urgency of that last command sent a cold shiver down my spine. Then I heard the click as the connection was broken.

Gavigan stood motionless for a second, holding the dead phone. Then the surging flood of his emotions spilled over. He jiggled the receiver frantically and swore again.

"Blast it! This phone is dead!"

I pulled myself out of a mental tail-spin, found a nickel, and dropped it in the slot. Gavigan's verbal fireworks died to a mutter as he heard the dial tone and he jabbed savagely at the dial.

A moment later the Telegraph Bureau was broadcasting a bowdlerized version of Gavigan's orders to the prowler cars in the Astoria Avenue neighborhood. And Gavigan and I were running for the street and his own car. Brady saw us coming, gunned his motor, and the instant we were aboard, took off as though jet-powered. He made a banked turn into Fifth Avenue against a red light, and we raced uptown, siren screaming.

If Zyyzk had been there beside us, handing out dire predictions that we

were headed straight for the Pearly Gates, I wouldn't have doubted him for a moment. We came within inches of that destination half a dozen times as we roared swerving through the crosstown traffic.

The Astoria address wasn't hard to find. There were three prowler cars parked in front of it and two uniformed cops on the front porch. One sat on the floor, his back to the wall, holding a limp arm whose sleeve was stained with blood. There were two round bullet holes in the glass of the door above him. As we ran up the walk, the sound of gun fire came from the rear of the house and the second cop lifted his foot, kicked in a front window, and crawled in through the opening, gun in hand.

The wounded man made a brief report as we passed him. "Nobody answered the door," he said. "But when we tried to crash the joint, somebody started shooting."

Somebody was still shooting. Gavigan, Brady, and I went through the window and toward the sound. The officer who had preceded us was in the kitchen, firing around the jamb of the back door. An answering gun blazed in the dark outside and the cop fired at the flash.

"Got him, I think," the cop said. Then he slipped out through the door, moved quickly across the porch and down the steps. Brady followed him.

Gavigan's pocket-flash suddenly sent out a thin beam of light. It started a circuit of the kitchen, stopped for a moment as it picked up movement

just outside the door, and we saw a third uniformed man pull himself to a sitting position on the porch floor, look at the bloodstain on his trouser leg, and swear.

Then the Inspector's flash found the open cellar door.

And down there, beside the beginning of a grave, we found Judge Keeler.

His head had been battered in.

But he couldn't find Merlini anywhere in the house. It wasn't until five minutes later, when we were opening Keeler's suitcase, that Merlini walked in.

He looked at the cash and negotiable securities that tumbled out. "You got here," he said, "before that vanished, too, I see."

Gavigan looked up at him. "But you just arrived this minute. I heard a cab out front."

Merlini nodded. "My driver refused to ignore the stop lights the way yours did. Did you find the Judge?"

"Yes, we found him. And I want to know how of all the addresses in Greater New York, you managed to pick this one out of your hat?"

Merlini's dark eyes twinkled. "That was the easy part. Keeler's disappearance, as I said once before, added up to *two* invisible men. As soon as I knew who the second one must be, I simply looked the name up in the phone book."

"And when you vanished," I asked, "was that done with two invisible men?"

Merlini grinned. "No. I improved on the Judge's miracle a bit. I made it a one-man operation."

Gavigan had had all the riddles he could digest. "We found Keeler's body," he growled ominously, "beside an open grave. And if *you* don't stop —"

"Sorry," Merlini said, as a lighted cigarette appeared mysteriously between his fingers. "As a magician I hate to have to blow the gaff on such a neatly contrived bit of hocus pocus as The Great Phone Booth Trick. But if I must — well, it began when Keeler realized he was going to have to take a runout powder. He knew he was being watched. It was obvious that if he and Helen Hope tried to leave town by any of the usual methods, they'd both be picked up at once. Their only chance was to vanish as abruptly and completely as Judge Crater and Dorothy Arnold once did. I suspect it was Zyyzk's first prediction that Miss Hope would disappear that gave Keeler the idea. At any rate, that was what set the wheels in motion."

"I thought so," Gavigan said. "Zyyzk was in on it."

Merlini shook his head. "I'm afraid you can't charge him with a thing. He was in on it — but he didn't know it. One of the subtlest deceptive devices a magician uses is known as 'the principle of the impromptu stooge.' He so manages things that an unrehearsed spectator acts as a confederate, often without ever realizing it. That's how Keeler used

Zyyzk. He built his vanishing trick on Zyyzk's predictions and used them as misdirection. But Zyyzk never knew that he was playing the part of a red herring."

"He's a fraud though," Gavigan insisted. "And he does know it."

Merlini contradicted that, too. "No. Oddly enough he's the one thing in this whole case that is on the level. As you, yourself, pointed out, no fake prophet would give such precisely detailed predictions. He actually does believe that Helen Hope and Judge Keeler vanished into the Outer Darkness."

"A loony," Gavigan muttered.

"And," Merlini added, "a real problem, at this point, for any psychiatrist. He's seen two of his prophecies come true with such complete and startling accuracy that he'll never believe what really happened. I egged him into predicting my disappearance in order to show him that he wasn't infallible. If he never discovers that I did vanish right on time, it may shake his belief in his occult powers. But if he does, the therapy will backfire; he'll be convinced when he sees me, that I'm a doppelganger or an astral double the police have conjured up to discredit him."

"If you don't stop trying to psychoanalyze Zyyzk," Gavigan growled impatiently, "the police are going to conjure up a charge of withholding information in a murder case. Get on with it. Helen Hope wasn't being tailed, so her disappearance was a cinch. She simply walked out, with-

out even taking her toothbrush — to make Zyyzk's prediction look good — and grabbed a plane for Montana or Mexico or some such place where Keeler was to meet her later. But how did Keeler evaporate? And don't you give me any nonsense about two invisible men."

Merlini grinned. "Then we'd better take my disappearance first. That used only one invisible man — and, of course, too many phone booths."

Then, quickly, as Gavigan started to explode, Merlini stopped being cryptic. "In that restaurant you and Ross sat at a table and in the seats that I selected. You saw me, through the window, enter what I had been careful to refer to as the second booth from the right. Seen through the window, that is what it was. But the line of phone booths extended on either side beyond the window and your field of vision. Viewed from outside, there were nine — not six — booths, and the one I entered was actually the third in line."

"Do you mean," Gavigan said menacingly, "that when I was outside watching the second booth, Ross, inside, was watching the third — and we both thought we were watching the same one?"

"Yes. It isn't necessary to deceive the senses if the mind can be misdirected. You saw what you saw, but it wasn't what you thought you saw. And that —"

Then Gavigan did explode, in a muffled sort of way. "Are you saying that we searched the *wrong* phone

booth? And that you were right there all the time, sitting in the next one?"

Merlini didn't need to answer. That was obviously just what he did mean.

"Then your silver dollar," I began, "and the phone receiver —"

"Were," Merlini grinned, "what confidence men call 'the convincer' — concocted evidence which seemed to prove that you had the right booth, prevented any skeptical second thoughts, and kept you from examining the other booths just to make sure you had the right one."

I got it then. "That first time you left the restaurant, before you came back with that phony request for the loan of a nickel — that's when you left the dollar in the second booth."

Merlini nodded. "I made a call, too. I dialed the number of the second booth. And when the phone rang, I stepped into the second booth, took the receiver off the hook, dropped the silver dollar on the floor, then hurried back to your table. Both receivers were off and the line was open."

"And when we looked into the second booth, you were sitting right next door, three feet away, telling Gavigan via the phone that you were in the Bronx?"

Merlini nodded. "And I came out after you had gone. It's a standard conjuring principle. The audience doesn't see the coin, the rabbit, or the girl vanish because they actually disappear either before or after the magician pretends to conjure them

into thin air. The audience is watching most carefully at the wrong time."

"Now wait a minute," the Inspector objected. "That's just exactly the way you said Keeler couldn't have handled the phone business. What's more he couldn't. Ross and I weren't watching you the first time you left the restaurant. But we'd been watching Keeler for a week."

"And," I added, "Malloy and Hicks couldn't have miscounted the booths at the station and searched the wrong one. They could see both ends of that line of booths the whole time."

"They didn't miscount," Merlini said. "They just didn't count. The booth we examined was the fifth from the right end of the line, but neither Malloy nor Hicks ever referred to it in that way."

Gavigan scowled. "They said Keeler went into the booth '*to the right of the one that was out of order.*' And the phone in the next booth *was* out of order."

"I know, but Keeler didn't enter the booth next to the one we found out of order. He went into a booth next to one that was marked: Out Of Order. That's not quite the same."

Gavigan and I both said the same thing at the same time: "The sign had been moved!"

"Twice," Merlini said, nodding. "First, when Keeler was in the Oyster Bar. The second invisible man — invisible because no one was watching him — moved it one booth to the right. And when Keeler, a few min-

utes later, entered the booth to the right of the one bearing the sign, he was actually in the second booth from the one whose phone didn't work.

"And then our second invisible man went into action again. He walked into the booth marked out of order, smashed a duplicate pair of blood-smeared glasses on the floor, and dialed the Judge's phone. When Keeler answered, he walked out again, leaving the receiver off the hook. It was as neat a piece of misdirection as I've seen in a long time. Who would suspect him of putting through a call from a phone booth that was plainly labeled out of order?"

Cautiously, as if afraid the answer would blow up in his face, the Inspector asked, "He did all this with Malloy and Hicks both watching? And he wasn't seen—because he was invisible?"

"No, that's not quite right. He was invisible—because he wasn't suspected."

I still didn't see it. "But," I objected, "the only person who went anywhere near the booth next to the one Keeler was in —"

Heavy footsteps sounded on the back porch and then Brady's voice from the doorway said, "We found him, Inspector. Behind some bushes the other side of the wall. Dead. And do you know who —"

"I do now," Gavigan cut in. "Sergeant Hicks."

Brady nodded.

Gavigan turned to Merlini. "Okay,

so Hicks was a crooked cop and a liar. But not Malloy. He says he was watching that phone booth every second. How did Hicks switch that Out-of-Order sign back to the original booth again without being seen?"

"He did it when Malloy wasn't watching quite so closely—after Malloy thought Keeler had vanished. Malloy saw Hicks look into the booth, act surprised, then beckon hurriedly. Those actions, together with Hicks's later statement that the booth was already empty, made Malloy think the judge had vanished sooner than he really did. Actually Keeler was still right there, sitting in the booth into which Hicks stared. It's the same deception as to time that I used."

"Will you," Gavigan growled, "stop lecturing on the theory of deception and just explain when Hicks moved that sign."

"All right. Remember what Malloy did next? He was near the information booth in the center of the floor and he ran across toward the phones. Malloy said, 'I did some fancy open-field running through the commuters.' Of course he did. At five-twenty the station is full of them and he was in a hell of a hurry. He couldn't run fast and keep his eyes glued to Hicks and that phone booth every step of the way; he'd have had half a dozen head-on collisions. But he didn't think the fact that he had had to use his eyes to steer a course rather than continue to watch the booth was important. He thought the dirty work—Keeler's disappearance—had taken place.

"As Malloy ran toward him through the crowd, Hicks simply took two steps sideways to the left and stared into the phone booth that was tagged with the Out-of-Order card. And, behind his body, his left hand shifted the sign one booth to the left — back to the booth that was genuinely out of order. Both actions took no more than a second or two. When Malloy arrived, 'the booth next to the one that was out of order' was empty. Keeler had vanished into Zyyzk's Outer Darkness *by simply sitting still and not moving at all!*"

"And he really vanished," Gavigan said, finally convinced, "by walking out of the next booth as soon as he had spoken his piece to Malloy on the phone."

"While Malloy," Merlini added, "was still staring goggle-eyed at the phone. Even if he had turned to look out of the door, all he'd have seen was the beefy Hicks standing smack in front of him carefully blocking the view. And then Keeler walked right out of the station. Every exit was guarded — except one. An exit big enough to drive half a dozen trains through!"

"Okay," the Inspector growled. "You don't have to put it in words of one syllable. He went out through one of the train gates which Malloy himself had been covering, boarded a train a moment before it pulled out,

and ten minutes later he was getting off again up at 125th Street."

"Which," Merlini added, "isn't far from Hicks's home where we are now and where Keeler intended to hide out until the cops, baffled by the dead-end he'd left, relaxed their vigilance a bit. The judge was full of cute angles. Who'd ever think of looking for him in the home of one of the cops who was supposed to be hunting him?"

"After which," I added, "he'd change the cut of his whiskers or trim them off altogether, go to join Miss Hope, and they'd live happily ever after on his ill-gotten gains. Fadeout."

"That was the way the script read," Merlini said. "But Judge Keeler forgot one or two little things. He forgot that a man who has just vanished off the face of the earth, leaving a dead-end trail, is a perfect prospective murder victim. And he forgot that a suitcase full of folding money is a temptation one should never set before a crooked cop."

"Forgetfulness seems to be dangerous," I said. "I'm glad I've got a good memory."

"I have a hunch that somebody is going to have both our scalps," Merlini said ominously. "I've just remembered that when we left the shop —"

He was right. I hadn't mailed Mrs. Merlini's letter.

Charles Francis ("Socker") Coe, famous for his stories of crooks and crookedness in "The Saturday Evening Post," probably achieved the maximum of toughness acceptable to a national-circulation "slick" magazine. His toughness, in tales of gangsters and racketeers, was not as uninhibited as the toughness of the hardboiled school in "pulp"; it was not as raw or as raucous. Whether it was as essentially true to life, or as effectively realistic, depends in the final analysis on one's literary point of view — and the perspective of time.

But Mr. Coe did not always write his special blend of toughness. There were occasions when his attitude to crime and criminals was decidedly sentimental — a quality, by the way, which the hardboileders would deny being susceptible to, but which they often wallowed in. Yes, crime has its romantic side, its lump in the throat, and although we may pretend to a certain literary callousness these lean, terse days, few of us can resist honest sentiment.

One day Charles Francis Coe met a certain lifer in Sing Sing — the meeting had been arranged by Warden Lawes. One other day Mr. Coe met a certain Governor of the State of New York. The two men — the prisoner serving life and the politician serving liberty — had no connection whatever: they had never met, and were not likely to. Yet these two men became characters in Mr. Coe's creative thoughts. It was true that the lifer had murdered his wife; it was also true that the Governor, while he had been District Attorney, had prosecuted a notorious underworld figure — but in real life the wife-murderer had not been that man. Yet, such is the creative process, Mr. Coe tied the two men together, and thus produced the basic situation which you will find in "Bars." But in the tying-together Mr. Coe somehow managed — such is the creative process — to tie in a piece of his heart.

BARS

by CHARLES FRANCIS COE

I KILLED her because I loved her. I don't care what you do with me." That was Cotter's statement when they found him standing above the victim with a still-smoking gun held in his hand. It remained his only

statement throughout all the weary weeks of the Grand Jury hearings, the ensuing indictment and into the very courtroom itself.

The Court assigned him an attorney, whose services he did not want.

"It's the law," they told Cotter. "You are indicted for first-degree murder and cannot plead guilty. The State must satisfy itself before taking your life."

"Very well. I don't care," he responded listlessly. "I don't see why we have to make all this fuss about it. I killed her because I loved her. I admit it. There's nothing to prove."

"There is a great deal to prove," the assigned lawyer argued. "You don't seem to realize that you're headed for the chair. If we give them a battle on the sheer evidence they've got, they'll never burn you! I might even get you off with a short sentence for manslaughter. We'd try the insanity gag if you'd help a bit."

"I wasn't insane," Cotter said simply. "I knew when I killed her. I remember every move I made and every one she made. There was just something inside me made me do it. I loved her, but I'm glad I did it. I had to do it."

So it was that there was little enough of a case. Cotter himself was the only eye-witness. From the standpoint of the trial an ambitious lawyer stood discouraged.

The District Attorney recognized this fact; perhaps felt a little sympathy for the mute man who was slowly growing gray in the cell, where he awaited disposition of his case. In any event, he agreed to take a plea of guilty in second-degree murder, which called for a natural life sentence. And so it was arranged.

The Judge heard the evidence and

the plea, read the indictment with judicious care, then pronounced the sentence.

"It is the judgment and the sentence of this Court," he droned, "that you be confined at hard labor in the State Prison for the rest of your natural life." He spoke slowly, ponderously; and his tongue seemed to hesitate over the last seven words.

Cotter showed no emotion unless it was of relief. For him, the business of uncertainty, at least, was over. They led him from the courtroom, and men and women looked upon him with curiosity. He dropped his glance toward his feet and kept it there as they traversed the well-filled corridor of the ancient building.

The afternoon papers referred briefly to the case:

**JONATHAN COTTER RECEIVES LIFE SENTENCE
KILLER PLEADS GUILTY TO WIFE
MURDER AND IS SENTENCED**

BY JUDGE TRAND

Jonathan Cotter, who, several months ago, was found standing over the body of his murdered wife with a smoking revolver still clutched in his hand, today received a life sentence.

The District Attorney agreed to accept a murder plea of guilty in the second degree, thus saving the State the cost of trial.

"This is a peculiar case," Roland B. Nevers, the attorney assigned by the Court to the defense, said after sentence had been pro-

nounced. "I have never met a man like Cotter. With proper defensive measures, the State would have had a hard time proving a lawful case against him. But he would not fight. I agreed to the second-degree plea only after he had repeatedly refused to help himself in any way."

Cotter is a successful business man, who has operated an uptown department store over a period of years. He and his wife, the former Miss Sunny Weather in a popular extravaganza, occupied a luxurious apartment in the city and it was there that the crime was committed.

The murderer will be taken immediately to the State Prison, where he will remain for the rest of his natural life unless pardoned by the Governor.

"The settlement of your estate," Warden Kelsh announced to the blue-clad man standing before his desk, "leaves a considerable sum of money to your credit. The law allows you to name trustees for its investment and care. You can consult an attorney about the matter if you wish." He spoke crisply and in the tone of a man who cites matters of law.

The prisoner cleared his throat and spoke huskily. "It's all right, Mr. Warden," he said listlessly. "I don't care about it."

"The law allows you to spend a small sum each week for additional

food here in the prison," Kelsh added suggestively.

"Very well, sir. I'd like that."

As the official watched the man before him, his lids narrowed and a tolerant light filled his eyes.

"How long have you been here now, Cotter?" he asked.

"I don't know, Mr. Warden. I haven't kept track. It doesn't matter, you see."

"No," the Warden grunted, "you aren't going anywhere in particular, that's true enough. But you're not always going to feel that way, Cotter."

He leaned across the desk and pressed a button. The clerk whom he summoned was sent for Cotter's commitment papers. The Warden perused them thoughtfully.

By and by he said, "You've been here eight months, Cotter. You ought to begin getting a hold on yourself by this time."

The prisoner laughed throatily.

"You're a queer case, Cotter," the Warden said impulsively. "We get all kinds in a place like this, but you're different from any I've ever seen. We'd never know we had you here if you weren't in the count three times a day."

"I'll not make trouble, Mr. Warden," Cotter said slowly.

"I'm glad. It's a pretty useless business, trying to run counter to prison rules. But you're utterly crushed, Cotter. God alone knows what you're thinking about twenty-four hours each day. There are lights

in your eyes but they never flame into words. You are an educated man; cultured, in fact, and intelligent. Your silence makes us wonder if you aren't planning an escape."

Again Cotter laughed — that throaty, husky laugh that is born of disused vocal cords. He ran his tongue over his lips and slowly whirled his blue prison cap between his white fingers.

"I wouldn't escape, Mr. Warden," he said steadily. "The last thing on earth I'd do is leave here, sir. I wouldn't go if you left every gate open the year round. This place is not a prison to me, sir. It's a haven."

"I'm inclined to believe you," the official nodded frankly. "As a usual thing, Cotter, a man is never himself while he carries in his heart a black secret. Sharing it with somebody relieves the burden and assists in restoring him to normal. If you ever reach the point where you want to talk, I'll listen."

Cotter nodded gratefully, but held his peace.

"We'll wait a few months," the Warden repeated, "about this money matter. In the meantime, you can sign an order authorizing us to charge the extras to your account here."

"Thank you, sir."

Cotter stepped through the side door of the Warden's office into the prison yard. Kelsh watched him as he walked slowly toward the library, where he was assigned to duty. The Warden had watched many a lifer survive the first few terrible months

of hopelessness, finally to recover some poise and interest. But never had there been one like Cotter. This man lived only for death.

More than two years slipped away before the demands of the law required a decision in the matter of Cotter's money. Then the prisoner met again with the Warden. Kelsh looked the man over with deep interest. He had aged, yet a light of contentment filled his face and eyes.

"We've got to settle this money business, Cotter," the official said briskly. "You'll have to make your wishes known in the matter."

"I specify, Mr. Warden," the prisoner said slowly, "that it be invested under the direction of a proper trust company, and the entire income from the funds be spent monthly to furnish prisoners with the extras allowable by law."

"That's pretty decent of you," Kelsh said, surprised at the ready answer. "I'll have papers for you to sign shortly."

"Very well, sir."

"By the way," the Warden called as Cotter turned to leave, "how're you doing over in the library?"

"I like the work, Mr. Warden," Cotter answered thoughtfully. "There are many of the boys here who cannot read well. They do not get the sense of a book. I am reading to them and explaining what I read."

He paused a moment, spun his cap between his fingers and said, "Perhaps

that is the new interest you said would come to me, sir. I have made some wonderful friends. There are some fine men here in prison, sir."

"You wouldn't want to try your hand at a different job?" the Warden asked.

A light of concern filled Cotter's eyes. "I'd rather not, sir," he said slowly. "I like the work there. I do my best. You'll find the books clean, sir, and well cared for."

"Oh, I wouldn't move you if you didn't want to go," Kelsh assured him quickly. "I just thought — well — maybe a change now and then."

"I love birds and flowers, sir," Cotter said simply. "There are several bird books there which I can study. Some on flowers, too."

"Well, maybe we can work it out to use some of this money of yours to get better books on those subjects," the Warden suggested.

"If you would, sir — for the library, understand — I'd love them."

When Cotter had gone the Warden sent for the head keeper.

"What," he asked that officer, "do you make of this lifer, Cotter? He appears to be an educated man and a smart one. Have we anything to fear from him?"

The head keeper smiled. "I'd send him outside on errands, as far as any danger of his crashing out goes," he said. "He wouldn't go if we let him, Warden!"

The head of the prison smiled understandingly. "That's the way I figured it," he admitted. "A fine

fellow, Jim. One of those cases where there isn't any more criminal in the man than there is in you or me. Maybe not half so much."

"His was an emotional crime," the head keeper nodded. "There was no reason attached to it. He just found himself swept off his feet at the same time a gun happened to be handy. Probably half an hour later he wouldn't have killed an ant."

"Make him a trusty," the Warden ordered. "He rates it now, doesn't he?"

"Yes, sir. I'd have recommended it, Warden, in another month or so. He does a great job in the library. The boys all swear by him. Some time you ought to stand around and hear him read to a flock of gunmen, then stop and explain the finer meanings of what he's read. It's a treat!"

"Well, make him a trusty," the Warden smiled, "and since he's crazy about flowers see if he can do anything to that flower bed outside my porch. Nobody else ever made anything grow in it."

So, for more than another year, Kelsh grew accustomed to seeing Cotter working outside his porch. Now and then he stopped and passed the time of day with him.

Cotter was always pleasant. "I'm afraid," he said one day, "that you're getting discouraged with my efforts here in the garden, Mr. Warden. But it'll take a year or so to show good results. The ground was exhausted, Mr. Warden. No one ever rotated the plantings here."

"Can't we send out for some better soil?" the Warden asked.

A look of delight crossed the lifer's features. "You could very easily, sir. Any good florist could supply you."

So eager was the man that Kelsh's heart warmed toward him. "I'll send in a florist," he promised. "You talk it over with him and tell him just what you want."

And he kept that promise. The florist was a man known to the Warden, and after he had talked with Cotter he returned to the Warden's office.

"Who is that prisoner?" he asked.

"A lifer," the Warden smiled. "Cotter's the name. Murdered his wife."

"It don't seem possible," the florist marveled. "Honestly, Warden, that man knows more about flowers than I do myself. I'm sending in the stuff he wants, and if you don't mind, I'd like to follow him up and see what results he gets."

"Sure thing," the Warden smiled. "He's a nice fellow, Cotter is. Wouldn't hurt a fly."

A big prison is a busy and an uncertain place. As a result, for those who direct its activities, time passes rapidly. Kelsh grew accustomed to seeing Cotter there in the garden.

The prisoner had aged inexpressibly, but all men do in prison. The bleakness of outlook or, as in Cotter's case, the utter lack of it, doubles the weight of the tread of time. But it does not retard its passing.

The flower garden not only bloomed to the everlasting delight of the Warden's wife, but it enlarged. The Warden's porch was redolent with the aroma of flowers.

Cotter was allowed more and more liberties, and several times, when he was making tours of inspection, the Warden came upon the man in various parts of the prison grounds.

"What're you doing over here, Cotter?" he asked of him one day.

The convict smiled doubtfully and answered, "It's pretty bare over here, Mr. Warden. I thought a few flowers — the boys can see 'em better and oftener."

Cotter had been in the prison five years before there was anything unusual in his conduct. He had become a sort of fixture. The head keeper admitted that the man had twice been allowed outside the walls without the usual prison guard with him.

And then Cotter began acting queerly.

He was suddenly more thoughtful than ever. At times when the Warden passed him the man seemed on the verge of speaking. That went on for a week. Finally the Warden spoke to him one day as he stood on the porch of his home while the convict worked in the garden below him.

"Cotter," the official said suddenly, "what's bothering you? Sick, are you?"

The man straightened and looked intently at the Warden for a moment, then he dropped his trowel suddenly

into the dirt and walked onto the porch.

"I've been trying to get the courage to talk to you, Mr. Warden," he said tensely. "I want to tell you something in confidence and I don't know how to do it."

"Something about the prison, Cotter?" the Warden asked, mystified.

"Indirectly, yes, sir."

"There isn't a man inside that doesn't trust you," the official muttered. "If anyone knows things, it would be you."

"I never violate a trust, sir," Cotter assured him. "I'm not — not a stool, Mr. Warden."

The Warden smiled and nodded. "Well," he said, "you can talk to me any time, Cotter."

"I would have to trust you a very great deal, Mr. Warden."

"Come into the office," the official suggested and led the way. Cotter stood respectfully before the desk as the Warden seated himself. "Now shoot," the officer smiled.

"I'd have to have your sacred promise, Mr. Warden," Cotter said diffidently, "that you'll not use the information I give you for —"

"Hold on a minute!" the official interrupted vehemently. "We can't go any farther along that line, Cotter. I'm not making promises of that nature to — to a —"

"Convict." Cotter furnished the word with a faint smile wreathing his lips. "I had that in mind," he nodded. "I can quite understand. But you see — an injustice is being done, Mr.

Warden. The rankest injustice possible. And I'm the only man who can stop it."

"You'll have to make up your own mind," the Warden said brusquely, "about talking to me. I'll have to be the judge of what use I make of any information you give. I'm not going to urge you with promises I might later regret."

Cotter thought at some length. Then he asked, "Would you permit me the writing of one uncensored letter, sir? One letter that no one ever will read but the man to whom I send it?"

"I'm sorry," Kelsh answered, "I cannot agree to that either, Cotter."

"It makes it so hard," Cotter complained gently. But he stood still there before the desk, his mind hard at work, his words a matter of the most careful selection. At last he said, "Would it be possible for me to tell you something and not have to answer questions about identity?"

"You mean," Kelsh asked, "tell me something that happened, or is going to happen, here in the prison, then be immune to questioning?"

"Yes, sir. Something that did happen, sir. Several months ago."

"I will not commit myself, Cotter," the Warden insisted. "I won't lie to you, old man. If I see it as my duty to use anything you tell me, I'm going to use it. I'm not going to insist that you tell me. But I am insisting that I remain the sole judge of my own course afterward. I owe that to the job. You understand that, I'm sure!"

Cotter was getting desperate. He wet his lips and glanced about the room. Finally he burst out:

"There's a man in the city being held for robbery," he said shortly. "His name is Martin, Mr. Warden. Roger Martin. He's charged with robbing the offices of a big theater. The whole thing is in the newspapers along with a picture of the man himself. That's how I know all about it. That man is innocent. I know he is. I want to get word to Henry Suntly."

"You mean Henry Suntly, the District Attorney?" Kelsh interrupted.

"Yes," Cotter nodded.

The Warden thought matters over with a queer expression on his face. After a moment he asked, "What attention would Suntly give to a message from you?"

"Suntly will listen to a message from me," Cotter answered slowly.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, Mr. Warden. I know him. I know Henry Suntly. I—I grew up with him."

"Is that so? I'm surprised to hear that. But tell me, Cotter, do you know this man Martin who is accused of the robbery?"

"I never saw him in my life," Cotter answered steadily. "But I know he isn't guilty and I believe that Suntly is out to convict him. I read it all in the papers — what Martin said about his own innocence, and the public promise Suntly has made to clean up the town. He's making an example of Martin, Mr. Warden. Making an example of an innocent man."

"How could you possibly know that, Cotter?" the Warden asked. "You've been cooped up here for five years."

"Yes, sir. But I know!" In his earnestness, Cotter leaned over the desk and pressed his tense face close to that of the Warden. "I know, sir," he repeated. "I know! I know!"

"How do you know?" Kelsh snapped.

"Because I heard the crime planned right here within these walls!" Cotter rasped hoarsely. "Knowing who did it, Mr. Warden, I know who *didn't* do it!"

Kelsh rose abruptly from his seat and braced his fingertips on the edge of the desk. He returned Cotter's steady gaze.

"You know full well what you're saying?" he demanded.

"As God is my judge," Cotter answered simply.

"And the message you would send Suntly is what?" Kelsh asked.

"Just what I have told you, sir — that I know this Martin is innocent because I know who is guilty. There were two robbers, and the newspaper accounts of the crime tally exactly with the plan I heard perfected here in this prison before the men were liberated. Martin had nothing to do with it."

"Suntly'll never believe you," the Warden grunted. "He'll pay no attention to your story."

"Suntly will believe me," Cotter snapped. There was fight in his face, for the first time since he had donned

his suit of blue. "He will, Mr. Warden. He's got to! Tell him I sent the message, Mr. Warden. Say this to him: 'Cotter knows Martin is innocent. And he knows many other things.' Tell him I warn him not to convict Martin. Tell him that in those very words, Mr. Warden."

"Are you out of your head?" Kelsh gasped. "Who are you to send such a message to the District Attorney? Do you know that Henry Suntly is the biggest political figure in the State? He can be Governor, if he likes."

"Tell him what I say," Cotter repeated steadily. "Please tell him, Mr. Warden. I know who he is. I know what he is, too. That's how I know he'll believe me. Let him be Governor if he likes. But deliver my message or have an innocent man sent up here to worry your heart out for five or ten years. I've told you the gospel truth, Mr. Warden. The responsibility is yours."

There was no doubting Cotter. He spoke with the ring of truth in his voice. The Warden paused, trying to assemble these amazing facts in his mind. After a time he demanded:

"Who were the two men who planned this thing?"

Cotter pressed his lips into a straight line. His eyes blazed scorn of the question.

"You'll be apt to lose your flower work unless you tell," Kelsh said, his eyes narrowly watching the convict.

The face of the man blanched, and a queer sound struggled into being but died in his throat. He pulled his blue

cap taut between his fingers, then said slowly, "I'll boil in hell, Mr. Warden, before I answer you that."

"I'd be the same way in your place," the Warden said, as though thinking aloud. Then, "Go ahead, Cotter, with those roses at the far end of the porch. I make you this promise: I'll tell Suntly personally all that you have told me. If he insists on questioning you later that's not my fault."

A smile of delight spread over the convict's pale face. "Thank you, Mr. Warden. Deliver my message exactly as I told it, please. Be exact, and Suntly won't bother me."

Then he was gone through the door onto the porch.

It was the visit of a horticulturist which served once again to break the commonplace relationship between Kelsh and Cotter. The display which Cotter was able to offer in the prison flower beds roused tremendous interest. A horticulturist society sent a representative who asked that Cotter might write an article for their magazine.

Kelsh found no regulation which prevented such a procedure, and he promptly granted the permission. Cotter just as promptly declined to do it.

"You cannot understand the matter," he told the visitor, "but the world outside this prison has ceased to exist for me. One memory of it I treasure. There is no other interest left me. I live for my flower beds here and want no contact with the world."

It never did anything but lie to me."

Nothing could induce him to change his decision, but he had no hesitancy about talking flowers with the visitor, and the Warden allowed pictures to be taken of the amazing results Cotter had attained in his circumscribed prison field.

"You disappointed that fellow, Cotter," the Warden said when finally the horticulturist had left. "He wanted to use your name over an article of your own."

Cotter smiled wanly and shrugged an answer.

"By the way, Cotter," the Warden continued, "your prophecy about Henry Suntly came true. I delivered your message exactly as you requested. He seemed to understand, asked how you were and told me he would immediately look into the matter of the Roger Martin case. Inasmuch as I have never heard of a trial, I presume that he found you to be right and liberated Martin."

"Yes," the convict said, "he found me to be right and liberated Martin. It was the only just thing to do. I watched the papers closely and saw that the indictments against the fellow had been quashed."

"What a break for him!" Kelsh said. "For all you know he'll never have the faintest idea that you are the man who saved him."

"That is a small matter," Cotter said slowly. "I like to have the knowledge that I did the right thing. I like to take that thought into my cell with me at night."

"I can understand that," Kelsh agreed. "And say, why is it, if you don't mind telling me, that there are never flowers in your cell? You love them so much."

"A cell is not a thing of beauty," Cotter said simply. "The man who said that all beauty is sheer contrast with the ugly never lived in a prison cell, Mr. Warden. A flower is a fine, beautiful, living thing. It would wither in no time in a prison cell."

"In some ways," the Warden said with the utter frankness that official position affects toward State wards, "you're just as balmy as a coot."

"Perhaps so," Cotter nodded agreeably. "But I'm happy in it."

"Happy?" Kelsh queried sharply.

"Exactly," Cotter nodded vigorously. "I'm a very much happier man than you are, Mr. Warden. My only recollection of the outside world is a happy one. I found a very beautiful thing out there, sir. I took it for what I thought it to be. The fact that it was imitation did not prevent its showing me what the genuine could be."

"You're getting pretty deep for me," Kelsh grinned. "Those books you read are pretty heavy stuff. But I'm glad that you're settled and happy. The thought struck me the day I talked with Suntly that the contrast between you two boyhood friends had suddenly grown pretty sharp. He's a big public servant and you — well — you see what I mean."

"I see perfectly," Cotter nodded. "But I wouldn't change places with Suntly or any other man on earth, Mr.

Warden. Everything in my thoughts is beautiful. I would rather have a bed than the bunk I sleep in, but I'll gladly sleep in my bunk in order to remain here with my flowers."

Kelsh seemed for the moment serious. "You know, Cotter," he said speculatively, "I get a real thrill out of the situation you and Suntly present. The business of justice being directed by a murderer doing life, through a powerful District Attorney who dangles on the end of a string the lifer pulls, is an unusual picture, indeed."

"I had the truth, that's all," the prisoner answered, but as he spoke he became uneasy and turned away. The Warden detained him.

"I'm not going to question you against your will, old man," he assured him, "but I've given the matter quite a little thought. You've been here a long time now, Cotter. A long time even as time in prison goes. I've grown to like you and trust you, but I've never even hoped to understand you. You don't seem morose, yet your crime, Cotter, is the sort that is apt to prey upon a man's mind as the years roll past."

"I committed no crime, Mr. Warden," the convict answered steadily. "What I did was anything but a crime."

"You've always admitted the killing of your wife!" Kelsh gasped.

"Oh, yes! But you see that only from the material side. If I thought I had done wrong I would be miserable," Cotter answered.

Kelsh laughed and shook his head.

"I suppose men are differently built," he mused. "Now, if I had known you on the outside I would have sized you up as a man of ambition. Your record shows that you were successful in business." He paused to allow time for an answer, but Cotter made none. The official continued: "I would have thought you'd be like your friend, Suntly. He always reaches out for more power. I have it straight that his party is urging him to run for Governor. If he runs he'll win."

The Warden paused again, and his eyes fixed themselves steadily upon Cotter. There was tremendous suggestion in the glance, but the convict met it with no sign of understanding.

"All politicians would like to be Governor," Kelsh prompted.

Cotter merely nodded in the affirmative and again turned as though he would leave. Once again Kelsh stopped him.

"It's pretty evident," he said, "that you've a lot of weight with Henry Suntly. I've been thinking what a situation would arise if he were Governor. It might mean a pardon for you, Cotter."

"No," the convict said slowly. "No, Mr. Warden, it wouldn't mean a pardon."

Kelsh shrugged. "Well, keep your secret if you like," he said. "But I'll watch with a good deal of interest. Suntly, my friend, is the next Governor of this State just as sure as you're a foot high. I have never before

known a case where the Governor was under the thumb of a lifer. It'll be fun to watch."

Cotter made no reply, and the Warden smiled wonderingly. "All right, Cotter," he said. "Go back to your flowers. Every man has a right to his own thoughts."

"Thank you, Mr. Warden," Cotter mumbled. "The finest thing you have ever done was to give me these flowers. I love them, sir. Life would be unbearable without them. I will always be happy so long as I have them."

"Okay, old man," Kelsh answered kindly. "I guess I needn't tell you that you'll have them as long as I'm Warden here."

"I hope that'll be as long as you wish, sir."

"It's got to last quite a while," Kelsh laughed. "What good would I be for anything else at this late day?"

Henry Suntly conducted his campaign for the Governorship of the State along the lines of reform. He laid a heavy hand upon corruptionists, trained the light of his investigations upon State institutions of all kinds, and carried to the people of the electorate a conviction that such a man as himself was needed at the helm of State affairs.

Kelsh read every campaign speech the man made, and he wondered more and more about the strange relationship between this outstanding public man and Cotter, the lifer who worked in his garden.

He knew without asking that Cotter was following the campaign with an interest even closer than his own. But he never spoke to the man of it, never tried to make the convict express an opinion.

When Election Day rolled around Kelsh received the returns at the prison.

The campaign had centered very largely upon issues of reform in State institutions, and the keepers of the prison, from the Warden down, felt a greater interest than usual. The feeling was general that Suntly's election would call for sweeping investigations and many changes in methods.

Many of the prison employees gathered in the offices and watched the returns on election night.

By ten o'clock the big metropolitan daily that had most bitterly opposed Suntly conceded his election as Governor. Kelsh received this news with mingled emotions.

None knew better than he the dire results of an inexperienced hand endeavoring to change the routine of a prison. Yet, in spite of that, his first thought on reading of the election of Suntly was not of the prison and the troubles that must come to it. It was of the silent lifer, Cotter.

Actuated by he hardly knew what, the Warden stepped from his office out into the prison yard and strolled toward the cell block where Cotter was locked. He nodded to the guards as he entered.

"Where's Cotter?" he asked of one of them.

"Number seventeen, sir," the man directed.

The lights were out, but Kelsh walked on to the door of Cotter's cell. The prisoner was reclining on his narrow bunk; but as Kelsh stopped he rose to a sitting position, swung his feet to the stone floor and stepped to the door.

"Cotter," Kelsh said softly, "you awake?"

"Yes, Mr. Warden."

"Suntly's elected," Kelsh said slowly.

"Yes, sir," Cotter acknowledged vaguely. "Yes, sir. Was there anything special about it, Mr. Warden?"

Kelsh was embarrassed. He felt a little ridiculous standing there reporting the election of a Governor to an inmate.

"No," he said. "No. Nothing special, Cotter. Only, I happened to have business in this block and I thought I'd let you know. It might be very important for you later on."

"Thank you, Mr. Warden," the prisoner said dully.

"He's out to raise hob with State institutions," Kelsh said. "That's been his campaign, and he'll have to make a showing at it. I suppose nobody'll know where his hammer'll fall next. But we'll hope for the best. Good night, Cotter."

"Good night, Mr. Warden."

For months afterward the picture of Cotter that came first to the official's mind was that which he saw as he turned away. The gaunt figure of

the man standing behind the steel lattice of his cell door. The shock of tousled hair that framed his steady, serious eyes, the ridiculous prison underwear that bagged at elbows and knees and dropped away from his throat.

Dejection and defeat stood out all over that broken creature. Yet in his big eyes dwelt contentment and a definite happiness. The very simplicity of his glance was power in itself.

Henry Suntly was not long in making his inauguration felt in State institutions. He appointed a committee which, in turn, appointed inspectors and detailed them for investigation.

The heavy hand of politics fell upon Warden Kelsh and his organization. Like the man he was, he fought against it. Soon friction developed, and it was rumored that Kelsh was at variance with the Administration.

Suntly was asked about this and stated flatly that he expected the Warden to comply with his economy and efficiency programs, and if the Warden did not see his way clear to do it he would accept his resignation.

The record of the prison, however, was well known. Friends of the Warden started a fight of their own to protect his rights. This brought matters to a head and focused attention upon the two principals. One or the other of them must relent, and all agreed that it could not be the Governor.

And that was what caused Cotter, the silent lifer, to explain at last that

simple sentence which had been his only defense for the killing of his wife. The man had had no intention of talking until he read in the papers that Suntly and his assistants had definitely asked the resignation of the Warden.

When Cotter read that one night in his cell his heart tripped in its beating.

He sent for Kelsh, and the Warden responded to his request. The official had altered a great deal. Lines were deep about his mouth and a haggard look filled his eyes.

"If you will do as I say, Mr. Warden," the convict said simply, "I will put an end to this business."

A look of keen surprise crossed the Warden's features. He held out his hand to the prisoner through the steel lattice.

"You're a mighty decent citizen, Cotter," Kelsh said. "I'm proud to have you for my friend. I know you've a good deal of power with Suntly, but you'll need that for your own ends. I'll not, for the sake of a job, jeopardize your chances of a pardon and a new lease on life."

Dully, with the air of a man who has no hope of being understood, Cotter answered, "Please do as I say. I want you to remain here at the prison, Mr. Warden. You want to remain too. I know because you've told me so yourself. Do as I say. I'm not jeopardizing myself a single jot. I swear it on my honor."

The stark drama of the statement was augmented because the words were uttered with absolutely nothing of emphasis or doubt or affectation.

"Go now," the convict said, "and get Henry Suntly on the telephone. Tell him this: 'Come to the prison personally at once. Jonathan Cotter demands it.' Say that, Mr. Warden, and nothing more. The Governor will come."

"That's pretty stiff, Cotter," Kelsh said doubtfully. "Henry Suntly is a big man."

"Tell him," Cotter repeated quietly. "Tell him exactly what I tell you. That and nothing more. And go now, sir. If there is trouble in reaching him on the telephone use my name and make the demand clear."

And Kelsh, hopelessly defeated in his own battle, carried out the instructions. In half an hour he was back again before Cotter's cell door. He whispered his words, but peering eyes from a hundred latticed cells looked on in flaming curiosity.

"I got him," Kelsh whispered. "Heaven only knows what you've got up your sleeve, Cotter, but it's potent. I talked to Suntly himself. I told him your exact words and he'll be here tomorrow. He'll motor to the prison, arriving during the afternoon. You'll want to see him, of course."

"Yes," the convict nodded. "Yes, I'll want to see him. It will be strange after all these years, Mr. Warden. Henry and I will have changed a whole lot."

They met in the room reserved for the use of the Parole Board. The Governor was the more nervous of the two. He paced the floor while a guard went for Cotter, and when the man

was brought in he gasped at his first sight of him.

"I'm sorry, John," he said stammeringly. "Sorry to find you like this." He glanced suggestively at the Warden, who started toward the door. Cotter put out a detaining hand.

"I want the Warden to stay, Henry," he said quietly. "You need offer me no sympathy. I'm the happiest man in the world."

There was a moment of embarrassed silence during which the convict seemed to realize that restricted use of words had left him partially inarticulate.

"I came to see you," Suntly said, "because the Warden requested it."

"The Warden demanded it," Cotter corrected steadily. "I want you to know that there is nothing I want for myself from you. I demand only that you allow the Warden to remain here in charge of the prison as long as you are Governor."

"That's going a little far," Suntly said slowly. "After all, I'm Governor of this State and must think first of the people who elected me. I have not been entirely satisfied with the reports that come to me."

"Stop!" Cotter snapped suddenly. He stood in the center of the room with his baggy clothes hanging about his person and his untidy hair a mat upon his head. But there was power about him.

"I say, Henry Suntly," he pronounced slowly, "that you will do as I ask. I am going to tell you something you never knew — something that

you only suspected — something which has hung over your head all these years."

"Your own case," Suntly interrupted hastily, "has been in my mind, John. I had thought of considering a pardon. After all — an actress —"

"Do not stop me, Henry," Cotter said. "I want no pardon from you, nor from anybody. I got you here to tell you the truth. You and the Warden. For her sake, I never have told it before."

He paused as though gathering his words, then leaned for support upon a chair and, with his eyes fastened steadily upon the Governor, told his story. So simple and so stark was it that they did not interrupt him.

"That day," he said, "when the pistol came so ready to my hand, Henry — you don't know what was to have happened later. You don't know that Sunny, as we always called her, was going to you. She had been with you before, Henry. You had both lied to me about that. And that pistol — she had that, Henry." Cotter laughed shortly. "She was taking it with her *to kill you!*"

"We were all so young then, and she was so inexperienced. I find no fault with you now. I merely state the facts. She had trusted you, Henry, and you lied to her, as she did to me. Then you scorned her. I know, Henry! Oh, how well I know! You wrote her that letter. I remember every word of it. I see it now."

He raised a gaunt hand stained deep with the color of earth and seemed to

point at the letter there before him. He was transported by his own story back to the hour of his crime.

"I came home earlier than usual," he said slowly. "Sunny was just leaving and I knew that something was wrong. Her eyes were wild and she cringed before me, afraid. She tried to slip past me and reach the door. I caught her hand; and the bag she carried jerked open. The pistol was there. It was the first thing I saw, and I snatched it from the bag in amazement. Sunny fought me to get it back.

"She was quite insane; I think. She taunted me with her own deceit — and yours. Then she hurled the letter at me. It fell at my feet and I read it, with the gun clutched in one hand and Sunny twisting there on the divan.

"You told her she was a fool, Henry. A fool to bother you and run the risk of losing a husband who could provide well for her, and hadn't brains enough to see that he had no other function. You said to her, Henry, that she wasn't the kind of woman a man could take seriously. Then you asked her to be sensible and burn the letter and let you alone."

Once again Cotter stopped. His face was twisted and his eyes burned with a dull agony.

"A sordid mess, eh, Henry?" he said finally. "You never knew I saw the letter, perhaps. You thought that Sunny had done as you wished with it, and I had discovered perhaps another intrigue in her life, and so killed her.

"But you never were quite certain. There remained always a doubt in your mind. The bigger you grew, Henry, the more this worried you. Now you have the truth. I shot her because she loved you, Henry. Loved you and hated you and sooner or later would have killed you.

"I loved her. So I killed her and kept her name clean. It was for her I did it, just as I said that day when she lay there before me. I hated you — hate you now as a man hates a creeping thing, Henry. But you were both very young.

"They found the gun in my hand, Henry — but not the letter. Where is the letter?" He laughed sharply, his voice high and threatening to crack. "Where is it? They never found that."

His gaunt hands gripped the chair and he leaned forward and glared. "I — know — where — it — is," he said, spacing each word. "I know where to get it and hand it to the newspapers, Henry, with the signature of their reform Governor blazed across its face." He laughed again. "Yes," he repeated, "I know where it is, and so does the Warden. We alone know.

"Tell me, now," he finished suddenly, "that the Warden remains here. Tell me that, Henry. And tell him. And tell this committee of yours, and the newspapers."

The next day Warden Kelsh stood again on the porch above the garden and looked down upon the stooping brown figure there at work.

"I see by the morning papers, Cotter," he said, "that the fight between the Governor and myself has come to a happy ending. According to this account his visit yesterday was made for the sole purpose of checking up on the situation here. What he saw caused him to express complete confidence in my incorruptible efficiency."

"Yes, sir," the convict nodded, a faint smile about his lips. "I'm so glad, Mr. Warden."

"There's no reason," the official said, "why your case shouldn't be brought before him."

"But there is, Mr. Warden," Cotter said earnestly. "As God above judges me, there is. I want no pardon. I want to remain here, sir. Here I have found the simple things that never fail a man. Here, among the flowers, I have found peace and happiness and quiet. If you are my friend, there will never be a pardon, sir."

"I can understand that feeling," Kelsh nodded. "I know three men here who would not go. You are the fourth. They have been here so long, you see. But with your education —"

"Here I stay," Cotter said simply. "I have no worries now. I'm settled for life. I want no change. What others think is hard I have come to accept with no suffering. My books and my flowers are my own. The confinement of prison is a protection more than a curse to me, sir. If it keeps me away from society, so does it, keep society away from me. The restrictions I have ceased to mind. They are less hard than what I should have to meet on

the outside as a pardoned murderer."

"As you wish. But I am your friend, Cotter. Your real friend."

"Thank you, Mr. Warden."

They stood looking at each other a moment. "Life is a queer game," Kelsh shrugged at last. "I guess, after all, a man can't play anything but the cards dealt out to him."

Cotter smiled faintly and nodded.

"That letter," Kelsh said at last. "That one of Suntly's which you kept. How did you hide it, or having hidden it, how did you get it out of the apartment?"

The gardener straightened and a smile twisted at his lips. "That letter," he said, "I burned, Mr. Warden, before they found me standing over Sunny. I burned it in the fireplace and ground the ashes under my heel. I had to do that to protect her. But I knew that Henry Suntly would be afraid to challenge me. A man who is a coward with a woman is doubly so with a man."

"He's a smart politician, Cotter," Kelsh said sagely. "He's due for eight years in office, so we've little enough to worry us. But, as you say, he's certainly a coward. He knows nothing of the sort of courage you showed in sharing the secret you've kept inviolate until its telling would help a friend."

Cotter turned silently away and bent again to his work. It was as though he buried there in the earth the secret which he finally had shared, and that secret took root and blossomed and made a flowerbed.

GUESS WHO?

by TALBOT C. HATCH

PHYSICAL clues like dried blood-stains, greasy fingerprints, and microscopic bits of dirt under a dead man's nails are not nearly as important to this man as the psychic fingerprints which he asserts the criminal always leaves behind — psychic fingerprints for which he can wear no gloves. Another of his favorite assertions is that a lie is the sign manual to a man's inward thinking and that the quickest way to the truth is through the channels of listening and analyzing a liar's statements.

He believes and proves the dictum that "lies are psychological facts," that they lead to human blunders, and that a blunder is one form of clue a criminal can neither remove, conceal, nor destroy — the one clue that is entirely beyond his conscious control. He believes that the unconscious mind is not a mere word or convention, but something living and human; that no individual human act is ever accidental, but is the result of unconscious thought or feeling.

And so he should believe, for years of psychiatric study and practice — eight of them spent in London, Paris, and Vienna — have so developed and broadened his mental skills that he can climb through a jungle of associated ideas with the agility of a monkey and with little difficulty

trace any thought or memory to its lair. His keen mind goes directly to the heart of a problem, stripping away the non-essential facts which so often obscure the essential pattern.

He is said to be the first psychiatrist to apply psychology to the detection of crime and, while he is the chief of a psychiatric clinic in New York, he also is attached to the district attorney's office in that city in the capacity of psychiatric consultant. During the war years he served as a captain of Navy Intelligence. Incidentally, he has found auctorial time to produce a controversial treatise on *Time and Mentality*, and another, bearing the title *Psychopathology in World Politics*.

In person he is tall and distinguished-looking, lean in jaw and lean in body. His hair is brown, on the darkish side, and his inscrutable eyes, unusually bright with a gaze so disturbingly alert as to seem almost intrusive, are of the same color although slightly lighter in shade. The planes of his thin, intelligent face are flat and thoughtful in appearance, and his composed manner invites friendliness and exhibits tolerance. There is a certain slow grace about his gait and gestures, and his measured movements are the antithesis of "hustle."

It is said of him that he is one of

the few men who would look well in 18th century dress.

Although he is between forty and fifty, his enthusiasm makes him look much younger than his characteristically deliberate manner of carrying his five feet eleven inches of wiry strength would indicate. His voice is low and quiet, the voice of a man who loves words and uses them as the tools of thought, and always gives full value to every syllable and every shade of meaning. Like most people who speak several other languages, his English is distinct and unslurred.

His Russian mother and his American father give him a mixed parentage which accounts, in a way, for his thin-skinned temperament, at once more sympathetic, irritable, and intuitive than that of races in which the shell of civilization has not had time to harden. They gave him birth

in the city of Baltimore, where he later attended Johns Hopkins. After trekking to Europe for his post-graduate work, he returned to and now lives at 16A Park Avenue, in an antiquated dwelling that stands at the unfashionable and unpretentious end of the street below Grand Central.

His first name (and here is a good round hint) is an Americanism for that of his grandfather's, Vassily Krasnoy, who was a well-known Russian composer. He is well and ably served by a soft-spoken Baltimore Negro called Juniper, who has been with him since the Johns Hopkins days and who has grown gray in his service, with but one major injunction to remember: Never serve a cocktail made with fruit juices. Can you now *GUESS WHO?* You will find the answer below, printed upside down.

Solution to "Guess Who?"

Dr. Basil Willing, crime detector *extraordinaire*, created by Helen McCloy, who is one of our preferred performers in the field of detective fiction, and whose prizewinning short stories in *EQMM's* annual contests have been memorable tales, especially the beautiful and classic *Chinoiserie*. Watch for a brand-new story about Dr. Basil Willing in next month's issue — *The Singing Diamonds* — one of the remarkable group which won Special Awards in last year's contest.

There is no doubt that Anthony Boucher is one of our most acute and most perceptive criminological critics. Therefore, his appraisal of Roy Vickers is too important to let die on the vine. For one thing, Anthony Boucher is convinced that Roy Vickers is at least three writers — how could one writer be responsible for Fidelity Dove, for thrillers à la Edgar Wallace, and for the Department of Dead Ends? No, it doesn't seem possible that three such different and diverse types of detective story could have been conceived and executed by the same man. And our incredulity is raised another notch when we recall that Roy Vickers has also written some solid Croftian tales.

It is the Department of Dead Ends saga which perplexes Mr. Boucher most. He has the strange feeling that the Dead End stories were never conceived at all. Many writers, Mr. Boucher reminds us, have breathed the breath of life into their murderers; a few have even made their detectives live and breathe; but Vickers is almost the only writer, according to Mr. Boucher, who infuses life into the very crimes themselves. And yet, the baffled Mr. Boucher admits, the crimes that finally come to a dead end in the Department of Dead Ends have an artistic pattern, a preciseness of form, usually lacking in accounts of real-life murder.

Mr. Boucher can see only one solution to the riddle of Vickers's multiple identity: obviously, the Roy Vickers who gives us the Dead End stories is simply a fact-crime writer reporting the murders of a parallel time-world, where murder and retribution are more artistically shaped and finished off than here on planet-Earth.

Stf, and double stf, Mr. Boucher!

THE "TRY-OUT" MURDER

by ROY VICKERS

SURGEONS will often claim success for an operation that has resulted in the death of a patient — provided that there is a reasonable lapse of time between the two events. By the same thought process George Hudson might have claimed that he had successfully murdered Ethel Mollett, concealed the body, and removed all traces of the crime.

True that he was hanged for it all. But the fact must not be allowed to dim his brilliance as a criminal. He beat the police and for nearly a year afterwards led a life of blameless domesticity.

By all the rules of the game, if one may call it so — by everything that was logical — he ought to have escaped. He was beaten by a preposter-

ous coincidence — by a million-to-one chance that happened to turn up against him.

George Hudson was born at Salisbury, the son of a well-to-do architect. Both his parents were killed in the Salisbury railway disaster of 1902 when he himself was twenty-two and within a month or two of qualifying in his father's profession.

The death of his parents left him with a little under £200 a year and a clear sum of about £800. It was just enough to enable him to live in idleness, and with that object in view he decided to move to London where he had neither friends nor relatives to worry him with advice.

Romance met him, as it were, on the doorstep — or, more exactly, in the third-class compartment in which he traveled up to London — in the person of Ethel Mollett.

Ethel was eighteen, the daughter of a farm laborer from an outlying village. She was on her way to take up her first situation as housemaid to a chemist living in Tredegar Road, Bow, E. She was plumpish and pretty, with apple cheeks and big, trustful eyes.

To these rather elementary physical charms she added the subtle fascination of being very bewildered and rather helpless. She had never before left her village except for an occasional jaunt to the market town. She was more than a little afraid of the train and quite horribly afraid of the vast city that lay at the end of the journey.

Hudson told her tales of London, the kind of tales that the rustic mind seems curiously eager to believe — tales of staggering dangers that beset the unwary. If this did not allay her fears, it at least made her snatch at his offer to see her safely to her employer's house.

Before they parted the girl had gratefully accepted Hudson's generous invitation for her first free afternoon.

For the next year the story of their association is the commonplace story of a man's infatuation for a woman who is his social and intellectual inferior. He was fascinated by her naiveté and innocence — more brutally expressed, her almost incredible "greenness."

He kept her very much to himself. Invariably, on her afternoon off, he would call for her at the house in Tredegar Road. There was no narrow snobbery about him. He allowed himself to be interviewed by the chemist and his wife as Ethel Mollett's sweetheart, who was supposed to be employed in some vaguely humble capacity on the night staff of a newspaper.

In May of the following year Ethel was granted a fortnight's holiday which she spent with Hudson at Lowestoft.

Just a little of the greenness had perhaps worn off by this time, for at the end of June we find her unwilling to listen any longer to reasons, however ingenious in themselves, for postponing the wedding day. The wedding

must take place at George Hudson's earliest convenience, or she would consult not only her employer but also her father.

Mention of her father frightened Hudson. He knew the village custom in these matters. Her father would come first; if he were not successful, he would return with all the relatives and friends he could muster. The village, in short, would pool its resources for the purpose of putting pressure upon the man who had made love to one of its maidens. They would come to his lodgings (where Ethel had never been) and make scene after scene.

All this would upset George Hudson's other plans.

"You don't know what you're talking about, my dear," he said in the *man-of-the-world* tone that she so admired. "For one thing, if you tell your employers they will promptly turn you out. And what is the good of upsetting your father — you don't think his word counts for anything up here, do you?"

One imagines her trying to ignore this and repeating with deadly monotony her demand for marriage.

"Now listen to me. If you carry out these ridiculous threats of yours I will never speak to you again. Promise to do as I tell you and we'll 'go to the parson,' as you call it, this afternoon."

This overawed her and she promised to obey — a promise she kept with a literal faithfulness that was her undoing.

A few minutes later they were in-

terviewing the rector of the parish. As the girl was a minor, he asked the usual questions and was assured by Hudson that her parents would send formal consent and would, of course, be present at the ceremony.

Next, they took the train to Victoria, as Hudson had lodgings in the adjacent district of Pimlico. He gave her the satisfaction of accompanying him while he in turn gave particulars, so that the banns might be called in his parish.

The very obvious genuineness of the reverend gentleman, the indisputable reality of the adjoining church, banished the last of her suspicions of the strange manner in which one apparently got married in London. She was ready once more to obey George Hudson in anything.

He told her to ask for an hour off the next evening and to meet him at Bow Station — and in the meantime to say nothing to her employer or anybody else of their wedding.

George Hudson is possibly the first murderer in history to hit upon the remarkable device of "trying out" the murder before actually committing it — to see if it were really as safe as it looked. It was his intention that Ethel Mollett should disappear in such circumstances as to suggest that she had met with foul play at the hands of some man other than himself.

It was easy enough to make so very gullible a girl disappear without leaving any direct trace. The vital ques-

tion was: had the police some trick up their sleeves for finding young women who disappeared suddenly?

He proceeded to find out in the following manner.

When Ethel met him as arranged at eight o'clock, he took her from Bow to Waterloo Station. This, of course, was in the days when the station was a comparatively small one, surrounded by a network of mean streets. In one of these streets, known as Walsall Place, he had previously booked lodgings in the name of Wall (doubtless suggested by the address) for himself and his wife.

Here, at No. 7, he installed Ethel as his wife and presented her with a brown-paper parcel containing various articles of feminine attire which he himself had bought to offset the inconvenience caused by leaving her employer's house without luggage.

On the following morning he gave her £12 and told her to go to a certain shop and buy, ready-made, a walking costume, a new hat, and anything else she wanted, after which she must return to Walsall Place and pass the time as well as she could until he came back from Salisbury. Overnight it had been agreed, at his suggestion, that he should go by himself to her parents, explain the situation in full, and beg them to come to the wedding. That, she readily admitted, would be "better than writing." She was always ready to believe that almost anything was "better than writing." She gave him messages which he promised to deliver.

Now, although he did not deliver the messages, he did go to see her parents. But he went first to the house of her late employers at Bow who were in a state of mingled indignation and alarm at the girl's failure to return the previous night. Before they could get in a word edgewise, he asked whether Ethel were ill, as she had failed to keep an appointment with him the previous evening.

Explanation was followed by discussion. At the right moment Hudson made a manly confession. He had intended, he added, to behave in as honorable a manner as was left to him and to marry her secretly as soon as the statutory three Sundays had passed. He had wanted to see her the previous evening in order to persuade her, against her will, to inform her kind employers.

This explanation only made Ethel's disappearance seem all the more sinister. It was incredible that such a nice, quiet, simple country girl should elope with one man when the banns were about to be called in respect to another. It almost looked as if something must have happened to her.

"There's just the one chance that she has gone home," exclaimed Hudson. "It's not much use wiring—her people probably can't read. I'm going down to see for myself, and if she isn't there I'm going straight to Scotland Yard. I hope you'll back me up in all I say."

He went down to Salisbury, told the same substantially true story that

he had told the girl's employers, and on his return to London that night went with the chemist to Scotland Yard and laid the "facts" before the authorities.

Any suspicion that might have fallen on George Hudson was allayed by the fact that investigation showed that the story he told was true in every particular. It was true about the banns; it was true that he had been to see the girl's parents.

The grief-stricken parents had supplied through Hudson the only existing photograph — a wedding group taken three years previously which was of little use for purposes of reproduction. A description was published, giving details of the dress in which she had left the house in Bow.

Hudson knew that he was in no danger from that published description. She was wearing her new dress, and the descriptions of her face and figure would have fitted thousands of young women.

On returning to the squalid lodgings in Walsall Place, the account he gave of his interview with her parents must be considered as an item of propaganda rather than a summary of facts. That he had indeed been there she could not doubt because he gave an accurate description of the cottage. Besides, she did not bother to doubt anything — now that George was really going to marry her.

She was therefore willing to believe that her father had promised to come, with her mother, to the wedding; that in the meantime he wished her to

keep the whole thing as secret as possible, to continue to live under the protection of her future husband, and to obey him in all things.

For once her placid nature found obedience difficult because obedience consisted mainly in staying indoors and doing nothing but look at the books and magazines that George brought her. (Ethel, it must be admitted, was but an indifferent reader.) George left her alone a good deal, having, as he told her, so many things to attend to.

One of the many things that George attended to was Scotland Yard. At any odd time of day he would make himself a mild nuisance by calling for news of his "missing sweetheart." Another item that claimed a good deal of his energy was the renting of a house.

In those days it was easy enough to rent a house, but George Hudson wanted something rather special in the matter of a garden. It need not be a big garden nor a beautiful garden; it merely had to be a garden that was not overlooked by the neighbors.

He found what he wanted at Surbiton, then a very small suburb struggling to expand.

One afternoon, some ten days after she had left Bow, he took her down to Surbiton and showed her that which he described as their future home — a pleasant little six-room house with a very fair-sized garden adequately screened by a high wooden fence. In that part of the garden which was intended for the growing of vegetables

two men were putting the finishing touches to a circular pit, five feet deep with a diameter of ten feet.

That, George explained, was to be a fish pond with an ornamental fountain in the center. Local men had done the digging; a London firm would attend to the rest of it.

He paid off the local men and then, being possessed of the key, showed Ethel over the house. There arises the pathetic picture of the girl flitting from room to room in the eager business of home-making — wholly unsuspecting of the dreadful significance of the "fish pond."

In spite of her entreaties he did not take her to Surbiton again until the following Monday — two days before their promised wedding day. The police had had a clear fortnight in which to find the missing Ethel Mollett. They had failed to discover so much as a single clue.

In short, the coast seemed as clear as any murderer could reasonably expect.

They left their lodgings, depositing their scanty luggage in the cloak room at Waterloo whence Hudson subsequently reclaimed and destroyed it. They arrived at the house in Surbiton in the early evening. In his pocket he carried a velvet pad of the kind that is used for dusting silk hats, a part of which was eventually found in the girl's mouth. In the house were several lengths of box cord with which he bound her and suspended her by the neck from the baluster rail on the first floor.

He spent the hours of darkness burying her in the "fish pond" with a spade previously brought to the house.

On the next day, having removed all traces of the night's toil, he called on the house agent, mentioned a sudden change of plans which would make it impossible for him to occupy the house, and suggested that he should forfeit his half-quarter's deposit in return for cancellation of the lease. The agent was quite willing to do this but raised the question of the fish pond.

"I've already had it filled in," explained Hudson. "Of course, it makes a bit of a mound just now; but that will subside in a week or two. I don't imagine it will be a bar to re-letting."

It was no bar. . . . The house was let for the September quarter and duly occupied by a dentist with his wife and child who, as far as we know, made no complaint about the garden.

The case of Ethel Mollett was filed in the Department of Dead Ends among the other unsolved mysteries.

During his year of residence in London George Hudson had had plenty of leisure. The late Ethel Mollett's demands on his time had been limited to one afternoon per week and alternate Sundays.

Through a mutual friend in Salisbury he had early become acquainted with a Mrs. Strickland, a very, very buxom widow some dozen years his senior. During the year of frequent

meetings the acquaintanceship had ripened into something deeper. In November an advertisement in *The Times* proclaimed that they were engaged and would be married in January.

It cannot be known whether George Hudson was attracted by the lady's ample person or by the fact that she had inherited from her late husband a grocery business that yielded her over £1000 per year — together with a very suitable house on the outskirts of Guildford.

The marriage, however, did not take place in January, but in February, the postponement being caused by the lady having a serious "heart attack," for which the doctor prescribed a period of absolute rest. As a matter of fact, the unhappy woman was suffering from Bright's disease from which she died two years later — though this was not known at the time.

In February, then, they were married and spent their honeymoon at Herne Bay, but were driven away after three days by the inclemency of the weather, returning to the bride's house at Guildford, where they settled down to a humdrum life of prosperous indolence.

From time to time Mrs. Hudson, as she now was, had a repetition of the "heart attack." But as she was always able to obey the doctor's orders to rest, no one was unduly alarmed.

Every Monday she would go to interview the manager of the grocery

business, to receive a report of the previous week's trading, and to draw in gold enough money for her current expenses.

As she was anxious to reduce her weight she would walk, when weather permitted, from Waterloo Station. When walking, one of her ways lay through Walsall Place.

This latter fact does not seem to have disturbed George Hudson in the very least, as he never accompanied her. Sherlock Holmes himself could have found no link in the fact of Mrs. Hudson occasionally passing through a street in which nearly a year ago Ethel Mollett had been concealed from the police. But where Sherlock Holmes might have failed, blind coincidence triumphed. The million-to-one chance turned up in the form of a telegram delivered one Thursday afternoon at the little house in Guildford.

"Have had another attack am better now and no need to worry but please come and help me home at 7 Walsall Place. Mary."

No. 7! This echo from the past was, to say the least, disturbing. If he were to go there, it was just possible that Mrs. Sidwell, the landlady, might recognize him. She might possibly reveal the fact that he had lived there with another woman, ostensibly his wife. But there was no need, George assured himself, to lose his head.

He went to the doctor who lived in the same road, told him what had happened, and asked him to go up to

Waterloo and bring Mrs. Hudson home — in case she should need medical attention on the way.

She would not, the doctor asserted, need medical attention on the way. He had other cases on hand and did not feel justified in doing a job that Mr. Hudson himself could do perfectly well.

"All right, then, I'd better go myself," said George — but did not go. Instead, he sent the cook — who returned out of temper close upon midnight unaccompanied by her mistress.

Mrs. Hudson, she reported, had had a second attack and although she had recovered, she had no confidence in her ability to accomplish the journey home without her husband.

George did nothing that night nor the following morning. About midday came another long telegram, urging him to come at once and help her home. He showed it to the cook who pointed out that it would be useless for her to make a second journey.

"All right, then, I'd better go myself," said George for the second time and, being short of loose cash, borrowed eight shillings from the cook and left the house.

But he did not go to Walsall Place. He went to a boarding house in Bloomsbury and lay low for a week, assuming that his wife would go home by herself. The newspapers at that time were making much of the Baroda case (a case of lapsed memory), and he intended to say that he had set out for Walsall Place and that before

arriving he, like the notorious Baroda, had suffered a lapse of memory.

It does not seem to have occurred to George Hudson that his wife was genuinely fond of him. Alternatively, he does not seem to have guessed that a reasonably loving wife would be, not offended, but alarmed.

A confused exchange of telegrams was followed by a reappearance of the cook at Walsall Place. Nothing but an accident or worse, asserted Mrs. Hudson, could have prevented George from coming to her aid. What more natural, therefore, than that, before returning home with the cook, she should inform the police of her husband's mysterious disappearance.

At Scotland Yard the name "George Hudson," came indirectly to the notice of Sergeant Haskins, who a year ago had been employed in the search for Ethel Mollett. It was a funny thing, he thought, that now it should be George's turn to disappear — but it was no more than a funny thing. On the face of it there could be no logical connection between the two events. And it was nothing but sheer red tape which compelled him to send a memo to the Department of Dead Ends.

The hospitals yielding no information, Haskins took the train to Guildford and there saw among others the doctor and the cook.

"Looks like one of these cases of a lapse of memory!" thought the Sergeant who had also read about Baroda.

But, lapse of memory or not, George could not live for very long

on the cook's eight shillings; so to be on the safe side, Haskins interviewed the manager of George's bank.

Two days later Haskins was informed by telephone that Hudson's check for £10 had been cleared through the account of a boarding house in Bloomsbury. Haskins sent a junior to the boarding house, who presently telephoned that George had just sat down to lunch.

The chase was at an end and the Department of Dead Ends was duly informed that the case was solved.

Superintendent Tarrant applied the old formula of assuming that a logical connection existed between events palpably unconnected.

Applying the formula, a conclusion emerged — that George had shown a calculated and systematic unwillingness to call at No. 7 Walsall Place. And by means of this kind of semi-scientific guesswork, on which the theory of the department was based, Tarrant guessed that George Hudson's unwillingness was concerned with the disappearance of Ethel Mollett.

He instructed one of his own juniors to bring Mrs. Sidwell, the landlady, without fail to the Yard at three o'clock — and at three o'clock he himself walked in with an amiably chattering George Hudson, ostensibly to settle some formality in regard to his "disappearance."

On the way to Tarrant's room the unsuspecting George was seen and recognized by Mrs. Sidwell. The supposed formality was soon completed and George departed to make the best

job he could of the lapse-of-memory story to his devoted wife.

But a double relief of plainclothes men were told off to escort George unobtrusively to Guildford, and to keep a watch on him.

In the meantime Superintendent Tarrant learned from Mrs. Sidwell that George Hudson, under the name of Wall, had lived at her house with a young woman — at the very time when he was playing the grief-stricken lover and urging the Yard to redouble their efforts to find his missing bride-to-be, Ethel Mollett.

Where did the couple go when they left her? Mrs. Sidwell was sure she couldn't say, but she had heard them talking about a house they had seen once and were going to see again. She did not know where the house was, but she thought you must go to it from Waterloo Station, as they had run from her house to catch the train on the first occasion.

A police circular was promptly sent to all the police stations on the line within one hundred miles of London, instructing them to make inquiries of all their local house agents.

Two days later Superintendent Tarrant was talking to the Surbiton house agent who told him all he knew of "Mr. Wall," bringing in, almost as an afterthought, the story of the proposed fish pond.

That afternoon, by the courteous permission of the dentist, who still tenanted the house, Scotland Yard began digging.

Hudson was hanged in August.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

T. M. McDade's "Let Me Help You With Your Murders" is one of the eleven "first stories" which won special awards in last year's contest. Despite its comparative brevity the tale is loaded with ingenious gimmicks — indeed, there are enough for more than one story of the gimmick-type. But although studded with trick devices, Mr. McDade's tale has an altogether different appeal: it is a kind of detective story rarely come upon these down-to-earth days — a story which combines ferreting with fancy, clues with clever conceits, wickedness with whimsy. And this is all the more surprising when you consider the author's background.

T. M. McDade is just past 40 — a lawyer and an accountant by profession, but not the sedentary variety of office-worker. Blazes, no! For five years Mr. McDade earned his living as a G-man, and while with the F.B.I., in the 1930s, he investigated real-life crime and tracked down real-life criminals. He was a member of the famous JODIL squad (code word for the John Dillinger manhunt) and of the equally famous BREKID squad (code word for the Bremer kidnaping), both operating out of Chicago; and during the course of this derring-do he survived more than a few shooting scrapes — which is something to marvel at, since the McDade possesses a 6-foot-4 physique, no small target for a ruthless hood with a handy rod.

In 1938 he joined a law firm which represented bonding companies, thus furthering his knowledge of embezzlement techniques, including check kiting and deposit lapping. The war drew him into the Army, advancing his education in mass murder, among other grand-scale criminalities. He was given the assignment of reorganizing the Manila Police Department, and later, while on the beach at New Guinea, he began writing.

Now, you would think that a man of that experience and training would write the most realistic of stories — crime in the raw and authentic police procedure. Yet Mr. McDade's first story in print is exactly the opposite. Not that whimsy is not welcome — but we urge Mr. McDade to draw on his own marvelous background for future story material; we warrant that an F.B.I. tale by Mr. McDade will have the ring of 'tec truth in it, and the ring of truth has been, is, and always will be the priceless ingredient . . .

LET ME HELP WITH YOUR MURDERS

by T. M. McDADE

THE man with the derby perched on the back of his head shifted his weight forward and the front legs of the tilted chair hit the floor with the full force of his two hundred pounds.

"Well, I'll be —" he said to his companion. "Listen to this ad, Joe."

MURDER—Let me help you with your murders. Clues and alibis arranged. Forget about fingerprints and the locked room. Use the modern technique. Vivid, dramatic, insoluble.

Schmid, 511 East 44th Street.

"Do you think that means what it says, Joe?"

The only other occupant of the bare quarters of the midtown Homicide Squad had a long solemn face the shape of an egg. He was in no hurry to reply, but looked thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"What paper is that printed in, Bill?" he asked at last, as he beat his pipe into the palm of his hand.

Bill thumbed his way back through the pages and scrutinized the title.

"It says *The Saturday Review of Literature*. It's something Mason left around. It's full of screwy ads."

Joe studied the stem of his pipe, trying to guess how soon he would bite through it.

"Sounds kind of queer, though it's too obvious for the real thing. We might look in on Mr. Schmid just to kill some time. We don't seem to be making much headway in the Van Riper case."

At the mention of this case Bill made a grimace. Solving homicides was hard enough, but when you weren't sure whether you had a homicide or a death from natural causes,

it almost made you wish you were back on the Safe and Loft Squad.

They had only a few blocks to drive and as they left their car they noted the building in which Schmid had his office. It was an old tenement which had not kept pace with the fire laws and which continued in use only by effrontery and a liberal fee to the building inspector. On the third floor they could just make out in the gloom the words *A. Schmid, Agent* on the frosted door.

A tiny man jumped from behind a typewriter to greet them. They got a general impression of pink cheeks, white hair, and an immaculate starched shirt with a collar of the Herbert Hoover vintage. Odd-shaped glasses and bright blue eyes gave him the appearance of Foxy Grandpa.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"My name is Kelly," said Joe, "and this is my friend and partner, Harris," waving in the general direction of Bill. "We are interested in your ad in *The Saturday Review of Literature*." He produced the magazine as though to prove that he actually read it. "Are you Mr. Schmid?"

"Yes, I am." The blue eyes jumped from one to the other. "Come in and sit down, won't you? It's a good ad, isn't it? I wrote it myself. Quite a few people have read it and come to me for help."

"About murders?" asked Bill hopefully.

"Oh, yes. About murders and other problems. Personally, I prefer murder

— much the most interesting. And then, of course, it pays better. Don't you think so?" The white head bobbed at each of them as he spoke.

"I suppose it does," said Kelly. "Tell me, what do you do for your clients?"

"I'm glad you asked that," said Schmid. "People get such queer ideas about the services an agent renders." His eyes said plainly that he hoped that they were not the kind of people who had "queer ideas."

"Let us say that you have a special problem with your murder," he continued, "disposing of the body, for instance, or leaving clues to incriminate someone else. Well, that's where I come in. I have a really fertile imagination and lots of originality. I'm not really boasting." He smiled at them a little shyly. "I can refer you to many of my successful cases."

"Like what?" asked Harris curiously.

"Well, take *Murder by Magic*," said the old man. "In that case —"

"Wait. What's that murder by magic business?" Harris was puzzled and as a result sounded a little truculent.

"Why, that is the name of the book. In that story I . . ."

"Book," ejaculated Harris. "Cripes, I thought . . ."

"I see," interposed Kelly, cutting short Harris's confession of ignorance. "You help detective-story writers with their plots?"

"Well, sometimes, but not usually." The little man was quite anxious to

explain his art. "Plot doesn't mean much in the modern detective story. What you really need is a batch of good clues. Have you noticed how they advertise murder stories these days? On the jacket it will say:

This book is about —

A child's slate

A Japanese lantern

A Brueghel reproduction

A missing sandwich

A dead mouse.

Those clues are the meat of the story. Given a good list of clues, any hack writer can throw them together into a story."

He glanced at Harris who had lost interest and decided to concentrate on Kelly who did not look bored.

"Is that all you do," asked the latter, "just make up a list of items like that and let someone else write the book?"

"Oh, no. There's much more to it than that. You see, each clue is a sort of paradox in itself. It seems to suggest one thing, but it actually means another."

"For instance," broke in Kelly.

The old man searched the ceiling for a moment as he sought a reply that would make himself clear.

"Take this one, for instance. In *Murder on Wheels* the body is found in a locked automobile. It is important to know whether he was shot from within the car or from the outside. A .45 calibre bullet is found in the body. There is a hole in one window, but it is too small for a .45 bullet to have passed through. Now on that

evidence you'd say that it was not the hole made by the bullet which killed him, wouldn't you?" The question was thrown at Kelly.

"Well, I suppose so. If the hole in the glass is smaller than the bullet, it must have been made by something else — perhaps a smaller calibre bullet." Kelly felt safe in being logical.

"Exactly," said Schmid, jumping up in glee. "And you'd be wrong. Because the murder bullet *did* go through that smaller hole! Shall I tell you how?"

This time even Harris looked up expectantly.

"Because glass bends when it's hit and the shatterproof glass in cars will bulge backwards as much as a couple of inches while a bullet is passing through it. When so bent, the hole is a bit larger than when the glass has sprung back into shape. Then the hole is too small for the same bullet to be pushed through."

The old man was quite pleased with the effect of this revelation. Harris muttered, "Well, I'll be —" and looked wonderingly at the agent.

"And you sold that idea to someone who put it in a book?" asked Kelly.

"And got paid for it?" added Harris.

"Naturally I got paid for it. Of course, what I get depends on how many clues I give and how good they are. Some may be the key to the whole story, others are just red herrings." Schmid was warming up to his subject; having overcome their indifference he was anxious to hold their attention. He continued.

"Now in *The Case of the Careless Corpse* I planted only three or four items, but each gave the story a twist and added greatly to the interest."

"For instance?" asked Harris. It occurred to him that there might be something to be learned from the old man. Schmid went on.

"The odor of cedar wood on the murdered man's hands suggested a cedar closet, a carpenter shop, and several other possibilities. Actually, he'd emptied a pencil sharpener shortly before he died. Have you ever noticed the smell of cedar in pencil shavings? Then at another point in the story a man and his wife left their home together and something a neighbor told the detective made him realize that they did not intend to return together."

"What was that?" asked Kelly.

Schmid smiled. It was getting to be a sort of game.

"Oh, they were *both* carrying umbrellas. As simple as that. It is surprising how much you can build up a story on a little device like that — as a matter of fact, they are the whole story. One author did write a whole book around a single clue I sold him. Did you read *The Peek-a-Boo Murders*?"

He looked from Kelly to Harris, each of whom shook his head.

"In that story the murder was committed in an office to which the victim had a private entrance. There were several suspects, some with alibis. One suspect could not have known the victim was in the office because of the

private entrance and the layout. It had but one window and that was frosted glass. I won't go into all the details, but the point was that the suspect had to know the victim was in the room at a certain moment and he learned this by looking into the room through the frosted-glass window."

Schmid paused to let the idea sink into their minds.

"Some kind of radar," suggested Harris.

Schmid smiled. "No, no," he protested. "I like to keep things simple and practical. Do you know that all you have to do to look through frosted glass is to place a piece of Scotch tape over the frosted side? Do that and immediately that piece of glass becomes transparent. Look."

He took them to the door they had entered and they then noticed a small transparent strip in one corner of the pane. Harris peeked through and swore.

"That's the darndest thing I ever saw," he said.

"What happens if you take it off?" asked Kelly, as he edged his partner away to peek through it himself.

"Why it goes back the way it was — it becomes translucent again. Don't ask me why it happens. Something to do with the bending of light rays, I suppose."

They were grouped around the door and Harris had begun to move out into the hall. The subject seemed to have petered out. The detectives had had their interest satisfied, but the

little agent was reluctant to stop talking.

"Thanks for all the information," said Kelly. "I don't think there is anything you can do for us right now. We were looking for something bigger."

Schmid pressed on. "Oh, I've done more than the details of some jobs. A couple of weeks ago I worked out a plot and all the details for a story in which the victim was killed in his office while seated at his desk. It had quite a macabre twist to it. I sold that idea and it's being written now."

Kelly asked the question out of courtesy; he was no longer interested. He could stand only so much fiction.

"What was the idea, Mr. Schmid?"

The old man smiled.

"Well, I can't tell you all about it, because you see it's not my property now. But the joke is that the man is murdered at his desk — by drowning."

"Drowning!" Both men echoed the old man's last word.

Harris turned to Kelly.

"That's what the medical examiner said about Van Riper. Remember? He said it sounded silly, but it looked as though he had been drowned while sitting at his desk in his office." They stared at one another, forgetting the agent in their surprise.

"Yes, he said there was some evidence of suffocation, traces of water in the lungs, and him dead with his head on his desk blotter. So he called it a stroke but was still worried about those queer bits that didn't fit."

They looked at Schmid who, although he had heard their remarks, seemed not to have given them any significance apart from his own story.

"That's true," he said. "There would be traces and perhaps enough to make a few inquiries, but really nothing to get your teeth into. I've always said that you don't have to make a murder fool-proof — just a reasonable margin of safety, such as you'd exercise crossing a dangerous corner. There's always an element of risk. Now in sending the flowers . . ."

Kelly turned to Harris. "There were flowers in that room, weren't there?"

Harris skimmed through a small notebook and found the note he was looking for.

"Yes, here it is. Flowers were delivered that morning. No card, but we didn't check that because it didn't seem important. Van Riper's secretary put them in a bowl. She called them some kind of roses."

"Rosemary — for remembrance," cut in Schmid, "exactly. Why that's my story! — even to the flowers. I hope someone hasn't written it already. It's so embarrassing to the clients."

Kelly grasped Schmid firmly by the arm and led him back to his desk.

"Look, Schmid," he said. "We're the police. Something has happened and we want you to tell us all about this little plot of yours, how it works, who you sold it to, and everything. Understand?"

The old man's face showed disap-

pointment rather than any surprise.

"Why, of course," he said, "anything to help you. But I assure you that the idea is original with me. If someone else tried to use that idea, it was stolen."

"Perhaps — or bought it from you. But go on and tell us about your idea."

"Well, it's quite simple. First, you drug your victim with a cigarette or some mild soporific in a drink. That is not difficult and a subsequent analysis will show only in traces and never enough to cause serious harm. Then you take the flowers out of the flower bowl and rest the face of the unconscious victim *in* the bowl. He drowns in his own office. A bizarre touch. Of course, death is due to asphyxiation, but there is no evidence of the usual forceful suffocation. No fluff in the lungs from the pillow, no marks on the throat — quite clean. After he stops breathing, you wipe off his face, replace the flowers in the bowl, and there you are."

"By George," said Harris, "it fits! The shape of the bowl, the mild drug — everything."

"Tell me," asked Kelly, "do you know the fellow you sold this story to?" He tried to sound casual.

"He was not one of my regular clients," said Schmid. "He came in, said he had read the ad, and asked for some help. He paid me in cash and said I would get a bonus if the idea worked out. Let me see, where did I put his address?" He pulled out one of the drawers of the desk and began

poking through a litter of paper, cards, and envelopes.

"Here it is. Abercrombie, Thaddeus P. Address — 241 West 29th Street."

"What kind of a looking chap was he?" asked Harris.

"Oh, he was a good-looking fellow, quite short with blond wavy hair and a nice smile."

Kelly gestured to Harris who thumbed through some papers in a wallet and selected a photograph across the back of which was typed, "Arthur J. Van Riper, Jr." He passed it to Schmid who immediately exclaimed, "My goodness, how extraordinary! That's the very person. How in

the world did you get his picture?"

The question went unanswered. The two detectives got up and started to leave.

"Mr. Schmid," said Kelly, "you've been a great help. We have to go now but we will be back soon and talk to you a little more about this."

At the door an afterthought made him turn and add, "You ought to be more careful to whom you sell your material, Mr. Schmid. You should make sure they are really writers."

The little man threw up his hands.

"But I did," he said. "I knew he was a writer. Why, he showed me his rejection slips from *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*."



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ONLY THE FOOLS GET CAUGHT

by WALTER DURANTY

ONLY the fools get caught," said Vanderlyne; "this smuggling business is so easy, really, if you know how to handle it. Anything's easy when you know how, and I know smuggling. It's easy, I tell you, if you watch your step and aren't too greedy. It's only the fools who get caught."

He was a stocky little Flamand. Belgium is one of the smallest of world nations but in it there are two peoples and two languages, the Walloons and the Flamands, or Flemish. The former are aristocratic and dignified and rather French, but perhaps not quite so strong as their ancestors. The latter are as tough as their blood brothers in Holland and the Frisian Islands, thick-sturdy people born in mud and fog, with a thick muddy language, but very strong and resistant, and impervious to the blows of Fate.

I first met Vanderlyne in Finland in 1919. Somehow or other he had had himself appointed official courier traveling to Helsingfors. It was occasionally risky in those days of Civil War and uncomfortable always, but what did he care for that? He had his courier's pass — that was what he cared for. His courier bag was sealed with leaden seals and inviolate according to diplomatic usage, but in theory his personal baggage was liable to customs inspection. In practice the

courier pass took him through without scrutiny at any frontier. That was the point of his game and he knew how to play it.

We traveled from Åbo to Helsingfors together; we had met in the smoking room of the boat from Stockholm and made friends over our drinks. It was reported that there were loose mines in the channel, and somehow it seemed to us both that to sit up and drink whiskies and sodas was a better defense against mines than lying alone in a cabin and trying nervously to sleep.

At Åbo I had no place reserved and the train was full, so Vanderlyne offered me half of the coupé that was held for him as a courier. And we shared a room in Helsingfors in the only hotel then fit for foreign occupation, which was crowded to the roof. Thus we became good friends. We both were young, and when you're young you make friends easily. It was the second night in Helsingfors that he told me about his smuggling.

"You see that suitcase," he said, pointing over to the corner. "That's full of silk stockings and lingerie. Cost me three thousand Danish krone, say five hundred dollars of your money. I bought the stuff in Copenhagen, and I can sell it here for ten thousand krone — more than fifteen hundred

dollars. My trip costs a hundred and fifty krone each way — I pay that myself — which leaves me a profit of more than a thousand dollars on a journey that only lasts a week. At that I may be able to pick up here some platinum or *objets d'art* — that may double my profit. I tell you it's easy."

It was seven years before I met him again, in Paris this time, in 1926. He was a little heavier and much better dressed, but the instinctive sympathy which had played between us in Finland was strong as ever. Life's like that sometimes — you meet someone you've never seen before and you're friends with him quite quickly and then you don't see him again for ages, but when you do meet it's just as before — you know you're still friends.

He took me to dinner at LaRue's and wouldn't let me pay a cent. "This is my evening," he said. "I'm hitting it hard these days, running stock certificates and bonds in and out of France. I made a killing six months ago with Royal Dutch certificates, bringing them in from London to the French Bourse. And now that the franc is dropping, I slide out international securities to London. They pay me five percent on each consignment, and my last trip I took five million francs worth. It's risky but it's worth it."

I thought he was a little too plump and a little too sure of himself, but we had a pleasant evening.

The next time I saw Vanderlyne was in '32 in Berlin. He was thinner and less cheerful. "This damned De-

pression," he said, "it's spoiled everything. I had a fortune right at my fingertips and then . . ." He leaned forward confidentially. "You know," he said, "I don't like risks. Only fools take risks, and it's the fools who get caught, but in '29, at the beginning of October, I took a risk. I don't mean a risk of getting caught — I'd fixed that watertight — but a money risk. I mean I took diamonds over to New York with my own money. I bought seventy thousand dollars worth of diamonds in Amsterdam, worth a hundred thousand or more in the United States on account of the duty, thirty-three per cent *ad valorem*, and damn it, man, I had the thing so neatly fixed. It was *really* watertight, like this. I bought a round-trip ticket on the *Mauretania*, cabin to myself and all, cost seven hundred dollars, but what was that? During the voyage I took my little fret-saw and cut out a piece in the panel under the bed and popped my diamonds in behind it and left them there. Then I went ashore and had a good time in New York and saw my friends. One of them was a big jewel merchant of the kind who asks no questions as long as he gets the stones. I had dealt with him before and knew that I could trust him. A couple of days later I go back on the *Mauretania* — of course I've already arranged to have the same cabin — and this friend of mine, the jewel broker, comes down to see me off. It's the easiest thing in the world to open up the little panel and get the stones out. He puts them in his overcoat

pocket and goes off with the rest of the crowd when the 'all-ashore' sounds. No risk for anyone, but thirty thousand dollars for Julius B. Vanderlyne, that's me."

"Sounds good," I admitted, "but what went wrong?"

"This damned Depression," said Vanderlyne bitterly. "Would you believe it, the Market broke the very next day and went on breaking. It ain't done breaking yet, if I'm any judge. And me, I couldn't wait, I had to sell those stones, I needed the money. Got forty thousand for them finally, and that just covered my margins for one week. I tell you, man, in those days I thought I might be rich, but now I'm not so greedy — all I want is a nice little monthly income."

One Saturday night in Antwerp in '35 I met Vanderlyne again in a dance hall called the Globe, jammed full of people sitting in each other's pockets, the air so thick you could hardly see the orchestra, which was banging away like a battleship firing salvos. He was sitting in the corner with a nice quiet round little woman in her early thirties, and he hailed me at once when I came in.

"I want you to meet my wife," he said. "We've been married three years this Christmas and you ought to see the youngster. He's only eighteen months, but he talks French and Flemish and can run like a greyhound. Look, what do you think of these?" — and he showed me a dozen pictures of a happy smiling baby, naked and

sturdy. I made the appropriate remarks and asked how was business. "Smooth as silk," Vanderlyne replied, "no more risks for yours truly. I tell you, old man, I've found the answer — small profits, quick returns, and *no risks*. Only the fools get caught, and I'm no fool."

He ordered beer for the three of us — they drink a lot of beer in Antwerp — and explained his system.

"Razor blades and crystals of menthol," he said, "that's the racket nowadays. Not greedy nor extravagant, just a neat little game with a modest little profit of five thousand francs a month."

"I'll tell you how it's worked. I have a friend in Berlin who buys the stuff there and travels down on the night train in a Wagon-Lits compartment to Cologne. He unpicks a corner of the upholstery in the compartment, pulls out some of the stuffing, and puts in the box of razor blades or the bottle of crystals, and sews it up again neatly. At Cologne he gets out and the car goes on to Aachen across the Belgian border. At Liege I climb aboard the train — you understand that I have a sideline job as traveling salesman for a coffee-machine outfit — and I say that I want to ride in the Wagon-Lits car because I'm rather tired and have some accounts to write up, or what-not.

"I know what compartment the stuff's hidden in, so I take that one — it's easy enough to arrange. I unpick the upholstery, take out my little packet, put back a handful of horse-

hair, and sew her up again, as easy as that. But with four trips a month I have my profit of five thousand francs — nothing to write home about but enough to live upon, which is all I want nowadays. I mean, you see, it's a variation of the trick I did with the diamonds on the *Mauretania*. There's no risk and mighty little expense, and the thing is fool-proof. It's only the fools who get caught."

He rubbed his chin reflectively and added with a somewhat rueful look — or perhaps I was mistaken — "I could do the same thing with cocaine, you know, but dope is nasty stuff to handle, and dangerous. Besides, Yvette here doesn't like it. She hates the idea of doing it, don't you, darling?"

His wife, who until then had said little, made it quite clear that Julie, as she called him, would never smuggle dope as long as she had anything to say about it, and it seemed she had a lot to say.

For the first time I envied him — his wife and his little son, his house near Antwerp, and the Ford car, and his fool-proof racket which brought him the modest competence which every bourgeois so ardently desires.

Three months later I saw a piece in a Brussels newspaper. It was short, and to me quite sad. The headlines ran, *Notorious Smuggler Caught Redhanded*, and here was what followed:

"Julius B. Vanderlyne was today sentenced to twelve months imprisonment and a fine of 100,000 francs for violation of the customs regulations. Investigation showed that he had been

defrauding the customs consistently over a term of years. His method was ingenious; a confederate on the German side of the border secreted smuggled goods in the upholstery of a sleeping-car compartment, which Vanderlyne occupied after the border had been crossed, during the journey from Liege to Brussels. On December 1 of this year, however, an elderly lady, the Baroness de Brunen, entered the train at Aachen on the German-Belgian frontier and occupied the compartment in question. As the conductor came to examine her ticket, Madame de Brunen was taking off her bonnet, which was secured by hatpins. She asked the conductor to put the bonnet on the rack, and turning, attempted to place the hatpins in the upholstery beside her. The pin struck a hard object, somewhat to the annoyance of the Baroness, who said to the conductor, 'Your cushions are deplorable; this one is hard as iron.' The conductor took the hatpin and immediately discovered that there was some solid object secreted in the cushion. He asked the Baroness to move to another compartment and summoned one of the Belgian customs officials who had not yet left the train. They found a packet of five hundred dozen razor blades secreted in the upholstery. The customs official replaced the packet and waited to see what would happen. At Liege the compartment was entered by the man, Vanderlyne, who was later arrested with the smuggled goods in his possession. Inquiry showed that smuggling was his

main source of income, and it is estimated that in the course of the last few years he has defrauded the Belgian authorities of no less than 200,000 francs."

There was nothing I could do about it, but as it happened I knew the warden of the Antwerp prison to which my friend was sent to serve his sentence. I asked if I might see him and bring him cigarettes and other minor comforts. The Belgians are a humane people and my request was granted.

Vanderlyne was less downcast than I had expected. "It's not so bad as all that," he said, "and after all I still have money in the bank despite that heavy fine. But I can't do business in Belgium any more, that's certain, and it won't be nice for my boy to think

that his father was in prison. I'm planning to go to Mexico; they say that there is a most lucrative trade in running Chinese across the border into the United States. Of course, there's always the White Slave business in Argentina, but my wife wouldn't like that. You know what she is," — he shook his head sadly — "no dope and no White Slaves."

I found him a little too complacent. "I thought you said," I remarked maliciously, "that only the fools get caught."

He grinned at me unabashed. "And wasn't I a fool," he retorted, "to forget that elderly ladies who wear Queen Mary bonnets have to hold them on with hatpins. What a fool I was to forget that! It's just as I told you, only the fools get caught."



NEXT MONTH . . .

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Helen McCloy's THE SINGING DIAMONDS
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And, in addition, we offer you another *EQMM* "first story" — *Vinnie Williams's* A MATTER OF THE TAX PAYERS' MONEY.

THE MANY-FACETED FRANK



Frank Gruber sold his first story in 1927 to a Sunday School paper — for the magnificent sum of \$3.50. He then got a job as editor of a trade paper, and edited various farm and business journals until 1934, when he quit to become a full-time writer. In the next six years he sold more than 300 stories. His first book — a western titled PEACE MARSHAL — was published in 1939; his first mystery novel — THE FRENCH KEY — appeared in 1940. Since then he has written 28 books — 6 western-historical novels, 1 autobiographical novel, and 21 mysteries. Of the 21 mystery novels, 12 feature his best-known detective character, Johnny Fletcher, 3 are Simon Lash stories, 2 Otis Beagle, and the remaining 4 are “of just guys” . . . Now, if this tereotype makes you think of Frank Gruber as prolific, you don't know the half of it. 28 full-length books and numerous short stories in less than ten years is a man's size job of writing if Frank did nothing else whatever, except catch a little shut-eye and bolt an occasional meal; but since 1942, when Mr. Gruber moved to Hollywood, he has sandwiched in no less than 31 motion picture screenplays, of which his favorite (and with good reason) is the script of Eric Ambler's memorable “Mask of Dimitrios.” Add to all this a radio show and Mr. Gruber's other consuming interests, and we must rate Frank Gruber one of the really prodigious workers of our time.

His other “consuming interests”? Western folk lore and book collecting — and it is Frank Gruber's pursuit of these happinesses that reveals the real stature of the man . . . His interest in western folk lore goes back to his boyhood. As a kid on a Minnesota farm he used to buy paperback thrillers from Montgomery, Ward & Company — five for forty-three cents. Many of them dealt with the exploits of Jesse James and other western outlaws. When years later Frank happened to drive through Northfield, Minnesota and saw some signs on buildings pertaining to Jesse James — Northfield was the scene of Jesse's only fiasco, when the Youngers were captured and three other members of the band were killed — it suddenly dawned on him that the Jesse James he had read about as a boy had been a real person. Frank got a biography of J.J., just to see if the real Jesse had been anything like the blood-and-thunder one of the dime novels. That one book led to a flood of others, and in checking back on the real-life career of Jesse James, Frank got tangled in the western history of the Civil War, and from there it was no jump at all to become fascinated by the entire vast and variegated folk lore of the West. Indeed, it is no exaggeration whatever to describe

Frank Gruber as one of the best informed men in captivity on certain phases of Western history. Years ago Frank would think nothing of getting into his car and driving 1000 to 2000 miles to run down a clue on some obscure point in the life of, say, Billy the Kid; and today Frank owns an impressive and extensive collection of Western Americana.

Then there is Frank's other book collecting . . . He has one of the largest collections of Harry Castlemon, and the finest collection of Horatio Alger, Jr. But of these non-murderous matters more later — when we bring you other stories by the many-faceted Frank.

CAT AND MOUSE

by FRANK GRUBER

WHEN I let myself into the apartment Tommy was slouched in the red leather easy chair. I said, "Hello" and he didn't even look up. I tossed my hat on a table, lit a cigarette and sat down on the sofa.

"You're home early and you look like hell," I said, "so you had a fight with Ethel."

He was biting his fingernails. He never uses a nail file because he never has any nails to file. They're always chewed right down to the quick. He kept on biting around at his thumb-nail, but his shaggy eyebrows rose and he looked at me.

"It was our last fight," he said. "We're through. Finished." He laughed. "She tied the can to me."

"Oh, I dunno, Tommy," I said, trying to cheer him up. "You'n her have had spats before. You'll make up."

"Not this time, Hank," he said. "I never told you what most of our fights

have been about. I may as well, now. I've had competition. And the competition won out. She's going to marry him. The big, greasy cluck!"

"Tell me about it," I urged. I figured it'd make him feel better to get it off his chest. I didn't want him to mope around for a week. I've seen his spells before. Me, I'm a cheerful guy. I don't like crepe around the joint.

Tommy examined what's left of his left thumb and started nibbling on the right. "The guy's name is Coch-rane, Bill Coch-rane," he says. "You know me, Hank. I like a quiet movie. I never cared a helluva lot for goin' to a dance hall. But Ethel's nuts about dancing and this Bill Coch-rane bozo practically lives at dance halls. He can even do the big apple or little banana or what-have-you."

I shook my head. "So you been takin' it from her, huh?"

"Yeah. She's been dating this

Cochrane Wednesdays and Sundays and giving me only Saturdays. I couldn't stand it no more last night. I told her she hadda make up her mind which one of us she wanted. She said Cochrane."

"So she gave you back the ring?"

"She said Cochrane, but she didn't give back the ring. We had words and I walked out on her. The hell with the ring. She can keep it."

"Well, Tommy," I said, "I only met Ethel a couple of times, but to tell you the truth I coulda told you you two couldn't have hit it off. So maybe it's just as well."

"Yeah, Hank," he agreed, but his face got even longer, "I know that, but I really went for her and it hurts."

Well, the next day was Sunday and Tommy moped around all day. I laid low most of the day, even sitting through a double feature movie, plus Mickey Mouse and newsreel, in the evening.

When I got home he had the smoke in the place so thick you could cut it with a knife. He'd moved from the red leather chair to the sofa, but otherwise he looked just the same. Still grouching. . . .

I got the mail in the morning — Monday. There was a little package for Tommy. He was dressing to go to work and looking a little better but when he saw the little box his pan fell again.

"The ring," he said, "she's mailed it back to me." He opened the package and sure enough it was the ring. There was a little typed note with it, too.

He read it out loud: "'Give it to the next one. My finger was turning green anyway! Green! Why the ——!'"

He threw the ring across the room and it hit the wall and bounced back to the other side. I spotted where it fell and after a minute picked it up. Then I took it to the bedroom and dropped it in his dresser drawer. After all, I knew he paid \$75.00 for the thing and no use letting the maid pick it up with the vacuum sweeper.

Well, I went off to the mail-order house where I've got a job. I figured Tommy's gone to work, too, but when I got back to the flat around six thirty, he was parked on the sofa again.

"What the hell?" I asked. "Didn't you go to work?"

"No," he said, "I called 'em up and told 'em I was sick."

"Over a dame," I snorted. "Come on, Tommy, pull yourself together. She wasn't worth that."

"I know it," he said. "But I can't help it. I'm that way, Hank."

Then this guy pounded the door from outside. Tommy didn't even look toward it, so I went over and opened it. I didn't recognize him from Tommy's description because he was really not a bad-looking sort at all.

"Tom Flood live here?" he asked.

Tommy got up when he heard the voice. He said, "What the hell, Cochrane, what you want here?"

Oh-oh, so it was Bill Cochrane, the successful rival. He came into the

living-room and I let the door swing shut. I figured maybe I better hang around. Cochrane was a pretty husky fellow. Weighed more than Tommy, but in the mood Tommy was in he'd probably try climbing this guy's frame and get his ears knocked down. And after all, a pal's a pal.

"I came to talk to you about Ethel," this Cochrane said.

"What for?" snapped Tommy. "She gave me the gate, didn't she? What more do you want? She's all yours."

"Is she? You were out with her Saturday night, weren't you?" Cochrane looked kind of funny at Tommy.

Tommy snorted. "I wasn't out with her. I was up to her place and she told me off. Said she was goin' to go steady with you from now on. So what? You come around here to crow about it?"

"No. I came to find out where Ethel is."

Tommy blinked at Cochrane. "What?" he asked, surprised. "Why, you oughtta know more about that than me. Sunday night's yours, isn't it?"

"It was. I had a date with her last night. But she wasn't home. I hung around all evening and she didn't show up. This morning I asked her landlady and she said she didn't see her all day yesterday. That's why I came here."

"Now, wait a minute," Tommy said. "Let's get this straight. Ethel stood you up. Well, she wasn't home anyway. So you come to see me.

Why? I told you she threw me over, didn't I?"

"Yeah," said Bill Cochrane. "But she told me lots of things about you. She said you was screwy. I know damn well she was scared stiff of you."

I didn't blame Tommy for getting mad then. In fact, I was getting kind of sore at this Cochrane guy anyway. Tommy started for him. "Why, you greasy, dancin' —" he began. Then he stopped and a funny look came over his face. I looked at Cochrane and he had a rod in his fist!

"Easy, Flood!" Cochrane said. "You come too close and I'll give you a dose of this."

I figured it was time to put in my two-cents' worth. "Put away the roscoe, mug. Where do you think you are?"

"I dunno," replied Cochrane. "But Ethel's told me things about this guy here and I bring along the gun just in case he tried to get funny with *me*."

"Nuts," I said. "I've known Tommy for years. You don't need no gun to talk with him. Put it away. I know you two don't like each other, being stuck on the same girl, but you can talk it over without fireworks, can't you?"

Cochrane gave me the once-over, then put the gun in his coat pocket. But he kept his hand close to it. "All right, Flood, let's talk it over — without the rough stuff. You were the last one to see Ethel."

Tommy went back to the sofa. "I saw her Saturday night. But I left her about ten. She broke our engage-

ment — yeah, on account of you, she said. All right, I came home. Hank knows that. I was here when he got in around eleven thirty. Then this morning, she mails me back the ring."

"That's right," I chimed in. "I saw him open it. She wrote a note with it."

"I got it," said Tommy.

"I'll take your word for that — for the moment," said Cochrane. "But Mrs. Kleinman, her landlady, says she wasn't in her room at all yesterday."

"Maybe she spent the day with some girl friend," Tommy said.

Cochrane shook his head. "No, I called up this Peggy who works with her at the dime store. She didn't see Ethel all day yesterday. And she didn't show up for work today."

"That's nothing. I didn't go to work either. After all — well, me and her went together almost a year. Naturally it sorta busts you up. Maybe she felt the same way."

"And for that she should get her pay docked?" snapped Bill Cochrane. "Hell, Ethel's measly twenty-five bucks a week didn't give her a chance to save any dough. She had a hard time payin' her room rent and gettin' her meals out of it."

"Yeah, I know," admitted Tommy. "I bought her a lot of stuff for Christmas. Stockings, underwear. . . ."

Then Bill Cochrane busted wide open. Which if Tommy'd stopped to think, he'd known he would. No guy likes to think of his girl havin' had

another guy buy underwear for her.

"You dirty —" Cochrane yelled and started for Tommy. This time I stopped it. I jumped in front of Cochrane and pushed him back. "Take it easy, pal!" I gave him. "Tommy and her was engaged. They were goin' to be married one time."

Cochrane eased off. "All right, she had hard luck. A lousy, cheap job. Not much chance to meet the right sort of fellas. So she let herself be engaged. All right. But she talked to me about this guy and look — if I don't get any satisfaction I'm going to the cops."

"What?" exclaimed Tommy and me both.

"You heard me," Cochrane said grimly. "I know what I know and I got my suspicions. Ethel's disappeared. And I know she didn't leave all her stuff in her room and hop a train to Florida or Hollywood. She's gone, and I want to know where she is. If I don't find out, the cops will."

Tommy got up again and I talked quick to Cochrane. "Now, wait a minute, pardner. Are you hinting that Tommy might, well — that he *did* something to this Ethel?"

"I'm not hinting," Cochrane came back. "Not any more. I'm saying it out loud. Ethel told me what a screwball this mug was. I know she was scared of him and I don't like the set-up none a-tall. I'm tellin' you —"

By this time I couldn't hold Tommy back any more. He was frothing at the mouth and trying to get at Bill Cochrane. I had to wrestle around

with him a while and when I finally got him down on the sofa, Cochrane had skipped, leaving the door wide open.

I walked across and closed the door. Then I came back to Tommy. "Tommy," I said, "that guy meant it. He's gone to call the cops."

"Let him," Tommy howled. "I ain't seen Ethel since Saturday night. And say — was that guy meaning that maybe I knocked off Ethel? Why the —"

I calmed him down. He even went and combed his hair and put on his coat, so he wouldn't look so wild. And then Cochrane came back. Yeah, with a cop. A dick.

Tommy held himself in pretty well. The detective, after all, had merely a routine report to go on and he treated Tommy pretty well. He asked him some questions which Tommy answered and after a while asked Tommy if he's willing to come down to Headquarters and let the captain ask some more questions. They didn't seem to want me along, so I stuck around the apartment.

The thing was goofy, of course. This Ethel dame had got herself all worked up over her love affairs and had chucked things and headed for places unknown — probably for her home, I figured. Tommy told me one time she'd come from out West.

I emptied the ashtrays that Tommy had filled up during the day, straightened up the place a little. For no reason at all I looked through Tommy's

dresser drawer and discovered he'd located the ring he'd tossed around that morning. Anyway, it wasn't there. He probably had it in his vest pocket.

I was straightening things out in the closet when I came across some of Tommy's tools. I didn't think much about it at the time. Tommy was a sheet-metal worker and lots of times he went out on a job. When he finished around quitting time, he usually brought his tools home with him and took them down to the shop again in the morning.

After about an hour Tommy came home. He was feeling more chipper than I'd seen him since before Saturday night. "Well, what happened?" I asked.

"What could happen? The cops ask me a lot of questions and I give them the answers. The greaseball gives them a song-and-dance about Ethel having told him I'd threatened to kill her. Can you imagine the nut?"

"What about her?" I asked. "The bunch of you figure out where she's gone?"

He shrugged. "I gave them her home address. She comes from a jerk-water town in Iowa. She lived there with her aunt. Her folks are dead. They're going to telephone and ask if she's come there. The flatfoot who was here's going to snoop around her room and ask down at the dime store. About the time they get through with that Ethel'll walk in and ask them what the hell they think they're doing."

We left it at that. Then the dick came around when I got home from work the next day with the information that they haven't been able to get any information. Ethel Kennard hadn't gone home to Iowa; they'd telephoned. Her aunt said she hadn't even heard from Ethel in two years. Ethel was sore at her. The girls at the dime store didn't know anything about her. Bill Cochrane hadn't heard a whisper from her.

Well, girls disappear in a big city every day. I read a story about them once. It was called *Missing Girls*, or something. It was about white slavery and such. I didn't tell Tommy about this though. He was feeling chipper again. Had gone to work.

Then, on Wednesday morning, came this other package. Tommy opened it and unfolded another note. "Listen to this!" he yelled. "It's from Ethel!" He read:

"I found this Woolworth cigarette case you gave me on my birthday and I don't want anything of yours to remind me of you. Put it with the ring."

The cigarette case was wrapped in tissue paper and when he started to open it I grabbed his arm. "Wait a minute; don't touch it! That thing's chromium and it'll hold prints. Give it to the cops!"

"Aw, now look, Hank," he said, "the cops aren't going to bother me any more, are they?"

"You can't tell about them," I said, shaking my head. "If Ethel

mailed that to you, her fingerprints'll be on it. And say—"I made a dive for the wrapping paper he'd dropped to the floor.

"There's no return address on this, but it's postmarked Milwaukee."

"Milwaukee!" he yelled.

I went with him to the precinct house. Lieutenant Jacobsen, the dick that came to our place with Cochrane, took the cigarette case and looked it over.

"Mmm," he said, "there're prints all right, but what good are they?"

"Why, they'll prove that Ethel handled the case, won't they?" asked Tommy.

"Sure, but the return address says she's in Milwaukee. So what? She went to Milwaukee. That isn't against the law, is it?"

I saw his point. If she was in Milwaukee she was alive. And so it wasn't a police case. If a girl jilts one man for another, then decides what the hell, she don't even want the other, then to keep from being annoyed goes to a city ninety miles away, so what? It's a free country.

We got back to the apartment, picking up a bite of supper on the way. In the lobby of the building this guy Cochrane was waiting for us. He was alone, but his right coat pocket was sagging again.

"Now what, Bad News?" Tommy snapped at him.

"Let's talk some more," Cochrane came back at him. "Upstairs."

Tommy would've just as soon argued it out with him downstairs, but

me, I saw the supe sticking out his long ears from around the elevator shaft, and I hustled the two of them up to our living-room and bedroom on the fourth floor.

When we got inside, Cochrane began: "Lieutenant Jacobsen phoned me a few minutes ago. Said you'd got a cigarette case from Ethel. Let's see it."

Tommy digs it out of his pocket. The lieutenant hadn't even wanted to keep it. "And the paper, too," said Tommy.

"The address is typed," Cochrane said. "So's the letter. *You* could have mailed the package yourself."

Tommy began to get red in the face. I tried to head him off. "Just for the sake of argument, Tommy, let's say you could have mailed the package, except that it's postmarked in Milwaukee yesterday and you were at work all day. See, Cochrane?"

"I see," said Cochrane. "Except he wasn't at work yesterday. I trailed him from here at seven thirty in the morning, followed him out to Lincoln Park, then downtown. I lost him at the Public Library. He could have got over to the North Shore Railway, taken it to Milwaukee, and been back by six in the afternoon."

"I could have, but I didn't, wise guy," Tommy sneered. "I knew you was following me all the time and I went to the State-Lake Theater after I shook you off."

I didn't say anything now. Tommy hadn't exactly told me he hadn't been to work on Tuesday, but I got the

impression that he had. It seemed to me, too, that the apartment got a little colder.

Then Tommy handed the cigarette case, still wrapped in the tissue paper, to Cochrane. "All right, Smarty, try your detective stuff on this. Lieutenant Jacobsen didn't care to. But go ahead, dust the case with powder and check on the prints. You'll find that mine aren't on it. And those on it *are* Ethel's."

Cochrane looked at Tommy through narrowed eyelids, then took the case carefully, so's not to touch it with his own fingers. "I'm not a fingerprint expert myself, but I think I'll just take this along, if you're quite sure you want me to have it."

"If it'll keep your ugly map away from here, you're welcome to it," said Tommy. "Take it back to the cops. Maybe they've got some of Ethel's prints from her room. Have them compare them with this case. And then let me to hell alone."

Tommy began chewing his nails again while I wandered around the apartment. I looked in the closet in our room. Why, I don't know. I'd lived with Tommy in this dump for over a year. I figured I knew him pretty well.

But his tool kit wasn't in the closet.

I came out into the living-room. "If you weren't working yesterday, Tommy, how come your tools are gone?"

Tommy looked at me all of a sudden, and somehow or other I didn't

feel so good at the moment. He didn't answer very quick and when he did he wasn't biting his nails.

"Now, Hank," he said then. "You're not going to start asking questions like Cochrane?"

"No," I answered. "Only I noticed you had your tools home and they're gone now. And you haven't been to work since last week."

Then Tommy got sore. "Hank, I'm not feeling so good as it is. I hate people who mistrust me. If that's the way you feel, all right. I'll pack my duds and get out of here."

I couldn't keep the apartment alone on my \$27.00 a week. Tommy knew it. But things had been getting on my nerves lately. I got plenty tired of Tommy sitting around biting his fingernails and moping and his eyes staring at me every time I happened to look in his direction.

So I said, "If that's the way you feel, Tommy. . . ."

He jumped up from the red leather chair and snapped up the classified phone directory. He looked around for a while, then got the phone and called a number.

"Hello, Ajax Express? Can you send a wagon around to 24 East Armitage? Yeah, Apartment 4-B. A trunk, yeah, big wardrobe. O. K. Right away."

He hung up and looked at me. "I'm packing. If you think I'm going to swipe any of your stuff, come on, watch me."

"Nix, Tommy," I said. "We've roomed together over a year. If we

bust up, we don't have to fight."

That cooled him off. He went into the bedroom and got out a suitcase. He packed his shirts and underwear in it, then unlocked that big wardrobe trunk of his and put in some stuff. He even asked me to give him a hand in lifting out the compartment. I gave him a hand and saw that the big section underneath was almost filled up.

After a while he had the trunk and the suitcase packed and about that time the express man knocked.

Tommy let him in. He was a big, husky fellow. "In the bedroom," he told the expressman.

The expressman went into the bedroom. I heard him grunt and then the thump of the trunk as he raised it up on end. Silence a moment, then he exclaimed, "For the love Mike, this thing is heavy."

Tommy went to the bedroom. "I got my books in it, that's all. What's the matter, you weak?"

I watched them carry the thing out of the door, to the elevator. Tommy came back for his suitcase.

"Any mail comes for me, Hank," he said, "I'll be at the Sorenson."

I just nodded. He looked around, half saluted and said, "So long."

I lit a cigarette and it tasted like dried cabbage leaves. I threw it away. It was getting dark in the room and I put on the lights, all of them.

I went to the bedroom and thought about sleeping in my bed tonight. It didn't appeal to me so much. I said out loud, "What the hell?" and went

to the closet for my own suitcase.

I didn't hear the outside door open, but all of a sudden Tommy was in the doorway of the bedroom. He said, "You movin' too, Hank?"

I guess I almost swallowed my tonsils. Tommy was grinning at me. "I changed my mind about moving to the Sorenson," he said. "I had the expressman take both my trunk and suitcase to the Union Depot."

He knew, all right. I knew that he knew and there wasn't any use playing the cat and mouse game. "You told the expressman the trunk was heavy because it was full of books," I said. "But you didn't have any books, Tommy."

"He caught me by surprise, Hank," Tommy said, still grinning. "The book thing popped out. I saw that you got it. And that tool stuff — you were already getting wise. You know what's in that trunk. . . ."

I'd been fairly sure the last fifteen minutes. Tommy was a sheet metal worker. He'd been home on Monday. He could have made a sheet-metal box to fit inside his trunk, solder it shut, airproof, then toss clothes in on top of the box . . . after what was put into the box.

"So you killed her," I said, hoarsely. "You killed her and brought her body up the back way Saturday night. And you kept it in the trunk all day Sunday. Then Monday you made the sheet-metal box."

"That's very good, Hank," Tommy said. "You got it all figured out. And Tuesday I ran up to Milwaukee and

mailed myself the cigarette case. Put the fingerprints on it, too, up there."

That didn't sink in for a minute, but when it did I yelped. "No, you musta had the fingerprints on it before you went to Milwaukee."

"No," grinned Tommy. He reached into his vest pocket and the light flashed on the diamond ring he pulled out. But I didn't even see the ring. I saw only the thing the ring's around.

Ethel's finger.

I almost keeled over and then Tommy yanked out the blackjack and came toward me.

Statement by Lieutenant Jacobsen:

If Sergeant Wilkins hadn't been out for his dinner I probably wouldn't have got into the case at all. But I'm watching the desk when this William Cochrane comes in and makes the complaint about the girl, Ethel Kennard, being missing and he suspects foul play.

The guy Cochrane suspects is using the name of Thomas Flood and he's living with a fellow named Henry Bradshaw. Bradshaw's a husky, clean-cut young fellow and looks O. K. to me. I wouldn't have tied up Flood with Glen Waters except that he was a sheet-metal worker, too. Anyway, the Glen Waters affair is four years old. He'd been smart even then and wiped off that casket in which we found the Tolliver girl, so we didn't even have fingerprints.

But when I learn that Flood's a sheet-metal worker too, and began to mull over the similarity in the names

— Flood-Waters — and remember that Waters had a phobia about water, always taking two-three baths a day, I get interested.

Of course, there wasn't anything on which to hold Flood. I let him go, without arousing any suspicions. I went to the cheap lodging house where the girl, Ethel Kennard, had roomed. I went over it with a fine-comb. I got plenty of her prints, but even though Flood was supposed to have visited her on Saturday I didn't find a single one of his prints.

She didn't have much in the way of clothes. Her suitcase was there. Her bed was mussed, as if she'd slept in it Saturday night, but I knew she hadn't.

Well, there still wasn't anything to go by. She *might* have just lit out without taking any clothes. There wasn't anything I could do except put a tail on Flood. And wait.

Clancy picked him up Tuesday morning. This Cochrane was shadowing him at the same time. Which mussed up the thing. Cochrane got in the way and when Flood lost Cochrane, Clancy lost him at the same time. But when Clancy saw him coming home in the afternoon, he didn't have the package with him.

I was plenty sore about losing that package, but later I discovered it held only his tools. He'd already had the ring mailed to himself. For some reason he wanted to get rid of the tools, probably to make his roommate think he'd been at work that day.

Well, during Tuesday I checked at

the factory where Flood worked. The foreman told me he hadn't been on the job since Friday.

I still didn't have enough to go by to make the pinch. Then on Wednesday he came in with the cigarette case. It was all I could do to keep from grabbing him then, but to be on the safe side I let him go — even take the case with him. It wasn't evidence. He'd probably made sure about the prints and all. But I chased Cochrane back there to worry Flood some more.

It worked. Flood called the express company to take away his trunk. Detective Moynahan took the driver's place. Then, at the last minute, Flood changed the address and gave Moynahan the suitcase, too. He told him to check both at the Union Depot. Then he tore back into the apartment.

I knew what that meant and followed. I had a little trouble getting the door open but when I heard the noise inside I put my shoulder to the door. And there he was — the ring and the finger in one hand, and in the other, a blackjack, whaling away at this Henry Bradshaw.

It was a close call at that. Perhaps I shouldn't have let it go as far as I did, but how was I to guess about that finger? That he'd cut it off with the ring on Saturday night and was carrying it around in his vest pocket all that while. Why, if we'd searched him Monday night when we had him at the station for questioning. . . . I wonder what he thought when he bit his own fingers to the bone, like the coroner said. . . .

Here, at long last, is the first Inspector Maigret short story to be published in the United States — a genuinely important detectival event which your Editors are both happy and honored to have entrepreneured. True, the first Maigret short is not a brilliant stroke of deductive reasoning — brilliance of deduction is not Maigret's long suit. Indeed, we don't want Maigret to become an infallible logician; we don't want a scintillatingly inspired or intuitional Maigret. By all means, let us continue to have the slow, heavy, plodding, tormented Maigret, the Maigret of inexhaustible patience, the Maigret of inextinguishable persistence . . .

Which reminds us of a pertinent parody of Maigret, as written by Renée Gaudin in *LA MORT SE LÈVE À 22 HEURES* (DEATH GETS UP AT 10 O'CLOCK), published in Paris by Jean-Renard in 1943 — and remember, only the truly great suffer the slings and arrows of burlesque:

"Sosthène Serpolet, unpublished mystery novelist and amateur detective, is brooding: 'What would Inspector Maigret have done in my place?'

"He would have walked up and down for three hours in front of the cheap hotel where the crime took place, his pipe functioning at full steam. He would have come back the next day and the day after that. He would have had a beer at the bar on the corner, then gone down, through a thick fog, to the banks of the Seine. There he would have questioned the barge-men.

"Whereupon the criminal, seeing the vise screwed tighter and tighter, would have rushed to Headquarters to confess, unless he preferred (still in a thick fog) to hang himself on the tree across from the hotel."

It is significant, it seems to us, that the only two other fictional sleuths who are similarly impaled by Renée Gaudin's sharp pen are Sherlock Holmes and Philo Vance . . . Yes, the weary, grunting, irritated, exasperated, hesitating, ruminating, stubborn, solemn Maigret is one of our truly great gumshoes, striking and powerful for all his stolid solidity.

STAN THE KILLER

by GEORGES SIMENON

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

MAIGRET puffed at his pipe as he walked along slowly, hands clasped behind his back. It was not a simple matter to push his heavy body through the morning mob in the Rue Saint-Antoine, where a bright sun

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poured down on carts and baskets of fruits and vegetables, blocking almost the entire width of the sidewalk.

It was marketing-time — the time for feeling artichokes and tasting cherries, the time for scallops and chops to take turns in the scales.

"Fine asparagus, five francs a bundle!"

"Get your fresh whiting, just come in!"

Clerks in white aprons, butchers in fine checks; the smell of cheese from a dairy shop and farther off a whiff of roasting coffee; the ping of cash registers and the rumble of a bus; the distrustful glances of housewives — all the agitated business of alimentation . . . and in the midst of it the slow heavy progress of Maigret, on one of his most tormenting cases.

Across from the Rue de Birague there's a little café, with a scant three tables in front of it, called the *Barrel of Burgundy*. There Maigret settled himself, like any other weary passerby. He did not even look up at the tall thin waiter who came for his order. "Small white Mâcon," he muttered — and who was to guess that this occasionally inept new waiter at the *Barrel of Burgundy* was otherwise known as Detective Janvier?

The waiter returned with the wine precariously balanced on a tray. He wiped the table with a questionable cloth, and was even so clumsy as to drop a scrap of paper on the floor. Maigret picked it up as he left, and read:

The woman's gone out marketing. No sign of One-Eye. The Beard left early. The three others must be still in the hotel.

At ten in the morning the crowd was getting even worse. Next to the *Barrel*, a grocery was having a sale and barkers kept-entreating the passersby to sample cookies at two francs a box.

At the corner of the Rue de Birague you could see the sign of a dingy hotel, "Rooms by the month, the week or the day. Payment in advance." With doubtless intentional irony this rat-trap had chosen to call itself the *Beauséjour*.

Maigret sipped at his light dry white wine and stared apparently aimlessly at the teeming crowd in the spring sun. But his gaze soon settled on a window in the first floor of a house in the Rue de Birague opposite the hotel. At that window a little old man sat by a canary's cage and seemed to have no interest in life but to bask in the sun so long as the Lord should deign to leave him alive.

And this old gentleman, who took no notice of Maigret, was Sergeant Lucas, deftly aged some twenty years.

All this constituted a state of siege which is more vulgarly known to the police as a stake-out. It had lasted six days, and at least twice a day the Inspector came around for the latest news. At night his men were relieved by a patrolman, who was actually a detective from the Judiciary Police, and a wench who contrived to walk the streets without ever picking up a customer.

Maigret would have Lucas's report in a moment, by telephone; it would undoubtedly prove to be no more sensational than Janvier's.

The crowd shoved by so close to the tiny terrace of the *Barrel of Burgundy* that Maigret found himself constantly obliged to pull his legs back under his chair. And now, as he made one of these shifts, he suddenly realized that a man had sat down unnoticed at the same table. He was a little man, with red hair and sad eyes, whose mournful face had something of the clown about it.

"You again?" the Inspector grunted.

"I beg you to forgive me, Monsieur Maigrette, but I am certain that you will eventually come to understand me and to accept the proposition which I —" He broke off to say to the waiterly Janvier, "The same as my friend."

He had an extremely marked Polish accent. He presumably suffered from throat trouble; he constantly chewed at a "cigar" impregnated with creosote, which emphasized the clownishness of his appearance.

"You're getting on my nerves!" Maigret burst out. "Will you kindly tell me how you knew I'd come here this morning?"

"I did not know."

"Then why are you here? Are you going to try to convince me that this is an accidental meeting?"

"No."

The little man's reflexes were as leisurely as those of the slow-motion

acrobats in vaudeville. His yellow eyes gazed around him, staring into emptiness. He spoke in a sad voice, unvarying in pitch, as though perpetually offering condolences.

"You are not nice to me, Monsieur Maigrette."

"That isn't answering my question. How do you happen to be here this morning?"

"I followed you."

"From Headquarters?"

"Long before that. From your home."

"So you admit you're spying on me?"

"I am not spying on you, Monsieur Maigrette. I have far too much respect and admiration for you! I have already stated to you that I shall one day be your collaborator . . ."

And he sighed nostalgically, contemplating the artificial ash of painted wood which tipped his creosote cigar.

There'd been nothing about it in any of the papers save one; and that one, which had got the tip the Lord knows where, uniquely complicated the Inspector's task.

The police have reason to believe that the Polish bandits, including Stan the Killer, are at this moment in Paris.

It was true enough, but silence would have been more helpful.

In four years a gang of unknown Poles had attacked five farms, always in the North of France, always with the same methods.

In each case it was an isolated farm, run by elderly people. The crime invariably took place the night of a market day; and the chosen victims were always those who had sold a good number of fowls and animals and had a large sum of cash on hand.

Nothing scientific about the procedure. Brutal attack, as in the days of the highway robbers. Absolute contempt for human life. These Poles were killers. They killed every human being they found on the farm, even down to the children; it was the one way of making sure they could never be identified.

Were there two of them? Or five, or eight?

In every case neighbors had noticed a small truck. One twelve-year-old claimed he had seen a one-eyed man. Some asserted that the bandits wore black masks.

Whatever the facts, one thing was certain: Every inhabitant of each farm had had his throat sliced.

This was no business of the Paris police. This was up to the mobile units in the provinces, who worked on it for two years without remotely clarifying the mystery — a failure which did not reassure the countryside.

Then a report came in from Lille, where whole villages are Polish enclaves in French territory. The report was vague enough; it was impossible even to establish its ultimate source.

"The Poles say that this is Stan the Killer's gang . . ."

But when the police tried to question the coal miners one by one, the men had never heard of it, or muttered, "Well, they told me . . ."

"Who's 'they'?"

"I don't know. I forget . . ."

Then came the crime near Rheims. There the gang overlooked a servant girl sleeping in the attic, who became the first survivor. She had heard the murderers talking in a language she thought was Polish. She had seen their masks through a hole in the boards; and had noticed that one of the men had only one eye and that another, a giant of a man, was extraordinarily hairy.

And so the police had come to refer to them as "Stan the Killer," "The Beard," and "One-Eye."

For months nothing more turned up, until a detective on the hotel squad made a discovery. His territory was the Saint-Antoine district, which teems with Poles. And in a hotel in the Rue de Birague he observed a suspicious group which included a one-eyed man and a giant whose face was literally covered with hair.

They were seemingly poor people. The bearded giant and his wife rented a room by the week; but almost every night they gave shelter to several compatriots, sometimes two, sometimes as many as five, and often other Poles rented the adjoining room.

"You want to take this over, Maigret?" the director of the Judiciary Police suggested.

Everything was strictly hush-hush — and so the next day one newspaper

printed the story. The day after that Maigret found a letter in his mail — clumsily written in an almost childish hand, full of misspellings, on the cheap sort of paper sold in grocery stores:

You won't ever get Stan. Look out. Before you can take him, he'll have time to kill off plenty more.

The letter was no hoax, Maigret was certain; it *felt* right. It had the filthy aftertaste of the underworld.

"Be careful," the chief recommended. "Don't rush into an arrest. The man who's cut sixteen throats in four years won't hesitate to scatter a few bullets around him when he sees he's done for."

Which was why Janvier had become a waiter and Lucas a basking old man.

The noisy life of the quarter went on with no suspicion that a desperate man might at any moment start firing in all directions . . .

And then Michael Ozep appeared.

His first meeting with Maigret had been four days ago. He had arrived at Headquarters and insisted on seeing the Inspector personally. Maigret had let him wait a good two hours; but the little man was undaunted. He entered the office, clicked his heels, bowed, and extended his hand:

"Michael Ozep, former officer in the Polish army, now professor of gymnastics in Paris —"

"Sit down. I'm listening."

The Pole spoke so volubly and with so pronounced an accent that it was sometimes impossible to follow

him. He explained that he came of very good family, that he had been forced to leave Poland because of unmentionably intimate misfortunes (he allowed his listener to gather that he had been in love with his Colonel's wife), and that he had now sunk to worse depths of despair than ever because he could not accustom himself to leading a mediocre life.

"You understand, Monsieur Maigrette . . ." (it was impossible to wean him from that pronunciation) ". . . I am a gentleman. Here I am forced to give lessons to individuals of no culture and no education. I am a poor man . . . I have decided to commit suicide."

"A nut . . ." Maigret thought to himself. An astonishing number of the unbalanced feel the need of confiding their problems to the police; he was used to such visits.

"I tried it three weeks ago. I threw myself into the Seine from the Austerlitz bridge, but the river squad saw me and pulled me out."

Maigret invented a pretext to step into the next office and phone the river squad. The story was true.

"Six days later I tried to kill myself with illuminating gas, but the post-man came with a letter and opened the door . . ."

A phone call to the police station in Ozep's district. And again the story was true.

"I truly *want* to kill myself, do you understand? My existence has lost all value. A gentleman cannot consent to live in poverty and mediocrity.

Therefore I thought that you might have need of a man like me . . ."

"For what?"

"To help you to arrest Stan the Killer."

Maigret frowned. "You know him?"

"No. I have only heard talk about him. As a Pole, I am indignant that a man of my people should so violate the laws of hospitality. I should like to see Stan and his gang arrested. I know that he is resolved to sell his life dearly. Among those who go to arrest him, some will certainly be killed. Is it not better then that it should be I, since I already desire to die? Tell me where Stan is. I shall go and disarm him. If need be, I shall wound him so that he can do no more harm."

All Maigret found himself capable of saying was the traditional formula, "Leave your address. I'll write you a letter."

Michael Ozep had a furnished room in the Rue des Tournelles, not far from the Rue de Birague. The report of the investigating detective was in his favor. He had indeed been a second lieutenant in the Polish army when it was organized after Poland gained her independence. Then his trail vanished. In Paris he tried to teach gymnastics to the sons and daughters of small merchants. His suicide attempts were genuine.

Nevertheless Maigret sent him, with the chief's approval, an official letter ending:

. . . deeply regret that I cannot take advantage of your generous

proposition, for which my most sincere thanks . . .

Twice since then Ozep had appeared at the Quai des Orfèvres and insisted on seeing the Inspector. The second time he had even refused to leave, claiming that he could wait as long as he was obliged to, and thus almost forcibly occupying, hour after hour, one of the green plush arm-chairs in the waiting-room.

And now Ozep sat there, at Maigret's table, in front of the *Barrel of Burgundy*.

"I wish to prove to you, Monsieur Maigrette, that I am of some use and that you can accept my services. It is now three days that I have been following you, and I am in a position to tell you everything that you have done during that time. I know too that the waiter who just brought my wine is one of your detectives and that there is another at the window across from us, near a canary cage."

Maigret clenched the bit of his pipe furiously between his teeth and kept his eyes turned away from the Pole, who kept on and on in his monotonous voice:

"I understand that when a strange man comes to you and says, 'I am a former officer of the Polish army and I wish to kill myself' — I understand why you would think, 'This may not be true.' But you have verified everything that I have told you. You have seen that I do not stoop to lies . . ."

He was a mill grinding out words, rapidly, jerkily. It wore Maigret out merely to listen to him, especially

since the accent so distorted each syllable that Maigret had to concentrate to follow the sense.

"You are not a Pole, Monsieur Maigrette. You do not speak the language; you do not comprehend the mentality. I earnestly desire to help you; for I cannot see the good name of my native land tarnished by . . ."

The Inspector was beginning to choke with anger. The former second lieutenant could hardly fail to observe the fact, but he continued nevertheless:

"If you try to capture Stan, what will he do? He has maybe two, maybe three revolvers in his pockets. He fires at everybody. Who knows how many ladies he wounds? How many little babies he kills? Then people will say that the police —"

"Will you shut up?"

"Now as for me, I am resolved to die. No one will weep for poor Ozep. You say to me, 'There is Stan!' And I follow him as I have followed you. I wait for the moment when there is no one near us and I say, 'You are Stan the Killer!' Then he fires at me and I shoot him in the leg. By the fact that he shoots me, you have your proof that he is Stan and you are not making a blunder. And since he is crippled by my shot . . ."

There was no stopping him. He would have gone on in spite of the entire universe.

"Supposing I have you arrested?" Maigret broke in crudely.

"Why?"

"To get a little peace!"

"What would you say? What has poor Ozep done in violation of the laws of France which instead he wishes only to defend and for which he is offering up his life?"

"Stuff it!"

"I beg your pardon? Are you agreeing?"

"Not in the least."

At that moment a woman went by; a woman with blonde hair and clear complexion, recognizably a foreigner. She was carrying a shopping bag and was headed for a butcher shop.

Maigret was following her with his eyes when he noticed that his companion had suddenly set to mopping his brow with an enormous handkerchief which all but swallowed up his small-featured face.

"That is the mistress of Stan, is it not?" Ozep asked.

"Will you leave me the blazes alone?"

"You have convinced yourself that this is the mistress of Stan, but you do not know which one is Stan. You think it is the one with the beard. Now the bearded one is called Boris. And the man with one eye is Sasha. He is not a Pole, but a Russian. If you should investigate them yourself you will learn nothing. In the hotel there are only Poles; they will refuse to answer or they will lie to you. Whereas I . . ."

No housewife shopping in the confusion of the Rue Saint-Antoine could suspect the subjects being discussed on the tiny terrace of the *Barrel of Burgundy*. The blonde foreigner was

buying chops at a nearby butcher's stall; in her eyes there was something of that same lassitude that lay in the eyes of Michael Ozep.

"Perhaps you are angry with me because you fear that you may be called to account if I am killed? In the first place, I have no family. In the second place, I have written a letter in which I state that I alone, and purely of my own volition, have sought this death . . ."

Poor Janvier stood on the threshold trying to figure out a way of telling Maigret that there was a telephone message for him. Maigret noticed the ambiguous pantomime, but went on watching the Pole and puffing forth little clouds of pipe smoke.

"Listen, Ozep."

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette?"

"If you're seen again anywhere around the Rue Saint-Antoine, I'll have you arrested!"

"But I live only —"

"You'd better move."

"You are refusing this offer which I —?"

"Get out!"

"But —"

"Get out, or I'll arrest you here and now!"

The little man rose, clicked his heels, bowed almost double, and executed a dignified retreat. Maigret had noticed one of his detectives nearby; now he signaled the man to follow the peculiar professor of gymnastics.

At last Janvier could deliver his message. "Lucas just phoned. He's

spotted that they have guns in the room. Five Poles slept in the next room last night, leaving the door open between. Some of them had to sleep on the floor. Who the devil was that character you were talking to?"

"Nothing . . . How much?"

Janvier slipped back into character, pointing at Ozep's glass. "You're paying monsieur's check? One franc twenty and one twenty makes two forty."

Maigret took a taxi to Headquarters. At the door of his office he found the detective who had set out after Ozep.

"You lost him?" he roared. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? I give you the most childish job of shadowing and you —"

"I didn't lose him," the detective murmured humbly.

"Where is he?"

"Here."

"You pulled him in?"

"He pulled me."

For Ozep had, indeed, headed directly for Headquarters, where he had placidly installed himself and his sandwich in the waiting-room, after announcing that he had an appointment with Inspector "Maigrette."

There're no kudos in paper work; but there may be the solution of a case.

Unwillingly, irritatedly, Maigret was adding up in one report in his own large handwriting the various information obtained in two weeks' siege of the Polish gang.

When he set down the facts in order he could see even more easily how very little they had learned. They did not even know precisely how many individuals belonged to the gang. The earlier reports, from the people who had seen or thought they had seen the bandits near the time of the attacks, stated that there were four of them, sometimes five. It was probable that they had other accomplices, who cased the farms and markets beforehand. That brought the number to six or seven, which seemed to correspond roughly with the number who hung around the nucleus in the Rue de Birague.

There were only three regular tenants, all of whom had filled out their cards according to regulations and displayed passports in perfect order:

1. Boris Saft, the one the police called The Beard, who seemed to live as man and wife with the pale blonde.
2. Olga Tzerewski, 28, born in Vilno.
3. Sasha Vorontsov, known as One-Eye.

Boris the Beard and Olga occupied one room, Sasha One-Eye the next; the door between was always left open.

The young woman did the shopping every morning and cooked the meals on an alcohol stove.

The Beard rarely went out, but spent most of his days stretched on the iron bedstead, reading Polish newspapers which he had one of the gang buy for him at the newspaper kiosk in the Place de la Bastille. Once

the errand boy brought back an American fact-detective magazine in addition to the Polish periodicals. They all read that.

One-Eye went out often, always followed by one of Maigret's detectives. A fact of which he was probably aware, since he never did more than take long walks through Paris, stopping in many bars but never speaking to a soul.

As for the rest, they were what Lucas called "the floating population." People came and went, always the same lot, four or five of them. Olga fed them, and sometimes they slept on the floor overnight. There was nothing odd about this; it happens in all hotels with poor tenants — exiles who get together to rent a room and then put up any of their compatriots they come across.

On the floating population Maigret had a few notes:

1. The Chemist, so called because he had twice visited the Work Exchange to apply for a job in a chemical plant. His clothes were badly worn, but rather well cut. For hours he would wander around the streets of Paris like a man looking for any way to earn a little money; and once, for a whole day, he was employed as a sandwich-man.

2. Spinach, named after the implausible spinach-green hat which seemed even more unlikely in view of his faded pink shirt. Spinach went out particularly in the evenings, when he picked up tips opening car doors in front of the Montmartre bars.

3. Puffy, a fat, wheezy little man, better dressed than the others even if his shoes were not mates.

And there were two others who visited the hotel less regularly; it was hard to say if they belonged to the gang.

Maigret stared at the notes with the exasperated feeling that the most important detail was somehow eluding him. Finally he picked up his pen again and wrote: *These people give the impression of penniless foreigners, looking for any kind of work at all. But there's always vodka in the rooms, and sometimes impressive spreads of food. Maybe the gang knows it's being watched, and is putting on an act for the police. If one of them is Stan the Killer, it is probably either The Beard or One-Eye. But this is only guesswork.*

It was without the least enthusiasm that he brought his report to the chief.

"Nothing new?"

"Nothing specific. I'd swear the rascals have spotted one of our men and are simply amusing themselves seeing how often they can come in and go out on innocent errands. They know we can't keep a large section of the force mobilized on their account forever. Time's on their side; they have lots of it . . ."

"You have a plan?"

"Look, chief. You know that ideas and I haven't been on speaking terms for a long time. I come and I go and I sniff around. You'll hear people say I'm waiting for inspiration; they're way off the track. What I'm waiting

for is the one significant happening that never fails to turn up. The whole thing is being there when it does turn up so that I can take advantage of it."

"So you're waiting for a . . . happening?" the chief smiled. He knew his man.

"This much I'm convinced of: This is the Polish gang. Because of that fool of a reporter who keeps hanging around here picking up scraps of conversation, they're on their guard. Now what I want to know is, why did Stan write to me? Maybe because he knows the police always hesitate to make a forcible arrest? More probably out of sheer bravado. These killers have their pride — you might almost say, professional pride. But which of them is Stan? And why that nickname? It's more American than Polish.

"You know how I take my time before I reach any conclusions. Well, it's beginning to come . . . The last two or three days I've begun to get the feel of the psychology of these boys. Very different from French murderers.

"They need money, not to retire to the country, or to have a fling in the night spots, or to clear out to foreign parts — but just simply to live their own lives, which to them means doing nothing, eating, drinking, sleeping, spending your days stretched out on a bed, smoking cigarettes, and killing bottles of vodka. And they have this longing to be together — to dream together, gossip together, some nights sing together.

"The way I see it, after their first crime they lived like this until the money ran out; then they got ready for another job. Whenever the funds are low, they start in again, coldly, without remorse, without a trace of pity for the old people whose throats they cut — and whose life's savings they eat up in a few weeks or months . . . And now that I've got the feel of it, I'm waiting —"

"I know. For the happening . . ." the director smiled.

"Joke about it all you want. Just the same the happening may be here already."

"Where?"

"In the waiting-room. The little man who calls me Maigrette and who wants at all costs to help in the arrest, even if it costs him his skin. He claims it's just another method of suicide."

"A crackpot?"

"Could be. Or an accomplice of Stan's who's using this method of keeping in touch with what we're doing. Any hypothesis fits; that's what makes my character with the creosote cigar so fascinating."

Maigret emptied his pipe by tapping it gently on the window ledge, so that the ashes fell somewhere on the Quai des Orfèvres, perhaps on the hat of a passerby.

"He bothers me, that little man," he added. "I've seen his face somewhere. It's not in our files, but I've seen it. And I've seen the girl, too, the blonde; she's worth remembering. None of the others. Just those two."

The director of the Judiciary Police leaned forward. "We've been going on the assumption that the blonde is Stan's mistress. You associate her and the little man. You see the possible implication?"

"That my little man is Stan himself? Could be."

"Are you going to accept this man's offer?"

"I think so." The Inspector headed for the door. He felt he'd said enough. "You'll see, chief. I'll be amazed if we still need the stake-out by the end of this week."

And this was Thursday afternoon.

"Sit down! Doesn't it get on your nerves to suck at that filthy creosote cigar all day?"

"No, Monsieur Maigrette."

"That 'Maigrette' of yours is beginning to get me . . . But anyway; let's get down to business. Are you still set on dying?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette."

"And you still want to be entrusted with a perilous mission?"

"I wish to help you to arrest Stan the Killer."

"So if I told you to go up to One-Eye and fire a bullet into his leg, you'd do it?"

"Yes, Monsieur Maigrette. But you would first have to give me a revolver. I am a poor man and —"

"Now suppose I tell you to go to The Beard or One-Eye and say you have important information — that the police are coming to arrest them?"

"Gladly, Monsieur Maigrette. I shall wait until One-Eye passes by in the street and then I shall perform my commission."

The lowering gaze of the Inspector had no effect on the little Pole. Rarely had Maigret seen a man who combined such self-assurance with such utter serenity. Michael Ozep spoke of killing himself or of visiting the Polish gang as simply, as naturally, as he might refer to brushing his teeth. He was as much at ease in police headquarters as in the *Barrel of Burgundy*.

"You've never met either of them?"

"No, Monsieur Maigrette."

"All right. I'm going to give you the job. And if there's any trouble, it's on your head." Maigret lowered his eyelids to conceal his too sharp interest in the other's reaction. "In a minute we'll go together to the Rue Saint-Antoine. I'll wait for you outside. You'll go up to the room, picking a time when the woman is there alone. You'll tell her you're a fellow Pole and you happened by chance to learn that the police are raiding the hotel tonight . . ."

Ozep said nothing.

"You understand?"

"Yes."

"It's all set?"

"I must confess something to you, Monsieur Maigrette . . ."

"You're turning yellow?"

"Yellow? I do not under — ah! yes. No, I am not turning yellow. But I should prefer to arrange the matter in a different way. You may think

that I am taking much upon myself . . . is that how I say it? But I am a timid man with the ladies. And the ladies are intelligent, far more intelligent than we men. Therefore, she will see that I am lying. And because I know that she will see that I am lying, I shall blush. And when I blush . . ."

Maigret sat motionless, absorbing this unlikely explanation.

"I should prefer to talk to a man. To the one with the beard, if you like, or the one you call One-Eye, or anyone at all . . ."

A ray of sunlight pierced slantwise through the office and lit full on Maigret's face. He seemed to be dozing, like a man whose injudiciously heavy lunch obliges him to take a siesta at his desk.

"It is exactly the same thing, Monsieur Maigrette . . ."

But Monsieur Maigrette did not answer. The only sign that he was still alive was the slim blue spiral which rose from his pipe.

"I am desolated. You can ask of me what you wish; but you demand precisely the one thing which —"

"Stuff it!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I say, 'Stuff it!' Which means, in French, to shut up. Where did you know the woman Olga Tzerewski?"

"I?"

"Answer me!"

"I do not understand what you mean . . ."

"Answer me!"

"I do not know this woman. If I knew her, I would tell you so. I am a

former officer of the Polish army and if I had not suffered misfortunes —”

“Where did you know her?”

“I swear to you, Monsieur Maigrette, by the head of my sainted mother and my poor father —”

“Where did you know her?”

“Why have you suddenly stopped being nice to me? You talk to me so brutally! To me who came here to place myself at your disposal, to prevent Frenchmen from being murdered by a compatriot —”

“Cut the pitch!”

“Pitch?”

“Sales talk, to you. You aren’t selling me.”

“Ask anything of me, no matter what —”

“That’s what I’m doing!”

“Ask me anything else — to throw myself under a subway train —”

“I’m asking you to go see that woman and tell her that we’ll make a raid tonight.”

“You insist?”

“Take it or leave it.”

“And if I refuse?”

“Then you’d better see to it that I never lay eyes on you again.”

“Are you really going to arrest the gang tonight?”

“Probably.”

“And you will allow me to help you?”

“Possibly. We’ll see about that when you’ve finished your first job.”

“At what time?”

“Your job?”

“No. At what time will you make the raid?”

“Let’s say one in the morning.”

“I am going.”

“Where?”

“To find the woman.”

“Just a minute! We’re going together.”

“It is better that I go alone. If one of them sees us, he will understand that I am assisting the police . . .”

The Pole had hardly left the office; of course, before the Inspector had set a detective at his heels.

“Should I keep under cover?” the detective asked.

“No use. He’s smarter than you are and he knows very well I’ll have him followed.”

And without losing a moment Maigret hurried downstairs and leaped into a taxi.

“Corner of Rue de Birague and Rue Saint-Antoine, as fast as you can make it!”

It was a radiant afternoon. Striped awnings lent a note of color to the shops. In their shadows dogs sprawled and napped, and all life seemed to run in slow motion. You felt that even the buses had a hard time making headway in the hot heavy air. Their wheels left tracks in the heated asphalt.

Maigret sprang out of the taxi into the house on the corner. On the second floor he opened a door without bothering to knock and found Lucas sitting at the window, still in the role of a quiet and curious elderly gentleman.

The room was shabby but clean. On the table lay the remains of a cold

meal that Lucas had had sent up from a delicatessen.

"Anything new, Inspector?"

"Anybody at home across the way?"

The room had been chosen for its strategic position; you could see straight into the two rooms of the *Hôtel Beauséjour* which the Poles occupied.

In this heat all the windows stood wide open, including the window of another room which revealed a young girl asleep and scantily clad.

"Well, well, Lucas! Looks like you don't find your job too boring . . ."

A pair of field glasses on a chair gave evidence that Lucas attended to his work conscientiously and missed no detail, however slight.

"At the moment," said the sergeant, "there are two of them in the rooms, but there'll be only one in a minute. The man's getting dressed. He stayed in bed all morning, as usual."

"That's The Beard?"

"Yes. There were three of them for lunch: The Beard, the woman, and One-Eye. One-Eye left as soon as he'd eaten. Then The Beard got up and began to dress . . . Well! He's just put on a clean shirt. That doesn't happen very often."

Maigret came to the window to take his turn watching. The hairy giant was knotting his tie. The white shirt made an unexpected and therefore all the more dazzling splotch in the gray room.

You could see the man's lips move

as he looked at himself in the mirror. Behind him the blonde woman was cleaning up, gathering gray papers and rolling them into a ball, turning off the alcohol stove, dusting the frame of a bright-colored picture on the wall.

"If only we knew what they're saying!" Lucas sighed. "There are times when it drives me crazy. I watch them talking and talking and they never stop. They wave their arms around and I can't even guess what it's all about."

"The limitless resources of the police," said Maigret drily, "do not include a lip-reader who knows Polish."

"It gets on my nerves. I'm beginning to understand the torture it must be to be deaf. I'm beginning to see why people afflicted that way are generally so cranky."

"Don't talk so much! Do you think the woman will stay there?"

"This isn't the time she usually goes out. And if she meant to, she would have put on her gray suit."

Olga was wearing the same dark wool dress in which she had done her marketing that morning. While she cleaned up her bohemian establishment, she kept smoking a cigarette without ever taking it from her lips, in the fashion of the true smoker who needs tobacco from morning till night.

"She never talks," Maigret observed.

"This isn't the time she does that, either. It's in the evenings that she

gets to talking, when they're all gathered around her. Or a few times when she's alone with the one I call Spinach — which doesn't happen very often. Either I'm badly mistaken or she has a weakness for Spinach. He's the best-looking of the lot."

It was a strange sensation to be in an unknown room like this, to look into the lives of people and come to know their smallest gestures.

"You're getting as snoopy as a concierge, Lucas."

"That's what I'm here for, isn't it? I can even tell you that the little girl over there — the one who's sleeping so soundly — was making love last night until three in the morning with a young man with an Ascot tie, who left at dawn, undoubtedly so he could get into his family's house unnoticed. . . . Hold on! Now The Beard's leaving."

"Look at that, will you! He's practically elegant!"

"You might say so. But he looks more like a foreign wrestler than a man of the world."

"Well, let's say a wrestler who's doing good business," Maigret conceded.

No goodbye kiss across the way. The man simply went — that is, he disappeared from the part of the room visible from the police observatory.

A little later he emerged onto the sidewalk and set off toward the Place de la Bastille.

"Derain will pick him up," Lucas announced, sitting there like a huge spider at the center of its web. "But he knows he's being followed. He

won't do anything but walk around and maybe pick up a drink somewhere."

As for the woman, she had taken a road map out of a drawer and spread it on the table.

Ozep couldn't have taken a taxi, Maigret calculated; he must have come by subway, in which case he should arrive at any moment. "If he's coming . . ." he corrected himself.

And he did come. They saw him arrive, hesitate, wander up and down the sidewalk, while the detective trailing him displayed great interest in a fish stall in the Rue Saint-Antoine.

Seen from above like this, the tiny Pole seemed even thinner, even more insignificant. Maigret experienced, for a moment, a pang of remorse. He could hear the poor devil's voice repeating a hundred times, in involved explanation, his famous "Monsieur Maigrette . . ."

He was hesitating, that was obvious. He seemed even to be afraid, to stare around him with a visible anguish.

"Do you know what he's looking for?" the Inspector asked Lucas.

"The little pale fellow? No. Maybe some money to get into the hotel?"

"He's looking for me. He's saying to himself that I must be somewhere around and if by some miracle I've changed my mind . . ."

Too late to change now; Michael Ozep had plunged into the dark hallway of the hotel. They could follow him in their minds. He would be

climbing the stairs, reaching the second floor . . .

"He's still stalling," Maigret announced. The door should have opened before this. "He's on the landing. He's going to knock. He's knocked — look!"

The blonde girl trembled, shoved the map, with an instinctive movement, back in the dresser, and went toward the door. For a moment they could see nothing. The two were in the invisible part of the room. Then suddenly the woman appeared. Something about her had changed. Her steps were fast, decisive. She went straight to the window, closed it, then drew the dark curtains.

Lucas turned to the Inspector with a quizzical smile. "Think of that!" he laughed. But his smile faded as he noticed that Maigret was far more concerned than he had expected.

"What time is it, Lucas?"

"Three ten."

"In your opinion, what are the chances that one of the gang will come back to the hotel in the next hour?"

"I doubt it. Unless, as I was telling you, Spinach, if he knows The Beard is out of the way. You don't look very happy about things."

"I don't like the way she closed that window."

"Are you afraid for your little Pole?"

Maigret made no answer.

"Have you thought," Lucas went on, "that we haven't any real proof that he is in that room? It's true we saw him go into the hotel. But he

might perfectly well have gone to some other room, while somebody else came.—"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

"What time is it, Lucas?"

"Three twenty."

"Do you know what's going to happen?"

"Do you want to go over and see what's happening across the way?"

"Not yet. But I'm probably going to make a fool of myself . . . Where can you telephone?"

"In the next room. He's a tailor who does piece work for one of the big houses, so he has to have a phone."

"Go to your tailor then. Try not to let him listen in. Telephone the chief, and tell him I want him to send me twenty armed men at once. They're to spread a cordon around the Hotel Beauséjour and wait for my signal."

Lucas's expression indicated the seriousness of this order, so out of character for Maigret, who usually laughed at police mobilization. "You think there'll be dirty work going on?"

"If it hasn't already gone on . . ."

His eyes remained fixed on the window, on the filthy glass panes, on the crimson velvet curtains of the time of Louis-Philippe.

When Lucas came back from the telephone, he found the Inspector still in the same place, still frowning thoughtfully.

"The boss says please be careful.

There was a detective killed only last week, and now if there should be another accident —”

“Shut up, will you?”

“Do you think that Stan the Killer —”

“I don’t think anything! I’ve thought so much about this case since this morning that I’ve got a headache. Now I’m satisfied just to have impressions; and if you want to know, I have the impression that some disagreeable things are happening or are about to happen. What time is it?”

“Twenty-three after.”

In the neighboring room the young girl was still asleep, her mouth open, her legs bent back. Higher up, on the fifth or sixth floor, somebody was trying to play an accordion, incessantly repeating, with the same false notes, the same fox-trot refrain.

“Do you want me to go over?”

Lucas suggested.

Maigret gave him a harsh look, as if his subordinate had reproached him for lack of courage. “Just what do you mean by that?”

“Nothing. I can’t help seeing you’re worried about what may be going on over there, and I thought I could go and check —”

“And you think I’d hesitate to go myself? You’re forgetting one thing: Once we’re over there, it’s too late. If we go and find nothing, we’ll never pin anything on that gang. That’s why I’m hesitating . . . If only that wench hadn’t closed the window!” He suddenly lifted his eyebrows. “Tell me: the other times, when she’s

been alone with a man, she’s never closed the window, has she?”

“Never.”

“Then she hadn’t any suspicion of your presence here.”

“She probably took me for just another foolish old man.”

“So it isn’t the girl who had the idea of closing the window, but the character who came in.”

“Ozep?”

“Ozep or somebody else. It’s the one who came in who told the girl to close the window before he showed himself.”

He took his hat from the chair, emptied his pipe, scraped the bowl with his index finger.

“Where are you going, boss?”

“I’m waiting for our men to get here . . . Look! There are two of them by the bus stop. And I recognize some others in that parked taxi . . . If I stay inside five minutes without opening that window, you’ll come in with our men.”

“You have your gun?”

A few moments later Lucas could see Maigret crossing the street, could see Detective Janvier notice him and break off his task of wiping the tables on the terrace.

After what seemed a miraculously short interval, the window across the way opened. Maigret signaled to his sergeant to join him.

From across the street Lucas had gathered that the room was empty save for the Inspector. He stumbled up a dark staircase through the stench of bad cooking and worse plumbing

and entered the room, only to start back as he found the body of a woman stretched out at his feet.

"Dead, of course," Maigret grunted.

It was as if the murderer had wished to leave his signature on his crime. The woman's throat had been cut, as with all the other victims of Stan. There was blood everywhere.

The bright picture on the wall turned out, on closer inspection, to be a portrait of Olga — even blonder, even more fresh-skinned than she had been in life. Lucas looked from the lushly alluring portrait to the unappetizing sight on the floor. He felt oddly like a drinking man who sees a bottle of fine brandy smashed.

"It was your Pole?"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders, still standing rooted in the middle of the room.

"Shall I give his description to our men so they can see that he doesn't leave the hotel?"

"If you wish."

"I'd like to put a man on the roof, just in case —"

"Go ahead."

"Shall I call the chief?"

"In a minute."

It was no easy job to talk with Maigret when he was like this. Lucas tried to put himself in his shoes. Maigret himself had said he'd make a fool of himself. But this was worse than looking foolish. He had mobilized a large body of police when it was too late, when the crime had already been committed under Maigret's

very eyes — almost with his consent, since he'd been the one who had sent Ozep into the Hotel Beauséjour.

"And if any of the gang come back, shall I arrest them?"

An affirmative nod. Or rather a gesture of indifference. And at last Lucas went out.

"Where's Maigret?" the chief demanded of Lucas before he was half-way out of his car.

"In the room. Number nineteen on the second floor. The people in the hotel don't know about it yet."

A few moments later the director of the Judiciary Police found Maigret sitting in a chair in the middle of the room, two steps from the body.

"Well, my friend! It looks to me as though we were in a pretty fix!"

For answer he received a grunt.

"So the notorious killer was none other than the little man who offered you his services! You must admit, Maigret, you might have been somewhat less trustful; Ozep's attitude was, to say the least, suspicious . . ."

A heavy vertical furrow seamed Maigret's brow and his jaws jutted out, giving his whole face a striking quality of power.

"You think he hasn't managed to slip out of the hotel yet?"

"I'm sure of it," the Inspector replied, as if he attached not the least importance to the matter.

"You haven't searched the hotel?"

"Not yet."

"You think he'll let himself be captured easily?"

Then Maigret's gaze detached himself slowly from the window, shifted toward the director.

"If I'm wrong, the man will try to kill as many people as he can before he's arrested. If I'm not wrong, things will take care of themselves."

"I don't understand, Maigret."

"I tell you again, chief: I can be wrong. Anybody can be wrong. In that case, I beg your pardon, because there's going to be trouble. The way this case seems to have solved itself doesn't satisfy me. There's something that doesn't fit, I can feel it. If Ozep was Stan, there was no reason why . . ." His voice trailed off.

"You're staying here, Maigret?"

"Pending further instructions, yes."

"Meanwhile, I'll go see what our men are doing outside."

They had arrested Spinach when, as Lucas had foreseen, he had come to pay his call on the young woman. When they told him that Olga had been killed, he turned pale; but he showed no reaction when they spoke of Ozep.

When this arrest was announced to Maigret, he merely mumbled, "What's it to me?" and resumed his strange tête-à-tête with the dead woman.

A half-hour later it was One-Eye's turn to come home and be arrested on the threshold. He submitted impassively; but when they told him of the woman's death, he tried to break free from his handcuffs and leap upstairs.

"Who did it?" he shouted. "Who killed her? One of you, wasn't it?"

"It was Ozep, alias Stan the Killer."

The man quieted down as if by magic. He frowned as he repeated, "Ozep?"

"You aren't going to tell us you didn't know your boss's real name?"

It was the chief in person who conducted this hasty questioning in a corridor, and he had the impression that a faint smile crossed the prisoner's lips.

Then came another of the gang, the one they called the Chemist. He simply answered all questions with an air of absolute confusion, as if he had never heard of the woman nor of Ozep nor of Stan.

Maigret was still upstairs, mulling over the same problem, hunting for the key that would at last enable him to understand what had happened.

"All right . . ." he murmured when Lucas told him of the arrest of The Beard, who had begun by raging like a fiend and ended by bawling like a calf.

Suddenly he raised his head. "Do you notice something, Lucas? That's four that they've arrested, and not one of them's put up any real resistance. Whereas a man like Stan —"

"But since Stan is Ozep —"

"Have you found him?"

"Not yet. We had to let all the accomplices come home before we turned the hotel upside down. If they got a whiff of anything wrong, they'd never come into the mouse-trap. Now that we have almost all of them, the big boss is laying siege to the establishment. Our men are downstairs

and they're going to go through everything.

"Listen, Lucas . . ."

The sergeant had been about to leave. He paused, feeling for Maigret something akin to pity.

"One-Eye is not Stan. Spinach is not Stan. The Beard is not Stan. But I'm convinced that Stan lived in this hotel and was the focus around which the others gathered."

Lucas thought it better to say nothing. Let the Inspector have his monomania.

"If Ozep was Stan, he had no reason to come here to kill an accomplice. If he was not Stan . . ."

Suddenly Maigret rose, crossed to the wall and pulled down the brightly colored picture of Olga. He tore away the tape that framed it, revealing lines of lettering above and below the face. He handed it to Lucas.

The sergeant knew enough English to make out both the line above:

REAL LIFE DETECTIVE CASES

and the lines below:

THE PRETTY POLE AND THE

TERROR OF TERRE HAUTE

Maigret was smiling now. "Vanity," he said. "They can't ever resist it. They had to buy the magazine when they saw it on the stands, and she had to frame the picture."

"I knew I'd seen her face before. I do remember the case roughly. I kept some clippings on it. Very similar to ours. In the Middle West of America, four or five years ago. A gang attacking lonely farms, cutting throats . . . Just like ours . . . and

they had a woman leader. The American press took great pleasure in describing her atrocities."

"Then Stan . . .?"

". . . was Olga. Almost certainly. I'll be positive in an hour, now that I know what to look for in the office. Are you coming with me, Lucas?"

"But Ozep?" Lucas asked, as they settled back in the cab.

"It's Ozep I especially want to look up. That is, I'm hoping I'll find something about him. If he killed this woman, he must have had a motive . . . Listen, Lucas: When I wanted to send him to the others, he agreed at once. But when I gave him an errand to the woman, he refused, and I was forced to use pressure, even to threaten him. In other words, the rest of the gang did not know him — *but the woman did.*"

It took a good half-hour to find the clippings in question. Order was not Maigret's dominant attribute.

"Read this! Always allowing for the exaggeration of the American press — they like to give the readers their money's worth. 'The Female Fiend . . . 'The Deadly Pole . . . ' 'Girl, 23, Heads Murder Gang . . .'"

The press reveled in the exploits of the Polish girl and furnished many proofs of her photogenic qualities.

At eighteen Stephanie Polintskaja was already known to the Warsaw police. Around this time she met a man who married her and strove to curb her evil instincts. She had a child by him. One day the man came home from work to find that his wife had

vanished with all the money and jewelry. The child's throat had been cut.

"You know who that man was?" Maigret asked.

"Ozep?"

"Here's his picture, and a good likeness. You understand now? Stephanie, nicknamed Stan, ran wild in America. How she escaped the American prisons I do not know. In any case she took refuge in France, surrounded herself with a fresh lot of brutes, and took up her old career.

"Her husband learns from the papers that she is in Paris, that the police are on her trail. Does he want to rescue her once more? I doubt it. I'm rather inclined to think that he wants to make sure that the detestable murderess of his child shall not escape punishment. That's why he offers me his services. He hasn't the guts to work alone. He's too much of a weakling. He needs the police to help him. And then, this afternoon, I force his hand . . .

"Face to face with his former wife, what can he do? Kill or be killed! She certainly would not hesitate to destroy the only man outside the gang who could testify against her.

"So he killed . . . And do you want to know what I think? I'm betting that they'll find him somewhere in the hotel, more or less seriously wounded. After mugging two attempts at suicide, it would amaze me if he muffed the third. Now you can go back to the hotel and —"

"No use!" It was the chief's voice. "Stan the Killer hanged himself in a vacant room on the sixth floor. Good riddance!"

"He made it," Maigret sighed. "Poor devil!"

"You're sorry for him?"

"Indeed I am. Especially since I'm somewhat responsible for his death . . . I don't know if it means I'm getting old; but I certainly took long enough to find the solution —"

"What solution?" the director asked suspiciously.

"The solution to the whole problem!" Lucas intervened happily. "The Inspector has reconstructed the case in all its details."

"That so, Maigret?"

"It is . . . You know, if you keep mulling over the same question . . . I don't think I've ever been so mad at myself in my life. I felt that the solution was there, within reach, that just one little touch . . . And you all kept buzzing around me like horseflies, telling me about arrests that didn't mean a thing . . . And then I remembered the American detective magazine and the woman's face on the cover . . ."

Maigret took a deep breath, loaded his pipe, and asked Lucas for matches. The afternoon vigil had used up all his own.

"What do you say, chief? It's seven o'clock. Suppose we three settle down to a nice glass of beer? Provided that Lucas gets rid of his wig and makes himself respectable again."

Leaves from the Editors' Notebook

QUEEN'S QUORUM: *Part Four*

by ELLERY QUEEN

WE PROCEED to one of the most neglected authors in the entire history of the detective story — Rodrigues Ottolengui. You would think the very unusualness of the name would make it stick in the memory; yet one famous collector, when asked about the author, commented facetiously: "It sounds like the name of a prehistoric animal!" Unappreciated even in his own time, Ottolengui finally gave up crime fiction and returned to his original vocation, dentistry — or, as Anthony Boucher once wrote, Ottolengui gave up the sleuth for the tooth. Another interesting fact about Ottolengui is that one of his direct lineal descendants is none other than Octavus Roy Cohen, creator of detective Jim Hanvey. You will meet two rival criminologists, Mr. Barnes the professional and Robert Leroy Mitchel the amateur, in

24. Rodrigues Ottolengui's
FINAL PROOF
New York: G. P. Putnam, 1898

No list of detective-story cornerstones would be complete without the first book of short stories written by that "syndicate" known as Nick Carter. True, Nick Carter is not the favorite today that he was just before and just after the turn of the century, but paradoxically his audience is larger now than it ever was: radio is responsible for this miracle of longevity and popularity. Naturally, Nick Carter has changed with the times — in everything but his age: he remains perennially young, as when Walter Pidgeon played the part in the days before the movie star became big box-office; but the genuine, oldtime Nick Carter still blood-and-thunders in

25. Nicholas Carter's
THE DETECTIVE'S PRETTY NEIGHBOR
New York: Street & Smith, 1899

as does his lesser-known colleague, also chronicled by Nicholas Carter, in THE ADVENTURES OF HARRISON KEITH, DETECTIVE (New York: Street & Smith, 1899).

Original version of "Queen's Quorum" from TWENTIETH CENTURY DETECTIVE STORIES, edited by Ellery Queen. Copyright, 1948, by The World Publishing Company

In the same year the great Amateur Cracksman and Cricketer, A. J. Raffles, appeared between covers. E. W. Hornung, the originator of Raffles, and A. Conan Doyle, the sire of Sherlock, were in real life brothers-in-law. It has been theorized that Hornung never meant Raffles to be a serious, three-dimensional character, that from the outset Raffles was intended to be nothing more than a grand-scale parody of Sherlock Holmes — an epic burlesque in which the Master Detective would be exposed by the reverse-english characterization of the Master Criminal. Evidence to support this belief consists chiefly of the dedication in

26. E. W. Hornung's
THE AMATEUR CRACKSMAN
London: Methuen, 1899

which reads: "To A. C. D., This Form of Flattery," and Hornung's classic double pun, supposed to have indicated his satirical intent, "Though he might be more humble, there is no police like Holmes." Stuff-and-nonsense: Raffles is as full-blooded a figment of the imagination as Holmes. True, he may have been inspired by Sherlock, but is he less alive for a' that? Holmes owed his own existence to an earlier conception — to Poe's Dupin, as Doyle himself admitted when he wrote: "Monsieur D—— [*sic*] had, of course, already demonstrated [that the resources of the human brain had never been appreciated, and that a scientific system might give results more remarkable than any of the arbitrary and inexplicable triumphs which so often fall to the lot of the detective in fiction], and I can only claim the very limited credit of doing it from a fresh model and from a new point of view." *

All roads — genealogical and geographical, chronological and critical — return inevitably to the fountainhead. An American named E. A. Poe was the original cause, the prime mover, the mainspring; he was — and never forget it — the Father of the Detective Story.

On the very heels of Raffles, the gentleman crook, came Madame Koluchy, the lady crook. Her grand entrance in

27. L. T. Meade's and Robert Eustace's
THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEVEN KINGS
London: Ward, Lock, 1899

marks the earliest appearance of a female felon in a series of short stories. In ten connected tales Madame Koluchy, as the guiding genius of a sinister secret society, as "the brain that had conceived and the body that had

* Page vii in the Preface to the "Author's Edition" of ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (London: Smith, Elder, 1903).

executed some of the most malignant designs against mankind that the history of the world has ever known," proves herself "the compleat criminal": kidnaper, blackmailer, bank robber, and murderer — although it should be noted that Madame Koluchy's attempts at murder were consistently foiled by a young scientist-detective named Norman Head.

Four years later Mrs. Meade created an equally memorable mistress-criminal — Madame Sara in *THE SORCERESS OF THE STRAND* (London: Ward, Lock, 1903). Unlike her sister in sin, Madame Koluchy, the sorceress of the Strand did specialize in murder. In six homicidal hair-raisers, including the first fictional murder in which poison was administered by a tooth-stopping — now called in dentistry a temporary filling — Madame Sara made rogues like Colonel Clay and Raffles look like sissies.

The Doyle Decade comes to an end with an important discovery

28. Herbert Cadett's

THE ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST

London: Sands, 1900-

Beverly Gretton, the detective in this book, has never been referred to even in a footnote by any of the critics of the mystery story; yet Mr. Gretton is probably the earliest journalist-detective in crime fiction, anticipating by seven years the more famous Joseph Rouletabille, who made his initial appearance in 1907 in Gaston Leroux's brilliant "locked-room" novel, *LE MYSTÈRE DE LA CHAMBRE JAUNE* (*THE MYSTERY OF THE YELLOW ROOM*)*. Also, in *The Clue of the Finger-Prints*, the opening tale in Cadett's book, Gretton makes use of "identification by fingerprints" — anticipating, again by seven years, the *accepted* first use in R. Austin

* It is not generally known that like Charles Dickens's *BLEAK HOUSE* (1852) and *THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD* (1870), Gaston Leroux's *LE MYSTÈRE DE LA CHAMBRE JAUNE* first appeared "in parts" — as thirteen weekly supplements to the French magazine, "L'Illustration," issued from September 7, 1907 through November 30, 1907. Published thus as separate leaflets (4to, illustrated by Simont), these parts constitute the true first edition, preceding the first appearance of the story in normal book form. And only if you examine the original parts can you discover an astonishing fact about Gaston Leroux's detective which, so far as we have been able to check, has never been divulged in any work of reference in the English language dealing with the mystery story. For on the title-page of the first installment you will find the story described as the "Extraordinary Adventures of Joseph Boitabille, Reporter"; and the journalist-sleuth is named Joseph Boitabille for two whole installments (slightly more than five chapters). In the first paragraph of Part Three the detective's name, without warning, becomes the one under which he has become famous — Joseph Rouletabille. A footnote explains that a real-life journalist named Garmont has claimed exclusive rights to the pseudonym of Boitabille, based on his use of that name in journalism for fifteen years; to avoid all controversy and all confusion, Gaston Leroux will designate his hero by his *other* name — Rouletabille!

Freeman's novel, *THE RED THUMB MARK*. Even most experts seem to have forgotten that Mark Twain deserves credit for the authentic first use of identification by fingerprints both in the short story and the novel: first in 1883 in Chapter XXXI of *LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI* (Boston: James R. Osgood) — the chapter is a complete short story by itself; and later, in 1894, as the main plot device of his novel, *THE TRAGEDY OF PUDD'NHEAD WILSON* (Hartford: American Publishing Company).

V. *The First Golden Era*

How is the graph of the detective-crime short story progressing? The upswing is prodigious. Revitalized by the spirit and success of Sherlock, the last ten years of the Nineteenth Century produced fourteen keystone books — exactly the same number achieved in the entire fifty years preceding! The detective-crime short story is on the march.

The curtain-raiser of the First Golden Era was

29. Richard Harding Davis's
IN THE FOG
 New York: R. H. Russell, 1901

a memorable book containing three connected tales and representing a perfect blend of Anglo-American storytelling. This was followed, in the next year, by the book destined to become the rarest volume of detective-crime short stories published in the Twentieth Century.

30. Clifford Ashdown's
THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE
 London: Ward, Lock, 1902

materialized without fanfare or huzzah. Data is lacking as to how many copies were actually printed and sold; at the time of this writing, however, only four copies of the first edition are known to exist. Bibliophiles and bookscouts have scoured England and America, seeking in the most likely and unlikely places; yet after nearly half a century of eagle-eyed and expert excavating, the recorded copies total exactly four — no more, no less. One is the copyright copy deposited in 1902, and still residing, in the British Museum of London; the second is the copy owned by the internationally famous book collector, Ned Guymon of San Diego, California; the third copy was recently acquired by P. M. Stone of Waltham, Massachusetts. The fourth copy, purchased from the estate of R. Austin Freeman, is

now one of the most prized volumes in the Ellery Queen collection.*

This fabulous book was signed as by Clifford Ashdown but it was actually written by R. Austin Freeman and a medical confrère, recently revealed as Dr. John James Pitcairn, an obscure prison medical officer. Dr. Freeman's personal copy (now the EQ copy) is without question the most desirable one extant: it is autographed by Dr. Freeman and superbly extra-illustrated. In addition to the frontispiece and three printed illustrations which the publisher made part of the book's format, fourteen more illustrations have been cleverly interleaved. The extra illustrations were taken from "Cassell's Magazine," where the stories originally appeared from June 1902 through November 1902.

An almost sacrilegious book of burlesques also appeared in 1902. It contained *The Stolen Cigar Case*, probably the best parody of Sherlock Holmes ever written. The detective is named Hemlock Jones† and satirically he is just as delectable today as he was nearly fifty years ago in

31. Bret Harte's
CONDENSED NOVELS (SECOND SERIES)
London: Chatto & Windus, 1902
Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1902

The earliest American murderer in a sustained series of shorts appeared in book form the following year. Besides being a ruthless and cold-blooded killer, Lingo Dan was a thief, hobo, confidence man, and patriot — a strange mixture. In a presentation copy of

* About 1300 books of detective-crime short stories have been published since 1845. The Ellery Queen collection, at the time of this writing, is about 90% complete. Of the hundred-odd cornerstones around which this history of the detective-crime-mystery short story is written, we have approximately the same percentage of completion. Strangely enough, the missing books are not all Kohinor rarities. The explanation for this is simple: often it is easier for a collector to find a Poe first edition worth hundreds or thousands of dollars than it is to find a comparatively recent book worth \$5. Bookdealers and bookscouts naturally go after the high-priced rarities with infinitely more patience and persistence than they are willing to expend on books that, no matter how scarce and desirable, will yield only relatively small profits or commissions. In other words, the rare-book dealers "care" about a Poe first, whereas they make no special effort to locate an "unimportant" and consequently inexpensive book — one of the vagaries of book collecting which contributes to making bibliomania, once contracted, an incurable disease.

† Some of Sherlock Holmes's other parody names include Thinlock Bones, Picklock Holes, F. H. A. Homes, Shamrock Jolnes, Sherlaw Kombs, Solar Pons, and Holmlock Shears; some of Watson's parody names are Jobson, Potson, Watsis, Whatsoname, and Whatsup. For a complete history of the Holmesian take-off, including thirty-three pastiches and burlesques, try to find a copy of our suppressed (by the Doyle Estate) Sherlockian anthology, *THE MISADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1944).

32. Percival Pollard's
LINGO DAN
Washington, D. C.: Neale, 1903

the author wrote: "Here's my 1903 book, which, after all, is but the assembling of certain ideas that began 10 years ago with me. I expect for it neither the success of Sherlock Holmes, Raffles, etc., nor yet the immunity from comparison with those gentlemen. Yet it is at least one thing the others are not: American." The author's hopes for lasting comparison were never realized: Lingo Dan is one of the many "forgotten men" in the literature of larceny. The historical importance, however, of this native-American criminal is considerable — both the creator and the creation deserve a measure of immortality.

Another obscure book which has survived the years chiefly as a permanent entry on most collectors' desiderata is

33. B. Fletcher Robinson's
THE CHRONICLES OF ADDINGTON
PEACE
London: Harper, 1905

The stories are orthodox in the sense that they ape the Sherlock Holmes formula. It is no discredit to the author that he imitated Doyle's technique — he was one of a multitude who followed in Doyle's footsteps. Indeed, B. Fletcher Robinson can be said to have earned the right: it was he who supplied Doyle with the inspiration for one of the most unforgettable of Sherlockian plots. Doyle acknowledged this debt in the following dedication: "My dear Robinson, It was to your account of a West-Country legend that this tale owes its inception. For this and for your help in the details all thanks. Yours most truly, A. Conan Doyle." The Holmes tale was, of course, THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES.

If you know anything about the real character of Arnold Bennett — the genuine shyness and charm which he hid behind a baroque and luxury-loving exterior — you will not be surprised at the type of detective the author of THE OLD WIVES' TALE and CLAYHANGER chose for one of his least-known books. In

34. Arnold Bennett's
THE LOOT OF CITIES
London: Alston Rivers, 1905

the detective is named Cecil Thorold and he is a millionaire "in search of joy." Thorold is a curious character — combination criminologist, promoter, and Robin Hood. In most of his cases — "schemes" — he commits

crimes to accomplish his ends: he blackmails to thwart a criminal, steals to recover a missing bracelet, kidnaps to further a romance, and so on. The volume of these opulent operations is unaccountably obscure: actually it is a book of unusual interest, both as an example of Arnold Bennett's early work and as an early example of dilettante detectivism.

(to be continued next month)

THE FIRE OF LONDON

by ARNOLD BENNETT

YOU'RE wanted on the telephone, sir." Mr. Bruce Bowring, managing director of the Consolidated Mining and Investment Corporation, Limited (capital two millions, in one-pound shares, which stood at twenty-seven-and-six), turned and gazed querulously across the electric-lit spaces of his superb private office at the confidential clerk who addressed him. Mr. Bowring, in shirt-sleeves before a Florentine mirror, was brushing his hair with the solicitude of a mother who has failed to rear most of a large family.

"Who is it?" he asked, as if that demand for him were the last straw but one. "Nearly seven on Friday evening!" he added, martyred.

"I think a friend, sir."

The middle-aged financier dropped his gold-mounted brush and wading through the deep pile of the Oriental carpet passed into the telephone-cabinet and shut the door.

"Hallo!" he accosted the transmitter, resolved not to be angry with

it. "Hallo! Are you there? Yes, I'm Bowring. Who are you?"

"Nrrrr," the faint, unhuman voice of the receiver whispered in his ear. "Nrrrr. Cluck. I'm a friend."

"What name?"

"No name. I thought you might like to know that a determined robbery is going to be attempted tonight at your house in Lowndes Square, a robbery of cash—and before nine o'clock. Nrrrr. I thought you might like to know."

"Ah!" said Mr. Bowring to the transmitter.

The feeble exclamation was all he could achieve at first. In the confined, hot silence of the telephone-cabinet this message, coming to him mysteriously out of the vast unknown of London, struck him with a sudden sick fear that perhaps his wondrously organized scheme might yet miscarry, even at the final moment. Why that night of all nights? And why before nine o'clock? Could it be that the secret was out, then?

"Any further interesting details?" he inquired, bracing himself to an assumption of imperturbable and gay coolness.

But there was no answer. And when after some difficulty he got the exchange-girl to disclose the number which had rung him up, he found that his interlocutor had been using a public call-office in Oxford Street. He returned to his room, donned his frock-coat, took a large envelope from a locked drawer and put it in his pocket, and sat down to think a little.

At that time Mr. Bruce Bowring was one of the most famous conjurers in the City. He had begun ten years earlier with nothing but a silk hat; and out of that empty hat had been produced, first the Hoop-La Limited, a South African gold-mine of numerous stamps and frequent dividends, then the Hoop-La No. 2 Limited, a mine with as many reincarnations as Buddha, and then a dazzling succession of mines and combination of mines. The more the hat emptied itself, the more it was full; and the emerging objects (which now included the house in Lowndes Square and a perfect dream of a place in Hampshire) grew constantly larger, and the conjurer more impressive and persuasive, and the audience more enthusiastic in its applause. At last, with a unique flourish, and a new turning-up of sleeves to prove that there was no deception, had come out of the hat the C.M.I.C., a sort of incredibly enormous Union Jack, which enveloped all the other objects in its

splendid folds. The shares of the C.M.I.C. were affectionately known in the Kaffir circus as "Solids"; they yielded handsome though irregular dividends, earned chiefly by flotation and speculation; the circus believed in them. And in view of the annual meeting of shareholders to be held on the following Tuesday afternoon (the conjurer in the chair and his hat on the table), the market price, after a period of depression, had stiffened.

Mr. Bowring's meditations were soon interrupted by a telegram. He opened it and read: *Cook drunk again. Will dine with you Devonshire seventhirty. Impossible here. Have arranged about luggage. — Marie.* Marie was Mr. Bowring's wife. He told himself that he felt greatly relieved by that telegram; he clutched at it; and his spirits seemed to rise. At any rate, since he would not now go near Lowndes Square, he could certainly laugh at the threatened robbery. He thought what a wonderful thing Providence was, after all.

"Just look at that," he said to his clerk, showing the telegram with a humorous affectation of dismay.

"Tut, tut," said the clerk, discreetly sympathetic towards his employer thus victimized by debauched cooks. "I suppose you're going down to Hampshire tonight as usual, sir?"

Mr. Bowring replied that he was, and that everything appeared to be in order for the meeting, and that he should be back on Monday afternoon or at the latest very early on Tuesday.

Then, with a few parting instruc-

tions, and with that eagle glance round his own room and into circumjacent rooms which a truly efficient head of affairs never omits on leaving business for the weekend, Mr. Bowring sedately, yet magnificently, departed from the noble registered offices of the C.M.I.C.

"Why didn't Marie telephone instead of wiring?" he mused, as his pair of grays whirled him and his coachman and his footman off to the Devonshire.

The Devonshire Mansion, a bright edifice of eleven storeys in the Foster and Dicksee style, constructional ironwork by Homan, lifts by Waygood, decorations by Waring, and terracotta by the rood, is situated on the edge of Hyde Park. It is a composite building. Its foundations are firmly fixed in the Tube railway; above that comes the wine cellarage, then the vast laundry, and then (a row of windows scarcely level with the street) a sporting club, a billiard room, a grill room, and a cigarette merchant whose name ends in "opoulos." On the first floor is the renowned Devonshire Mansion Restaurant. Always, in London, there is just one restaurant where, if you are an entirely correct person, "you can get a decent meal." The place changes from season to season, but there is never more than one at a time. That season it happened to be the Devonshire. (The *chef* of the Devonshire had invented tripe suppers, *tripes à la mode de Caen*, and these suppers — seven-and-six — had

been the rage.) Consequently, all entirely correct people fed as a matter of course at the Devonshire, since there was no other place fit to go to. The vogue of the restaurant favorably affected the vogue of the nine floors of furnished suites above the restaurant; they were always full; and the heavenward attics, where the servants took off their smart liveries and became human, held much wealth. The vogue of the restaurant also exercised a beneficial influence over the status of the Kitcat Club, which was a cock-and-hen club of the latest pattern and had its "house" on the third floor.

It was a little after half-past seven when Mr. Bruce Bowring haughtily ascended the grand staircase of this resort of opulence, and paused for an instant near the immense fireplace at the summit (September was inclement, and a fire burned nicely) to inquire from the head-waiter whether Mrs. Bowring had secured a table. But Marie had not arrived — Marie, who was never late! Uneasy and chagrined, he proceeded under the escort of the head-waiter to the glittering Salle Louis Quatorze and selected, because of his morning attire, a table half-hidden behind an onyx pillar. The great room was moderately full of fair women and possessive men, despite the month. Immediately afterwards a youngish couple (the man handsomer and better dressed than the woman) took the table on the other side of the pillar. Mr. Bowring waited five minutes, then he ordered Sole Mornay and a bottle of Ro-

manée-Conti, and then he waited another five minutes. He went somewhat in fear of his wife, and did not care to begin without her.

"Can't you read?" It was the youngish man at the next table speaking in a raised voice to a squinting lackey with a telegraph form in his hand. "'Solids! Solids,' my friend. 'Sell — Solids — to — any — amount — tomorrow — and — Monday.' Got it? Well, send it off at once."

"Quite clear, my lord," said the lackey and fled. The youngish man gazed fixedly but absently at Mr. Bowring and seemed to see through him to the tapestry behind. Mr. Bowring, to his own keen annoyance, reddened. Partly to conceal the blush, and partly because it was a quarter to eight and there was the train to catch, he lowered his face, and began upon the sole. A few minutes later the lackey returned, gave some change to the youngish man, and surprised Mr. Bowring by advancing towards him and handing him an envelope — an envelope which bore on its flap the legend "Kitcat Club." The note within was scribbled in pencil in his wife's handwriting, and ran: *Just arrived. Delayed by luggage. I'm too nervous to face the restaurant, and am eating a chop here alone. The place is fortunately empty. Come and fetch me as soon as you're ready.*

Mr. Bowring sighed angrily. He hated his wife's club, and this succession of messages telephonic, telegraphic and calligraphic was exasperating him.

"No answer!" he ejaculated, and then he beckoned the lackey closer. "Who's that gentleman at the next table with the lady?" he murmured.

"I'm not rightly sure, sir," was the whispered reply. "Some authorities say he's the strong man at the Hippodrome, while others affirm he's a sort of American millionaire."

"But you addressed him as 'my lord.'"

"Just then I thought he was the strong man, sir," said the lackey, retiring.

"My bill!" Mr. Bowring demanded fiercely of the waiter, and at the same time the youngish gentleman and his companion rose and departed.

At the lift Mr. Bowring found the squinting lackey in charge.

"You're the liftman, too?"

"Tonight, sir, I am many things. The fact is, the regular liftman has got a couple of hours off — being the recent father of twins."

"Well — Kitcat Club."

The lift seemed to shoot far upwards, and Mr. Bowring thought the lackey had mistaken the floor, but on gaining the corridor he saw across the portals in front of him the remembered gold sign, "Kitcat Club. Members only." He pushed the door open and went in.

Instead of the familiar vestibule of his wife's club Mr. Bowring discovered a small antechamber, and beyond, through a doorway half-screened by a portière, he had glimpses of a rich, rose-lit drawing-room. In the doorway, with one hand raised to the

portière, stood the youngish man who had forced him to blush in the restaurant.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Bowring, stiffly, "is this the Kitcat Club?"

The other man advanced to the outer door, his brilliant eyes fixed on Mr. Bowring's; his arm crept round the cheek of the door and came back bearing the gold sign; then he shut the door and locked it. "No, this isn't the Kitcat Club at all," he replied. "It is my flat. Come and sit down. I was expecting you."

"I shall do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Bowring disdainfully.

"But when I tell you that I know you are going to decamp tonight, Mr. Bowring——"

The youngish man smiled affably.

"Decamp?" The spine of the financier suddenly grew flaccid.

"I used the word."

"Who the devil are you?" snapped the financier, forcing his spine to rigidity.

"I am the 'friend' on the telephone. I specially wanted you at the Devonshire tonight, and I thought that the fear of a robbery at Lowndes Square might make your arrival here more certain. I am he who devised the story of the inebriated cook and favored you with a telegram signed 'Marie.' I am the humorist who pretended in a loud voice to send off telegraphic instructions to sell 'Solids,' in order to watch your demeanor under the test. I am the expert who forged your wife's handwriting in a

note from the Kitcat. I am the patron of the cross-eyed menial who gave you the note and who afterwards raised you too high in the lift. I am the artificer of this gold sign, an exact duplicate of the genuine one two floors below, which induced you to visit me. The sign alone cost me nine-and-six; the servant's livery came to two pounds fifteen. But I never consider expense when, by dint of a generous outlay, I can avoid violence. I hate violence." He gently waved the sign to and fro.

"Then my wife——" Mr. Bowring stammered in a panic rage.

"Is probably at Lowndes Square, wondering what on earth has happened to you."

Mr. Bowring took breath, remembered that he was a great man, and steadied himself.

"You must be mad," he remarked quietly. "Open this door at once."

"Perhaps," the stranger judicially admitted. "Perhaps a sort of madness. But do come and sit down. We have no time to lose."

Mr. Bowring gazed at that handsome face, with the fine nostrils, large mouth, and square, clean chin, and the dark eyes, the black hair, and long, black mustache; and he noticed the long, thin hands. "Decadent!" he decided. Nevertheless, and though it was with the air of indulging the caprice of a lunatic, he did in fact obey the stranger's request.

It was a beautiful Chippendale drawing-room that he entered. Near the hearth, to which a morsel of fire

gave cheerfulness, were two easy-chairs, and between them a small table. Behind was extended a four-fold draught-screen.

"I can give you just five minutes," said Mr. Bowring, magisterially sitting down.

"They will suffice," the stranger responded, sitting down also. "You have in your pocket, Mr. Bowring — probably your breast-pocket — fifty Bank of England notes for a thousand pounds each, and a number of smaller notes amounting to another ten thousand."

"Well?"

"I must demand from you the first-named fifty."

Mr. Bowring, in the silence of the rose-lit drawing-room, thought of all the Devonshire Mansion, with its endless corridors and innumerable rooms, its acres of carpets, its forests of furniture, its gold and silver, and its jewels and its wines, its pretty women and possessive men — the whole humming microcosm founded on a unanimous pretense that the sacredness of property was a natural law. And he thought how disconcerting it was that he should be trapped there, helpless, in the very middle of the vast pretense, and forced to admit that the sacredness of property was a purely artificial convention.

"By what right do you make this demand?" he inquired, bravely sarcastic.

"By the right of my unique knowledge," said the stranger, with a bright

smile. "Listen to what you and I alone know. You are at the end of the tether. The Consolidated is at the same spot. You have a past consisting chiefly of nineteen fraudulent flotations. You have paid dividends out of capital till there is no capital left. You have speculated and lost. You have cooked balance-sheets to a turn and ruined the eyesight of auditors with dust. You have lived like ten lords. Your houses are mortgaged. You own an unrivaled collection of unreceipted bills. You are worse than a common thief. Excuse these personalities."

"My dear, good sir ——" Mr. Bowring interrupted, grandly.

"Permit me. What is more serious, your self-confidence has been gradually deserting you. At last, perceiving that some blundering person was bound soon to put his foot through the brittle shell of your ostentation and tread on nothing, and foreseeing for yourself an immediate future consisting chiefly of Holloway, you have by a supreme effort of your genius, borrowed £60,000 from a bank on C.M.I.C. scrip — for a week, eh? — and you have arranged, you and your wife, to melt into thin air. You will affect to set out as usual for your country place in Hampshire, but it is Southampton that will see you to-night, and Havre will see you tomorrow. You may run over to Paris to change some notes, but by Monday you will be on your way to — frankly, I don't know where; perhaps Montevideo. Of course, you take

the risk of extradition, but the risk is preferable to the certainty that awaits you in England. I think you will elude extradition. If I thought otherwise, I should not have had you here tonight, because, once extradited, you might begin to amuse yourself by talking about me."

"So it's blackmail," said Mr. Bowring, grim.

The dark eyes opposite to him sparkled gaily.

"It desolates me," the youngish man observed, "to have to commit you to the deep with only ten thousand. But, really, not less than fifty thousand will requite me for the brain-tissue which I have expended in the study of your interesting situation."

Mr. Bowring consulted his watch.

"Come, now," he said, huskily, "I'll give you ten thousand. I flatter myself I can look facts in the face, and so I'll give you ten thousand."

"My friend," answered the spider; "you are a judge of character. Do you honestly think I don't mean precisely what I say — to sixpence? It is eight thirty. You are, if I may be allowed the remark, running it rather fine."

"And suppose I refuse to part?" said Mr. Bowring, after reflection. "What then?"

"I have confessed to you that I hate violence. You would therefore leave this room unmolested, but you wouldn't step off the island."

Mr. Bowring scanned the agreeable features of the stranger. Then, while the lifts were ascending and descending, and the wine was sparkling, and

the jewels flashing, and the gold chinking, and the pretty women being pretty, in all the four quarters of the Devonshire, Mr. Bruce Bowring in the silent parlor counted out fifty notes onto the table. After all, it was a fortune, that little pile on the crimson polished wood.

"*Bon voyage!*" said the stranger. "Don't imagine that I am not full of sympathy for you. I am. You have only been rather unfortunate. *Bon voyage!*"

"No! By Heaven!" Mr. Bowring almost shouted, rushing back from the door, and drawing a revolver from his hip pocket. "It's too much! I didn't mean to — but confound it, what's a revolver for?"

The youngish man jumped up quickly and put his hands on the notes.

"Violence is always foolish, Mr. Bowring," he murmured.

"Will you give them up, or won't you?"

"I won't."

The stranger's fine eyes seemed to glint with joy in the drama.

"Then —"

The revolver was raised, but in the same instant a tiny hand snatched it from the hand of Mr. Bowring, who turned and beheld by his side a woman. The huge screen sank slowly and noiselessly to the floor in the surprising manner peculiar to screens that have been overset.

Mr. Bowring cursed. "An accomplice! I might have guessed!" he grumbled in final disgust.

He ran to the door, unlocked it, and was seen no more.

The lady was aged twenty-seven or so; of medium height, and slim, with a plain, very intelligent and expressive face, lighted by courageous, gray eyes and crowned with loose, abundant, fluffy hair. Perhaps it was the fluffy hair, perhaps it was the mouth that twitched as she dropped the revolver — who can say? — but the whole atmosphere of the rose-lit chamber was suddenly changed. The incalculable had invaded it.

"You seem surprised, Miss Fincastle," said the possessor of the banknotes, laughing gaily.

"Surprised!" echoed the lady, controlling that mouth. "My dear Mr. Thorold, when strictly as a journalist I accepted your invitation, I did not anticipate this sequel; frankly I did not."

She tried to speak coldly and evenly, on the assumption that a journalist has no sex during business hours. But just then she happened to be neither less nor more a woman than a woman always is.

"If I have had the misfortune to annoy you —!" Thorold threw up his arms in gallant despair.

"Annoy is not the word," said Miss Fincastle, nervously smiling. "May I sit down? Thanks. Let us recount. You arrive in England, from somewhere, as the son and heir of the late Ahasuerus Thorold, the New York operator, who died worth six million dollars. It becomes known that while

in Algiers in the spring you stayed at the Hotel St. James, famous as the scene of what is called the 'Algiers Mystery,' familiar to English newspaper readers since last April. The editor of my journal therefore instructs me to obtain an interview with you. I do so. The first thing I discover is that, though an American, you have no American accent. You explain this by saying that since infancy you have always lived in Europe with your mother."

"But surely you do not doubt that I am Cecil Thorold!" said the man.

"Of course not. I merely recount. To continue. I interview you as to the Algerian mystery, and get some new items concerning it. Then you regale me with tea and your opinions, and my questions grow more personal. So it comes about that, strictly on behalf of my paper, I inquire what your recreations are. And suddenly you answer: 'Ah! My recreations! Come to dinner tonight, quite informally, and I will show you how I amuse myself!' I come. I dine. I am stuck behind that screen and told to listen. And — and — the millionaire proves to be nothing but a black-mailer."

"You must understand, my dear lady —"

"I understand everything, Mr. Thorold, except your object in admitting me to the scene."

"A whim!" cried Thorold vivaciously, "a freak of mine! Possibly due to the eternal and universal desire of man to show off before woman."

The journalist tried to smile, but something in her face caused Thorold to run to a chiffonier.

"Drink this," he said, returning with a glass.

"I need nothing." The voice was a whisper.

"Oblige me."

Miss Fincastle drank and coughed.

"Why did you do it?" she asked sadly, looking at the notes.

"You don't mean to say," Thorold burst out, "that you are feeling sorry for Mr. Bruce Bowring? He has merely parted with what he stole. All the people from whom he stole, stole. And the activities which center about the Stock Exchange are simply various manifestations of one primeval instinct. Suppose I had not interfered. No one would have been a penny the better off except Mr. Bruce Bowring. Whereas —"

"You intend to restore this money to the Consolidated?" said Miss Fincastle eagerly.

"Not quite! The Consolidated doesn't deserve it. You must not regard its shareholders as a set of innocent shorn lambs. They knew the game. They went in for what they could get. Besides, how could I restore the money without giving myself away? I want the money myself."

"But you are a millionaire!"

"It is precisely because I am a millionaire that I want more. All millionaires are like that."

"I am sorry to find you a thief, Mr. Thorold."

"A thief! No. I am only direct, I

only avoid the middleman. At dinner, Miss Fincastle, you displayed somewhat advanced views about property, marriage, and the aristocracy of brains. You said that labels were for the stupid majority, and that the wise minority examined the ideas behind the labels. You label me a thief, but examine the idea, and you will perceive that you might as well call yourself a thief. Your newspaper every day suppresses the truth about the City, and it does so in order to live. In other words, it touches the pitch, it participates in the game. Today it has a fifty-line advertisement of a false balance-sheet of the Consolidated, at two shillings a line. That five pounds, part of the loot of a great city, will help to pay for your account of our interview this afternoon."

"Our interview tonight," Miss Fincastle corrected him stiffly, "and all that I have seen and heard."

At these words she stood up, and as Cecil Thorold gazed at her his face changed.

"I shall begin to wish," he said slowly, "that I had deprived myself of the pleasure of your company this evening."

"You might have been a dead man had you done so," Miss Fincastle retorted, and observing his blank countenance she touched the revolver. "Have you forgotten already?" she asked tartly.

"Of course it wasn't loaded," he remarked. "Of course I had seen to that earlier in the day. I am not such a bungler —"

"Then I didn't save your life?"

"You force me to say that you did not; and to remind you that you gave me your word not to emerge from behind the screen. However, seeing the motive, I can only thank you for that lapse. The pity is that it hopelessly compromises you."

"Me?" exclaimed Miss Fincastle.

"You. Can't you see that you are in it? — in this robbery, to give the thing a label. You were alone with the robber. You succored the robber at a critical moment . . . 'Accomplice,' Mr. Bowring himself said. My dear journalist, the episode of the revolver, empty though the revolver was, seals your lips."

Miss Fincastle laughed rather hysterically, leaning over the table with her hands on it.

"My dear millionaire," she said rapidly, "you don't know the new journalism, to which I have the honor to belong. You would know it better had you lived more in New York. All I have to announce is that, compromised or not, a full account of this affair will appear in my paper tomorrow morning. No, I shall not inform the police. I am a journalist simply, but a journalist I am."

"And your promise, which you gave me before going behind the screen, your solemn promise that you would reveal nothing?"

"Some promises, Mr. Thorold, it is a duty to break, and it is my duty to break this one. I should never have given it had I had the slightest idea of the nature of your recreations."

Thorold still smiled, though faintly.

"Really, you know," he murmured, "this is getting just a little serious."

"It is very serious," she stammered.

And then Thorold noticed that the new journalist was softly weeping.

The door opened.

"Miss Kitty Sartorius," said the erstwhile liftman, who was now in plain clothes and had mysteriously ceased to squint.

A beautiful girl, a girl who had remarkable loveliness and was aware of it (one of the prettiest women of the Devonshire), ran impulsively into the room and caught Miss Fincastle by the hand.

"My dearest Eve, you're crying. What's the matter?"

"Lecky," said Thorold aside to the servant. "I told you to admit no one."

The beautiful blonde turned sharply to Thorold.

"I told him I wished to enter," she said imperiously, half closing her eyes.

"Yes, sir," said Lecky. "That was it. The lady wished to enter."

Thorold bowed.

"It was sufficient," he said. "That will do, Lecky."

"Yes, sir." And he retired.

"Now we are alone," said Miss Sartorius. "Introduce us, Eve, and explain."

Miss Fincastle, having regained self-control, introduced her dear friend, the radiant star of the Regency Theatre, to her acquaintance the millionaire.

"Eve didn't feel *quite* sure of you,"

the actress stated; "and so we arranged that if she wasn't up at my flat by nine o'clock, I was to come down and reconnoitre. What have you been doing to make Eve cry?"

"Unintentional, I assure you ——" Thorold began.

"There's something between you two," said Kitty Sartorius sagaciously, in significant accents. "What is it?"

She sat down, touched her picture hat, smoothed her white gown, and tapped her foot. "What is it, now? Mr. Thorold, I think *you* had better tell me."

Thorold raised his eyebrows and obediently commenced the narration, standing with his back to the fire.

"How perfectly splendid!" Kitty exclaimed. "I'm so glad you cornered Mr. Bowring. I met him one night and I thought he was horrid. And these are the notes? Well, of all the ——!"

Thorold proceeded with his story.

"Oh, but you can't do *that*, Eve!" said Kitty, suddenly serious. "You can't go and split! It would mean all sorts of bother; your wretched newspaper would be sure to keep you hanging about in London, and we shouldn't be able to start on our holiday tomorrow. Eve and I are starting on quite a long tour tomorrow, Mr. Thorold; we begin with Ostend."

"Indeed!" said Thorold. "I, too, am going in that direction soon. Perhaps we may meet."

"I hope so," Kitty smiled, and then she looked at Eve Fincastle. "You

really mustn't do *that*, Eve," she said.

"I must, I must!" Miss Fincastle insisted, clenching her hands.

"And she will," said Kitty tragically, after considering her friend's face. "She will, and our holiday's ruined. I see it — I see it plainly. She's in one of her stupid conscientious moods. She's fearfully advanced and careless and unconventional in theory, Eve is; but when it comes to practice ——! Mr. Thorold, you have just got everything into a dreadful knot. Why did you want those notes so very particularly?"

"I don't want them so very particularly."

"Well, anyhow, it's a most peculiar predicament. Mr. Bowring doesn't count, and this Consolidated thingummy isn't any the worse off. Nobody suffers who oughtn't to suffer. It's your unlawful gain that's wrong. Why not pitch the wretched notes in the fire?" Kitty laughed at her own playful humor.

"Certainly," said Thorold. And with a quick movement he put the fifty trifles in the grate.

Both the women screamed and sprang up.

"Mr. Thorold!"

"Mr. Thorold!" ("He's adorable!" Kitty breathed.)

"The incident, I venture to hope, is now closed," said Thorold calmly, but with his dark eyes sparkling. "I must thank you both for a very enjoyable evening. Some day, perhaps, I may have an opportunity of further explaining my philosophy to you."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: *Sherlock Holmes was the divinity of A. H. Z. Carr's boyhood. Last year, while driving through Switzerland, Mr. Carr actually detoured to make a pilgrimage to the Reichenbach Falls — to the utter astonishment of Mrs. Carr who, obviously, is not an initiate in these matters. The ledge from which Professor Moriarty fell, Mr. Carr is happy to report, is unmistakable; Mr. Carr looked for a monument, or even a bronze plaque, to commemorate that epic event in homicidal history, but there was none, and Mr. Carr cannot help but feel that the Baker Street Irregulars are singularly remiss in their duties.*

Today, Mr. Carr tells us, his tastes in detective fiction are much broader in scope — bounded on the left by Sam Spade and on the right by Father Brown. (Is it significant that Mr. Carr combined those particular sleuths and directions, that he did not say, for example, bounded on the left by Father Brown and on the right by Sam Spade?) Today, continues Mr. Carr, private-eye personality takes precedence over the piquancy of problem — which is as it should be, and which brings us to a few facts

ABOUT THE STORY: "The Man Who Played Hunches" was written as the solution to a problem. The story had its origin in a curious chance encounter, much as described in the opening incident; impelled to invent an explanation, Mr. Carr created the circumstances of the rest of the story. But note that, while the proximate cause of the story was an actual problem, Mr. Carr did not make the problem itself the dominating detectival point. Using the problem purely as a skeleton, Mr. Carr added the flesh of characterization and the blood of verisimilitude. Personally, we found Mr. Carr's tale one of the finest stories of its kind we have ever read: it has mood and Machiavellian make-believe; it has a slow but spellbinding sense of suspense; it has an extraordinary quality of quiet but ever quickening menace. It is not a story you drop in the middle . . .

THE MAN WHO PLAYED HUNCHES

by A. H. Z. CARR

NO ONE has ever called me superstitious or even tender-minded. In the past when people have told me at second hand about mysterious phenomena and occult forces ("I didn't see the spirit myself, exactly, but I know the fellow who did"), I

have generally been a little bored. But since my experience with the man called Leg-'n'-half I have sometimes — well, wondered.

These are the facts. I was driving through suburban Westchester one warm Sunday afternoon with a girl.

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She was — is — a very pretty girl. Possibly I was less concerned with the car and the road than with her profile; we were not married then. At any rate, while we were going through Ryeneck, one of Westchester's wealthy towns — you know the type: wide streets, stone and stucco mansions for the upper middle-class, Tudor-style apartment houses for the middle middle-class, dingy wooden cottages for the lower middle-class, neat, red-brick, glass-fronted stores downtown — while we were in the commercial district I passed a traffic light — a red light.

I advance in excuse that the light was badly situated and partly obscured by some construction work, although the crosswise stream of traffic should have warned me. However, seeing no signal, I inferred that here was one of those every-man-for-himself lightless intersections that used to make motor-ing exciting. The prospect of waiting indefinitely while New York-on-wheels returned home did not attract me; and at a propitious moment I charged across the road.

Blasts from horns, remarks reflecting on my parentage and intelligence, and requests for data on my eyesight and my destination rose all about us. The girl said, "Oh. I see the light now. You passed it." Simultaneously a large policeman advanced from nowhere and yelled, "Pull over to the curb, you!" I did.

This policeman was elderly, and life, no doubt, had thwarted him; he was bitter and vengeful. I have al-

ways believed that when dealing with Nemesis in a blue coat a candid admission of one's iniquities goes farther than a claim to know the chief of police, unless one happens actually to know him. But what I intended to be a disarming apology evoked in this instance only the little pad of summonses and a sarcastic, "Smart guy, hey?"

Stimulated by a deep-rooted aversion to the payment of fines, I pointed out that although I had been at fault, the violation had been (a) unimportant; (b) unintentional, and (c) due in part to the inconspicuous position of the traffic light. To this the policeman replied while examining my licenses, "Trying to lie your way out of it, hey?" and his tone was more than usually offensive.

Had I been alone it would never have occurred to me to resent what a policeman said, lest worse befall. I suppose the girl's presence made my ego unduly sensitive. At any rate, I replied something to the effect that I did not like his manner.

He said, "Oh, is 'at so? Tough guy, hey?"

Having committed myself thus far, I became reckless. I said, no, I was not tough. I said that I merely wanted him to be civil.

He said, "Shut up."

Up to this point I had been astonished and delighted at my own temerity; the summons seemed cheap at the price. But now, like so many inexperienced orators, I was carried away by my own eloquence. I pointed

out that he was a public servant (a statement that does not ring cheerfully in the ears of an American policeman) paid by the community's taxes to exercise a little intelligence, although, I implied, the community should have known better. I proclaimed my determination to make an issue of this case. I told him that he would regret his insolence, his arrogance, his discourtesy, and so forth. These were, of course, empty mouthings.

The speech was very soothing to me, but not to him. His complexion was red to begin with; it became apoplectic now; and breathing hard, he made some notes in his notebook which, he said, would do me no good in court.

While this was going on I was dimly aware that several men were watching us from a sleek black touring car parked at the curb some fifty feet away. I doubt whether they overheard the dialogue, but the pantomime was sufficiently clear. They grinned broadly; and one of them winked sympathetically at the amused girl next to me.

The policeman finally handed me the summons, and with an attempt at dignity, I drove away. When we came abreast of the other car, a man who had been standing at its side detached himself and called, "Hey!"

I stopped. He was a heavy-set, powerful man, round-faced, small-featured, swarthy, with a greasy skin—a South-Italian, I should guess. His costume consisted of a pair of shape-

less gray trousers, a dirty yellow "wind-breaker," and an old cap. When he moved out into the street limping, I instinctively glanced at his feet. One leg was perhaps three inches shorter than the other; and he wore on its foot a shoe with a grotesquely high heel to make up the difference.

He said, casually, "Get a ticket?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Aw, 'at's only ol' Scanlon. Let's have it, 'n'I'll fix it fuh yuh."

My first idea was that I had stumbled onto a new racket, in which a policeman gave out tickets which his associate down the street then "fixed" for a consideration. But there was an air about this man, a kind of placid confidence, that did not fit into this view. He was not sly or furtive. He stared at me steadily and waited for my answer.

I said, "What do you mean, you'll fix it? Why should you?"

He said, "Whut duh hell's 'uh difference s'long's it's fixed?"

I said, "How do I know you can fix it?"

He looked surprised. "Sure I'll fix it. Jeez, I fix a dozen of 'em ev'ry week."

"How?" I asked.

"How yuh think?" he retorted with a trace of irritation. "I know all 'uh right guys. Cripes, fella, I'm tryin' 'uh do yuh a favuh."

"Yes," I said doubtfully, "but suppose you didn't fix it. That'd leave me in a fine spot, wouldn't it?"

"But I'm gonna fix it," he repeated impatiently. "Hell, ev'ybody here

knows me. Henry Milano, 'ey call me Leg-'n'-half. I run all 'uh rackets roun' here. Ask anybody." He did not say this boastfully, but with a quiet authority, as a statement of fact.

I believed him. But I could not understand why he should go to any trouble on my behalf. While I was hesitating, he said, "You f'm Brooklyn, aintcha?"

I said, "No, I'm from Manhattan."

"Oh," he said, "I thought yuh was f'm Brooklyn, f'm yuh license plates."

I shook my head.

He continued, "I thought maybe you was one of Augie" — I think he said Geronimo — "Augie Geronimo's boys. Yuh know Augie?"

I had never heard of Augie. But while Leg-'n'-half — to give him the name by which I always think of him — was talking I became aware of several things. Scanlon, the policeman, had watched the scene for a moment and then moved away with a discomfited air too authentic to be simulated. The young men in the car were gesturing at the girl alongside as if to say, "Go ahead. Do it."

I no longer seriously doubted Leg-'n'-half's good intentions; but his motive remained incomprehensible. Then a theory occurred to me. I was wearing a new hat, an excessively jaunty affair into the purchase of which an unscrupulous salesman had intimidated me. It gave me, I felt, a rather sinister appearance. Could this fact, together with a sunburned skin, an unfortunate assemblage of features, an unpleasant attitude toward the po-

lice, and a presumptive Brooklyn license number have suggested that one of Augie's boys was taking his moll out for a drive? Was Leg-'n'-half extending the courtesies of the town to a fellow-racketeer? I could think of no less implausible explanation.

Obviously, I saw, a connection with this Augie should not be too quickly disowned if I wanted to avoid the trouble which had visited me. Accordingly, I said with what I hoped was the proper inflection, "Well, I don't know Augie personally, but one of my pals knows him very well."

I heard the girl in the car choke, but Leg-'n'-half seemed relieved. He said, as if everything was settled, "Deh y'are. Let's have it."

I handed him the ticket. Perhaps there was a trace of doubt still in my manner, because he said, "I'll give yuh my 'phone numbeh. Four-three-six. If yuh worried, just gimme a call so I won't f'get." With that, he crumpled the ticket, stuffed it into his pocket, and began to limp away.

A few flakes of gratitude were crystallizing out of my bewilderment. I said weakly, "Thanks very much." He looked round and said, "Okay." I got the impression that he was waiting for something, and an uncensored impulse made me ask, "Do I owe you anything?" He answered curtly, "Nah. What the hell." And this time with finality he turned his back.

We drove off while the men in the other car laughed. For a while the girl and I were amused and excited; but

after a few hours the incident dropped out of our consciousness. I forgot to telephone Leg-'n'-half; a week elapsed, and I had not heard from the Ryeneck police, and the episode began to slip into the mists of the faintly unreal.

About ten days later I went to the public library to consult recent copies of the metropolitan newspapers for the purposes of an article on which I was engaged. Glancing down a page, my eye caught a brief item which read: "Ryeneck, July 8th. Late last night Henry Milano, reputed Westchester racketeer, was shot outside the Helicon Restaurant by two unknown men who effected their escape by automobile. Milano was wounded in the abdomen and chest and was taken to the Ryeneck hospital. His assailants, with whom he exchanged several shots, escaped unrecognized, but the police believe that they are members of a Brooklyn gang who have lately been attempting to 'muscle in' on Milano's 'territory.' Milano's condition is grave."

My encounter with Leg-'n'-half had taken place on the sixth. He had been shot the next night. I was vaguely sorry; and I dismissed a faint uneasiness about my summons with the reflection that time would tell.

But a new worry arose to plague me. Suppose this Brooklyn gang was that with which I claimed connection. My name and address were on the summons. Might not Leg-'n'-half's friends regard me with suspicion?

I remained unmolested, however, by gangsters or police, and my fears

gradually wore thin, until a day about six months later, when while riding in the subway I became aware of another strap-hanger who was watching me intently. I turned and saw Leg-'n'-half.

As soon as our eyes met he forced his way through the crowd and took the strap next to mine.

"Yeah," he said without any preliminaries. "I thought it was you."

His manner struck me as being alarmingly enigmatic. "How are you?" I stammered.

"Okay," he said.

An embarrassing pause ensued. "I read in the newspapers that you got shot," I said, frantically wishing I could think of something else to talk about.

"Yeah," he said. "Right after you came along."

My imagination began to conjure up discouraging possibilities. If in Leg-'n'-half's mind I was in some way associated with the attack on him, the immediate future was not inviting. I wanted to protest my innocence, but I felt that anything I said might be interpreted as a consciousness of guilt. With desperate caution I began, "The papers said some fellows from Brooklyn did it."

He answered significantly, "Yeah. 'Ey got theirs las' month."

I was not troubled about the fate of the fellows from Brooklyn but I recall being a bit confused about the proper etiquette for the occasion. Did one offer congratulations? I mumbled something vague and hurried on. I said, "I've never thanked you

enough for fixing that ticket of mine."

He shrugged. "'At's okay."

I decided to clear the matter up once and for all. "You know," I said jocularly, "you asked me whether I was from Brooklyn — whether I knew some fellow — Augie something?"

His eyes flickered, and I plunged into awkward explanation. "I was kidding when I said I knew a friend of his. I really never heard of him, but I thought maybe you wouldn't fix the ticket if I said I didn't know him."

He smiled slightly, for the first time. "Sure, I knew yuh was lyin'," he said. "I jus' ast yuh tuh make sure yuh wasn't one o' Augie's guys. If you'd 'a' bin, you'd 'a' said yuh neveh hoid of him. Deh was a couple of 'em around just 'uh day b'fo', and I wasn't takin' no chances. I wasn't fixin' no tickets fuh none o' his guys."

This revelation of subtlety startled me, and all my former curiosity returned. "Look here," I said, "if you didn't fix the ticket for me on account of — well, why did you fix it anyway?"

His face became somber and he was silent for a moment. Then he said, "Well, I'll tell yuh. I play hunches, see? I was in kind of a spot wit' Augie, see, 'n' I was lookin' fuh a hunch. When I see you and yuh dame ah-guin' wit' Scanlon, right away I get a hunch. I say to the boys, 'Dat guy's gonna gimme luck. I'll fix it fuh him, 'n' I'll tell Augie tuh' " — he repeated what he had told the boys he would tell Augie to do. Then he

added, rather bitterly, "Well, I fixed 'uh ticket okay, but a hell of a lot o' luck you was. A jinx."

"I hope not," I said, trying to smile.

"Not any mo'," he answered promptly, with an air of having considered the question. "'S soon as I see yuh just now I had a hunch it was okay. 'At's why I come over tuh talk tuh yuh. I got a deal on t'night, 'n' I need some luck. Well, I'm countin' on yuh to give it tuh me dis time."

There was a challenge in his voice.

"I'll do my best," I said, idiotically.

"Okay," he said, as if satisfied. There was a long and difficult pause. Then he added, "Well, here's wher I get off," turned abruptly as the train pulled into a station, and limped onto the platform.

Without quite knowing why, I was perturbed, but my wife, to whom I related the incident, laughed, possibly at the thought of my bringing good luck to anybody. In an effort to create a little concern on my account, I pointed out that he was an avowed murderer, whose annoyance might easily carry a fatal connotation. But the detective stories and gangster movies to which my wife is addicted have made murderers too familiar to be very terrible.

"The least you can do," she said, "is give the poor man what he wants. Try concentrating."

The next morning at breakfast I turned a page of my newspaper to find a small headline staring at me: "Gangster Killed, Slayer Wounded In Gam-

bling House." The story read: "Last night, a little after nine o'clock, Henry Milano, whom the police describe as a racketeer living in Ryeneck, New York, shot and killed Pasquale Vincenti, of 1258 West End Avenue, who was discharged from Sing Sing only last month. The shooting occurred at Jack Maguire's Club at 10th Avenue and 57th Street, raided by the police as a gambling dive on several occasions. Milano was seriously wounded in the right shoulder, but whether by Vincenti or another is not known. At City Hospital he refused to give any information to the police."

The report went on at some length.

It was quite clear to me that Leg-'n'-half's superstition, derived from heaven knew what obscure Mediterranean origins, would hold me responsible for his casualty. And, actually, an absurd feeling of responsibility for what had happened to him did bother me. I could not get him out of my thoughts. A childish but nonetheless oppressive notion that I had been singled out to play a mysterious role in the life of this man defied every reference to common sense and seemed to adumbrate some impending calamity. Although my wife continued to dismiss my fears with regrettable lightness, I could not help hoping that Leg-'n'-half would go to jail for a long sentence. I watched the newspapers closely. In a month or so I read that he had proven to the district attorney's satisfaction that the killing had been in self-defense, and had pleaded guilty to a technical

charge of manslaughter. Sentence had been deferred. After that I saw no reference to the case.

Under the pressure of my own affairs the matter slowly slipped out of my mind. Then, one evening about eight months after the previous encounter, my wife and I stopped for dinner in a Westchester roadhouse. My first intimation of Leg-'n'-half's presence was a shuffle of feet behind me and a gasp from my wife. I turned and saw him standing back of me.

He was thinner and paler than the last time I had seen him. I looked for a clue to his feelings in his face, but it was as impassive as ever. When he spoke, however, his voice had an ominous undertone.

"Listen," he said to me, "I wanna talk tuh yuh. Come on-oveh to duh bah."

Before I could reply, my wife said, smiling pleasantly, "Why not talk here? I'm not in the way, am I?"

He looked at her for perhaps ten seconds, then said, "Naw, I guess not," and dropped into a chair at our table. "Listen," he resumed, "you jinxed me."

My wife said to me reproachfully, "I do think you might introduce me."

I mumbled an introduction, which Leg-'n'-half acknowledged with a nod. "I remember your kindness very well, Mr. Milano," said my wife.

He cleared his throat, and turned to me again. "Listen," he said, "I jus' got sprung on parole yestiddy. Duh las' six mont's I bin thinkin' about you."

"I was mighty sorry," I said, "to hear about that business — you know, the time we met on the subway?"

He paid no attention to my words. "Funny," he said thoughtfully, "my hunches a'ways clicked up t' I met you. Twice yuh jinxed me. I thought for a while you was doin' it on poipus, but when I look atcha I dunno. I keep gettin' 'uh same hunch I had b'fo'."

He broke off, and there was a little silence. Then he looked at me from under his heavy lids and said, "Yuh know, if I thought you was jinxin' me" . . . and stopped again, with a glance at my wife. She was no longer smiling, and I did not like the situation in the least.

I said, "You know I'm not jinxing you. How could I?"

He merely looked at me, and I hastened to drop the rational argument.

"Well, then," I said, "why should I? You were decent to me up in Ryeneck. I wouldn't want to see you in trouble, would I? It's just a coincidence."

He passed his fingers slowly across his lips. "Yeah," he said. "Only how do I know?"

My wife started to speak, and he interrupted. "Listen," he said. "Yuh needn't be scared. If I was gonna do anything, I'd 'a' done it. It's like I say, when I look atcha, I dunno. I keep gettin' 'at hunch. When I saw yuh t'night, I says t' myself, 'Deh's duh jinx. I can't rub him out here, so I better beat it b'fo' he sees me.' Den I'm not so sure. I keep thinkin' maybe

duh jinx is oveh. I keep feelin' you're luck if I can make it come."

I shook my head and then hastily reversed the motion to a nod.

He said, "Listen, guy. I don't have nothin' against yuh. But I don't stand for no more jinxes. Twice is enough. Three times is out. T'night I'm goin' back to Ryeneck to split wit' duh guys that's been lookin' after things while I bin away. Maybe dey'll split easy, and it'll be okay. Maybe it won't. It's up to you. Get it?"

I nodded again, vaguely.

"If you put the jinx on me again," he said simply, "it'll be duh last time. Yuh gotta be lucky. Get it? Lucky!"

With that he rose, in his usual abrupt fashion, and left us.

For the first time I saw my wife frankly alarmed. She wanted me to go to the police. I objected, however, that to do so would be a direct invitation to disaster; whereas if events were left to chance, Leg-'n'-half's luck might turn. Certainly the law of probabilities owed him — and me — something. Besides, what could I tell the police that would not sound like the timidiities of a neurotic; and what could they do?

But Leg-'n'-half had said, "Three times is out." I did not like the sound of that. The next morning my wife and I scanned every column of our newspaper. We found nothing. I was plunged into a state of unresolved suspense. Had I been confirmed as Leg-'n'-half's jinx? Or had the boys "split easy"? The incredible fact grew upon me that some night, any night,

as I walked along the street, I might quite casually, quite abruptly, be shot to death.

This was not a pleasant thought to live with. And although for a while nothing happened, there can be a kind of terror in nothing happening. At first, my wife and I buoyed up our spirits with wishful thinking. We told each other that Leg-'n'-half's affairs had probably prospered, failing reports of a shooting in Ryeneck; and that even if something had gone wrong, the man could not be fool enough to hold me responsible.

The truth is that the obvious insistence of circumstance on turning what should have been a joke into a tragedy had an air of predestination. My wife denies that she expected my murder hourly; but I know that I began to entertain a sort of resigned conviction that I was doomed.

It was after three days of morbid tension that Leg-'n'-half reappeared. He came while my wife and I were at the dinner table. We had been trying to talk of inconsequentialities, when she rebelled, saying, "This Suicide Club atmosphere is getting on my nerves. Let's go away for a while. Let's go to the country."

I had been secretly toying with the same notion, but naturally, I did not want to admit it. I said that I would not be forced out of my home by a gangster's threat; a man owed something to his self-respect; what were we coming to; and so on.

My wife is not easily deceived by heroics, especially mine. She said,

"Nonsense. We can't go on like this, looking up and down the street every time we go out of doors, jumping at every noise. And we're so helpless."

At this point the doorbell rang. I answered; we had previously agreed that Leg-'n'-half would not dare to call at our apartment, under the eyes of doormen and elevator boys. I had imagined several versions of an encounter with him; in all of which I came off with credit and alive; but as I opened the door and saw him standing there with another man I could not speak or move or slam the door; I was paralyzed.

He said, "Hello, guy."

I muttered something that I did not understand myself.

He said, "I come to tell you it was okay."

"Okay?" I gasped, and he nodded. I remember that my knees literally trembled with relief as I caught the implications of his words. "That's great," I managed to say. The thought crossed my mind that it was extremely decent of him to have taken the trouble to call.

"Yeah," he said. "Duh boys come through okay."

My wife, with a look of panic, had joined me at the door, and I said hurriedly, "Mr. Milano just stopped by to say that everything went off all right the other night."

"Oh," she cried, beaming at him. "I'm so glad. How nice of you, Mr. Milano, to let us know."

He cleared his throat, and said, "'At's okay." And then, with sudden

bravado, "My hunches a'ways bin good. 'At's how I got when I am."

"I'm sure of it," my wife smiled.

He turned to the man with him, a big, tough bruiser, and said, "Beat it a minute, Pete. I wanna talk tuh dis guy alone;" and the man strolled down the corridor.

"Listen," Leg-'n'-half said to me, lowering his voice. "I knew my hunch couldn't be wrong if you was pullin' fuh me."

"No," I said, cheerfully making conversation. "Of course not."

He paused for a moment before replying, as if considering my remark, and I began to feel vaguely uneasy. Then he said, "Listen. I'm f'gettin' about 'ose uddeh times. My hunch is, you're duh guy I been waitin' fuh."

"Waiting for?" I repeated stupidly.

He said, "I bin lookin' fuh a good-luck guy. I used tuh have a lucky kid but he died on me. Now I know yuh okay. I'm all set tuh make a couple o' deals I bin thinkin' about fuh a long time, see?"

I merely stared at him, and he went on. "I'm makin' a deal wit' a couple o' big shots downtown next Satiddy night, an' I ain't takin' no chances. I'll need plenny luck. So I'll be comin' in tuh see yuh on my way down. About eight o'clock, you be here."

This was not a question; it was an order, given by a leader to his henchman. I said, "But look here . . ."

He broke in impatiently. "I ain't got time now. If yuh know whut's good fuh yuh, guy, yuh won't try no

funny stuff. You'll pull fuh me. You be here." With this he turned and started to limp away.

My wife closed the door, and we looked at each other. The bitter unfairness of it all was what I resented most, I think. I felt rather like Job. Why should I, among millions, have been chosen by Leg-'n'-half to bear the responsibility of his dangerous fortunes? And I wondered again, was there in truth some unfathomable human relation between us that he could sense, and I could not?

My wife, however, is a realist. She wasted no time in idle reproaches to destiny, or in philosophical excursions. While I was dismally contemplating the agonies of uncertainty that would fill my brief future before its inevitable, violent end, she went to the telephone, where I heard her calling a real-estate dealer.

The result was that after a few days of unbelievable effort, on the morning of the very Saturday when Leg-'n'-half was to call, we moved into a small house in the country, about a hundred miles from New York. The place is not entirely satisfactory; but one cannot expect too much when one rents on such short notice.

I do not know what has happened to Leg-'n'-half. We left no forwarding address, and I think I am safe from him. In my more optimistic moments I hope that he is dead. But every now and then I get the quite ridiculous feeling that if he is dead, I may somehow — I don't know how — be to blame.

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