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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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

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

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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

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ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor* JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *General Manager*

Cover Kodachrome by Bill Stone

$100 Reward for the Body!

ANNOUNCING RENEWAL OF COVER CONTEST

Exactly two years ago, in our February issue of 1948, we announced a contest wherein we would award $100.00 to the best short-short story written around our — if you will forgive the professional expression — disembodied cover. The point was, as many *EQMM* readers will remember, that production difficulties make it necessary for our cover art-work to be finished and in the hands of the printer before the corresponding table of contents is definitely decided upon. The intriguing result is that our covers almost always illustrate a story which does not exist — a story, in short, with a face but no body. Now, two years later, the situation remains the same, and once more we are looking for a story to go with our art-work.

As we said the last time, here is your golden opportunity to become a writer — golden to the tune of $100.00 in cash. All you have to do is write a short-short story — only three pages of manuscript! — about this month's cover.

For the best story submitted we will pay $100.00 — and we will print the story in a future issue of *EQMM!* Here are the simple rules:

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

(2) Length must not exceed 1,000 words.

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

(4) Entries must be postmarked no later than Feb. 16, 1950, and the winning story will be published in our May issue, on sale April 7, 1950.

(5) No entries will be returned.

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

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

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

Mail your story to:

ELLERY QUEEN'S COVER CONTEST, 570 LEXINGTON AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

We are indebted to Herb Caen and his column "It's News to Me" (San Francisco Chronicle, June 12, 1947) for the following anecdote:

"Back in the '20s, when the colorful Phil Geauque was riding high as chief of the Secret Service in San Francisco, he hired a young assistant who proved to be a complete flop as a sleuth. Despite this, however, the aide turned in some of the best-written reports that Geauque had ever read — so finally Phil suggested:

" 'Young man, this isn't your racket, but writing certainly is. Why don't you forget about being an investigator and settle down at the typewriter?'

"The youngster took his advice, and has been making a fortune ever since. You know him as —"

Yes, you know him as the author of THE MALTESE FALCON *and* THE GLASS KEY; *you know him as the creator of Sam Spade, The Continental Op, The Fat Man, and The Thin Man — Dashiell Hammett.*

The "unknown" Hammett thrillers, rescued from the yellowed pages of forgotten pulps, have almost run their course in EQMM — until we make some more discoveries. We never give up hope, nor slacken our researches in old magazines, books, and newspapers. And — to whet your appetite for the future — we still have a few Hammett surprises up our editorial sleeves and in our editorial top hat. For example, there is a Hammett short story titled "The Man Named Thin" — never before published in any form whatever — which we have been hoarding in our inventory for nearly four years; and there is the novelette called "Woman in the Dark," which originally ran as a serial in "Liberty" in the early '30s, three years after the publication of THE MALTESE FALCON. *Fulton Oursler (alias Anthony Abbot, creator of Thatcher Colt) bought that story, while he was editor of "Liberty," and only the other day he reminded us about it during a phone conversation — he still remembered it vividly after more than a decade and a half.*

Perhaps you will remember the "Woman in the Dark" as long . . .

WOMAN IN THE DARK

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

HER right ankle turned under her and she fell. The wind blowing downhill from the south, whipping the trees beside the road, made a whisper of her exclamation and snatched her scarf away into the darkness. She sat up slowly, palms on the gravel pushing her up, and twisted

her body sidewise to release the leg bent beneath her.

Her right slipper lay in the road close to her feet. When she put it on she found its heel was missing. She peered around, then began to hunt for the heel, hunting on hands and knees uphill into the wind, wincing a little when her right knee touched the road. Presently she gave it up and tried to break the heel off her left slipper, but could not. She replaced the slipper and rose with her back to the wind, leaning back against the wind's violence and the road's steep sloping. Her gown clung to her back, flew fluttering out before her. Hair lashed her cheeks. Walking high on the ball of her right foot to make up for the missing heel, she hobbled on down the hill.

At the bottom of the hill there was a wooden bridge, and, a hundred yards beyond, a sign that could not be read in the darkness marked a fork in the road. She halted there, not looking at the sign but around her, shivering now, though the wind had less force than it had had on the hill. Foliage to her left moved to show and hide yellow light. She took the left-hand fork.

In a little while she came to a gap in the bushes beside the road and sufficient light to show a path running off the road through the gap. The light came from the thinly curtained window of a house at the other end of the path.

She went up the path to the door and knocked.

A hoarse unemotional masculine voice said: "Come in."

She opened the door. The wind blew it in sharply, her hold on the latch dragging her with it so that she had to cling to the door with both hands to keep from falling. The wind went past her into the room, to balloon curtains and scatter the sheets of a newspaper that had been on a table. She forced the door shut and, still leaning against it, said: "I am sorry." She took pains with her words to make them clear notwithstanding her accent.

The man cleaning a pipe at the hearth said: "It's all right." His copperish eyes were as impersonal as his hoarse voice. "I'll be through in a minute." He did not rise from his chair. The edge of the knife in his hand rasped inside the brier bowl of his pipe.

She left the door and came forward, limping, examining him with perplexed eyes under brows drawn a little together. She was a tall woman and carried herself proudly, for all she was lame and the wind had tousled her hair and the gravel of the road had cut and dirtied her hands and bare arms and the red crepe of her gown.

She said, still taking pains with her words: "I must go to the railroad. I have hurt my ankle on the road."

He looked up from his work then. His sallow, heavily featured face, under coarse hair nearly the color of his eyes, was definitely neither hostile nor friendly. He looked at the woman's face, at her torn skirt. He

did not turn his head to call: "Hey, Evelyn."

A girl — slim maturing body in tan sport clothes, slender sunburned face with dark bright eyes and dark short hair — came into the room.

The man did not look around at her. He nodded at the woman in red and said: "This —"

The woman interrupted him: "My name is Luise Fischer."

The man said: "She's got a bum leg."

Evelyn's dark prying eyes shifted their focus from the woman to the man — she could not see his face — and to the woman again. She smiled, speaking hurriedly: "I'm just leaving. I can drop you at Mile Valley on my way home."

The woman seemed about to smile. Under her curious gaze Evelyn suddenly blushed and her face became defiant while it reddened. The girl was pretty. Facing her the woman had become beautiful; her eyes were long, heavily lashed, set well apart under a smooth broad brow, her mouth was not small but sensitively carved and mobile, and in the light from the open fire the surfaces of her face were as clearly defined as sculptured planes.

The man blew through his pipe, forcing out a small cloud of black powder. "No use hurrying," he said. "There's no train till six." He looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece. It said ten thirty-three. "Why don't you help her with her leg?"

The woman said: "No, it is not necessary. I —" She put her weight on her injured leg and flinched.

The girl hurried to her, stammering contritely: "I — I didn't think. Forgive me." She put an arm around the woman and helped her into the chair.

The man stood up to put his pipe on the mantelpiece beside the clock. He was of medium height, but his sturdiness made him look shorter. His neck, rising from the V of a gray sweater, was short, powerfully muscled. Below the sweater he wore loose gray trousers and heavy brown shoes.

Evelyn was on her knees in front of the woman, pulling off her right stocking, making sympathetic clucking noises, chattering nervously: "You've cut your knee too. Tch-tch-tch! And look how your ankle's swelling. You shouldn't've tried to walk all that distance in these slippers." Her body hid the woman's bare leg from the man. "Now sit still and I'll fix it up in a minute." She pulled the torn red skirt down over the bare leg.

The woman's smile was polite. She said carefully: "You are very kind."

The girl ran out of the room.

The man had a paper package of cigarettes in his hand. He shook it until three cigarettes protruded half an inch and held them out to her. "Smoke?"

"Thank you." She took a cigarette, put it between her lips, and looked at his hand when he held a match to it. His hand was thick-boned, muscular, but not a laborer's. She looked through her lashes at his face while

he was lighting his cigarette. He was younger than he had seemed at first glance — perhaps no older than thirty-two or -three — and his features, in the flare of his match, seemed less stolid than disciplined.

"Bang it up much?" His tone was merely conversational.

"I hope I have not." She drew up her skirt to look first at her ankle, then at her knee. The ankle was perceptibly though not greatly swollen; the knee was cut once deeply, twice less seriously.

Evelyn came in with a basin of steaming water, cloths, a roll of bandage, salve. Her dark eyes widened at the man and woman, but were hidden by lowered lids by the time their faces had turned toward her. "I'll fix it now. I'll have it all fixed in a minute." She knelt in front of the woman again, nervous hand sloshing water on the floor, body between Luise Fischer's leg and the man.

He went to the door and looked out, holding the door half a foot open against the wind.

The woman asked the girl bathing her ankle: "There is not a train before it is morning?"

"No."

The man shut the door and said: "It'll be raining in an hour." He put more wood on the fire, then stood — legs apart, hands in pockets, cigarette dangling from one side of his mouth — watching Evelyn attend to the woman's leg. His face was placid.

The girl dried the ankle and began to wind a bandage around it, working with increasing speed, breathing more rapidly now. Once more the woman seemed about to smile at the girl, but instead she said, "You are very kind."

The girl murmured, "It's nothing."

Three sharp knocks sounded on the door.

Luise Fischer started, dropped her cigarette, looked swiftly around the room with frightened eyes. The girl did not raise her head from her work. The man, with nothing in his face or manner to show he had noticed the woman's fright, turned his face toward the door and called in his hoarse matter-of-fact voice: "All right. Come in."

The door opened and a spotted great Dane came in, followed by two tall men in dinner clothes. The dog walked straight to Luise Fischer and nuzzled her hand. She was looking at the two men who had just entered.

One of the men pulled off his cap — it was a gray tweed matching his topcoat — and came to her smiling. "So this is where you landed?" His smile vanished as he saw her leg and the bandages. "What happened?" He was perhaps forty years old, well groomed, graceful of carriage, with smooth dark hair, intelligent dark eyes — solicitous at the moment — and a close-clipped dark mustache.

"It is not serious, I think." She did not smile. Her voice was cool. "I stumbled in the road and twisted my ankle. These people have been very —"

He turned to the man in the gray

sweater, holding out his hand, saying briskly: "Thanks ever so much for taking care of *Fräulein* Fischer. You're Brazil, aren't you?"

The man in the sweater nodded. "And you'd be Kane Robson."

"Right." Robson jerked his head at the man who still stood just inside the door. "Mr. Conroy."

Brazil nodded. Conroy said, "How do you do," and advanced toward Luise Fischer. He was an inch or two taller than Robson — who was nearly six feet himself — and some ten years younger, blond, broad-shouldered, and lean, with a beautifully shaped small head and remarkably symmetrical features. A dark overcoat hung over one of his arms and he carried a black hat in his hand. He smiled down at the woman and said: "Your idea of a lark's immense."

She addressed Robson: "Why have you come here?"

He smiled amiably, raised his shoulders a little. "You said you weren't feeling well and were going to lie down. When Helen went up to your room to see how you were, you weren't there. We were afraid you had gone out and something had happened to you."

Nothing in her face responded to his smile. "I am going to the city," she told him. "Now you know."

"All right, if you want to" — he was good-natured — "but you can't go like that." He nodded at her torn evening dress. "We'll take you back home, where you can change your clothes and pack a bag and —" He turned to Brazil. "When's the next train?"

Brazil said: "Six."

"You see," Robson said blandly, speaking to the woman again. "There's plenty of time."

"I go like this," she replied.

Robson grimaced impatiently, half humorously, and turned his palms out in a gesture of helplessness. "But what are you going to do?" he asked in a tone that matched the gesture. "You're not going to expect Brazil to put you up till train time and then drive you to the station?"

She looked at Brazil with level eyes and asked calmly: "Is it too much?"

Brazil shook his head carelessly. "Uh-uh."

Luise Fischer said coolly, with an air of finality: "So."

Conroy looked questioningly at Robson, who sighed wearily and asked: "Your mind's made up on this, Luise?"

"Yes."

Robson shrugged again, said: "You always know what you want." Face and voice were grave. He started to turn away toward the door, then stopped to ask: "Have you got enough money?"

"I want nothing," she told him.

"Right. If you want anything later let me know. Come on, Dick."

He went to the door, opened it, twisted his head around to direct a brisk "Thanks, good night" at Brazil, and went out.

Conroy touched Luise Fischer's

forearm lightly with three fingers, said "Good luck" to her, bowed to Evelyn and Brazil, and followed Robson out.

The dog raised his head to watch the two men go out. The girl Evelyn stared at the door with despairing eyes and worked her hands together. Luise Fischer told Brazil: "You will be wise to lock your door."

He stared at her for a long moment, brooding, and while no actual change seemed to take place in his expression all his facial muscles stiffened. "No," he said finally, "I won't lock it."

The woman's eyebrows went up a little, but she said nothing. The girl spoke, addressing Brazil for the first time since Luise Fischer's arrival. Her voice was peculiarly emphatic. "They were drunk."

"They've been drinking," he conceded. He looked thoughtfully at her, apparently only then noticing her perturbation. "You look like a drink would do *you* some good."

She became confused. Her eyes evaded his. "Do — do you want one?"

"I think so." He looked inquiringly at Luise Fischer, who nodded and said: "Thank you."

The girl went out of the room. The woman leaned forward a little to look intently up at Brazil. Her voice was calm enough, but the deliberate slowness with which she spoke made her words impressive: "Do not make the mistake of thinking Mr. Robson is not dangerous."

He seemed to weigh this speech almost sleepily; then, regarding her with a slight curiosity, he asked: "I've made an enemy?"

Her nod was sure.

Evelyn came in carrying a tray that held glasses, mineral water, and a bottle of whiskey. Her dark eyes, glancing from man to woman, were inquisitive, somewhat furtive. She went to the table and began to mix drinks.

Brazil finished lighting his cigarette and asked: "Leaving him for good?"

For the moment during which she stared haughtily at him it seemed that the woman did not intend to answer his question; but suddenly her face was distorted by an expression of utter hatred and she spit out a venomous "*Ja!*"

He set his glass on the mantelpiece and went to the door. He went through the motions of looking out into the night; yet he opened the door a bare couple of inches and shut it immediately.

He turned to the mantelpiece, picked up his glass, and drank. Then, his eyes focused contemplatively on the lowered glass, he was about to speak when a telephone bell rang behind a door facing the fireplace. He opened the door, and as soon as he had passed out of sight his hoarse unemotional voice could be heard. "Hello? . . . Yes. . . . Yes, Nora. . . . Just a moment." He re-entered the room saying to the girl: "Nora wants to talk to you."

Luise said: "You cannot have lived here long if you did not know Kane Robson before tonight."

"A month or so; but of course he was in Europe till he came back last week" — he paused — "with you." He picked up his glass. "Matter of fact, he is my landlord."

"Then you —" She broke off as the bedroom door opened. Evelyn stood in the doorway, hands to breast, and cried: "Father's coming — somebody phoned him I was here." She hurried across the room to pick up hat and coat from a chair.

Brazil said: "Wait. You'll meet him on the road if you go now. You'll have to wait till he gets here, then duck out back and beat him home while he's jawing at me. I'll stick your car down at the foot of the back road." He drained his glass and started for the bedroom door.

"But you won't" — her lip quivered — "won't fight with him? Promise me you won't."

"I won't." He went into the bedroom, returning almost immediately with a soft brown hat on his head and one of his arms in a raincoat. "It'll only take me five minutes." He went out the front door.

Luise Fischer said: "Your father does not approve?"

The girl shook her head miserably. Then suddenly she turned to the woman, holding her hands out in an appealing gesture, lips —almost colorless — moving jerkily as her words tumbled out: "You'll be here. Don't let them fight. They mustn't."

The woman took the girl's hands and put them together between her own, saying: "I will do what I can."

The door opened and Brazil came in.

"That's done," he said cheerfully, and took off his raincoat, dropping it on a chair, putting his damp hat on it. "I left it at the end of the fence." He picked up the woman's empty glass and his own and went to the table. "Better slide out to the kitchen in case he pops in suddenly." He began to pour whiskey into the glasses.

The girl wet her lips with her tongue, said, "Yes, I guess so," indistinctly, smiled timidly, pleadingly, at Luise Fischer, hesitated, and touched his sleeve with her fingers. "You — you'll behave?"

"Sure."

"I'll call you up tomorrow." She smiled at Luise Fischer and moved reluctantly toward the door.

Brazil gave the woman her glass, pulled a chair around to face her more directly, and sat down.

"Your little friend," the woman said, "she loves you very much."

He seemed doubtful. "Oh, she's just a kid," he said.

"But her father," she suggested, "he is not nice — eh?"

"He's cracked," he replied carelessly, then became thoughtful. "Suppose Robson phoned him?"

"Would he know?"

He smiled a little. "In a place like this everybody knows all about everybody."

"Then about me," she began, "you —"

She was interrupted by a pounding on the door that shook it on its hinges

and filled the room with thunder. The dog came up stiff-legged on its feet.

Brazil gave the woman a brief grim smile and called: "All right. Come in." His hoarse voice was unemotional.

The door was violently opened by a medium-sized man in a glistening black rubber coat that hung to his ankles. Dark eyes set too close together burned under the down-turned brim of a gray hat. A pale bony nose jutted out above ragged short-cut grizzled mustache and beard. One fist gripped a heavy applewood walking stick.

"Where is my daughter?" this man demanded. His voice was deep, powerful, resounding.

Brazil was placid. "I don't know."

"That's a lie!" Grant's eyes darted their burning gaze around the room. The knuckles of his hand holding the stick were white. "Evelyn!" he called.

Luise Fischer, smiling as if entertained by the bearded man's rage, said: "It is so, Mr. Grant. There is nobody else here."

He glanced briefly at her, with loathing in his mad eyes. "Bah! The strumpet's word confirms the convict's!" He strode to the bedroom door and disappeared inside.

Brazil grinned. "See? He's cracked. He always talks like that — like a guy in a bum book."

Grant came out of the bedroom and stamped across to the rear door, opening it and disappearing through it.

Brazil emptied his glass and put it on the floor beside his chair. "There'll be more fireworks when he comes back."

When the bearded man returned to the room he stalked in silence to the front door, pulled it open, and holding the latch with one hand, banging the ferrule of his walking stick on the floor with the other, roared at Brazil: "For the last time, I'm telling you not to have anything to do with my daughter! I shan't tell you again." He went out, slamming the door.

Brazil exhaled heavily and shook his head. "Cracked," he sighed.

Luise Fischer said: "He called me a strumpet. Do people here —"

He was not listening to her. He had left his chair and was picking up his hat and coat. "I want to slip down and see if she got away all right. If she gets home first she'll be O. K. Nora — that's her stepmother — will take care of her. But if she doesn't — I won't be long." He went out the back way.

Luise Fischer kicked off her remaining slipper and stood up, experimenting with her weight on her injured leg. Three tentative steps proved her leg stiff but serviceable. She saw then that her hands and arms were still dirty from the road and, exploring, presently found a bathroom opening off the bedroom. She hummed a tune to herself while she washed and, in the bedroom again, while she combed her hair and brushed her clothes — but broke off impatiently when she failed to find powder or lipstick. She was studying her reflection in a tall

looking-glass when she heard the outer door opening.

Her face brightened. "I am here," she called, and went into the other room.

Robson and Conroy were standing inside the door.

"So you are, my dear," Robson said, smiling at her start of surprise. He was paler than before and his eyes were glassier, but he seemed otherwise unchanged. Conroy, however, was somewhat disheveled; his face was flushed and he was obviously rather drunk.

The woman had recovered composure. "What do you want?" she demanded bluntly.

Robson looked around. "Where's Brazil?"

"What do you want?" she repeated.

He looked past her at the open bedroom door, grinned, and crossed to it. When he turned from the empty room she sneered at him. Conroy had gone to the fireplace, where the great Dane was lying, and was standing with his back to the fire watching them.

Robson said: "Well, it's like this, Luise: you're going back home with me."

She said: "No."

He wagged his head up and down, grinning. "I haven't got my money's worth out of you yet." He took a step toward her.

She retreated to the table, caught up the whiskey bottle by its neck. "Do not touch me!" Her voice, like her face, was cold with fury.

The dog rose growling.

Robson's dark eyes jerked sidewise to focus on the dog, then on Conroy — and one eyelid twitched — then on the woman again.

Conroy — with neither tenseness nor furtiveness to alarm woman or dog — put his right hand into his overcoat pocket, brought out a black pistol, put its muzzle close behind one of the dog's ears, and shot the dog through the head. The dog tried to leap, fell on its side, and its legs stirred feebly.

Luise Fischer spun around at the sound of the shot. Screaming at Conroy, she raised the bottle to hurl it. But Robson caught her wrist with one hand, wrenched the bottle away with the other.

The dog's legs stopped moving.

Robson said: "All right. Now are you ready to go?"

She made no attempt to free her wrist. She drew herself up straight and said very seriously: "My friend, you do not know me yet if you think I am going with you."

Robson chuckled. "You don't know me if you think you're not," he told her.

The front door opened and Brazil came in. His sallow face was phlegmatic, though there was a shade of annoyance in his eyes. He shut the door carefully behind him, then addressed his guests. His voice was that of one who complains without anger. "What the hell is this?" he asked. "Visitors' day? Am I supposed to be running a road house?"

Robson said: "We are going now. *Fräulein* Fischer's going with us."

Brazil was looking at the dead dog, annoyance deepening in his copperish eyes. "That's all right if she wants to," he said indifferently.

The woman said: "I am not going."

Brazil was still looking at the dog. "That's all right too," he muttered, and with more interest: "But who did this?" He walked over to the dog and prodded its head with his foot.

Then, without raising his head, without the slightest shifting of balance or stiffening of his body, he drove his right fist up into Conroy's handsome drunken face.

Conroy fell away from the fist rigidly, with unbent knees, turning a little as he fell. His head and one shoulder struck the stone fireplace, and he tumbled forward, rolling completely over, face upward, on the floor.

Brazil whirled to face Robson.

Robson had dropped the woman's wrist and was trying to get a pistol out of his overcoat pocket. But she had flung herself on his arm, hugging it to her body, hanging with her full weight on it, and he could not free it.

Brazil went around behind Robson, struck his chin up with a fist so he could slide his forearm under it across the taller man's throat. When he had tightened the forearm there and had his other hand wrapped around Robson's wrist, he said: "All right. I've got him."

Luise Fischer released the man's arm and fell back on her haunches.

Brazil pulled Robson's arm up sharply behind his back. The pistol came up with it, and when the pistol was horizontal Robson pulled the trigger. The bullet went between his back and Brazil's chest, to splinter the corner of a bookcase in the far end of the room.

Brazil said: "Try that again, baby, and I'll break your arm. Drop it!"

Robson hesitated, let the pistol clatter down on the floor. Luise Fischer scrambled forward on hands and knees to pick it up. She sat on a corner of the table holding the pistol in her hand.

Brazil pushed Robson away from him and crossed the room, to kneel beside the man on the floor, feeling his pulse, running hands over his body, rising with Conroy's pistol, which he thrust into a hip pocket.

Conroy moved one leg, his eyelids fluttered sleepily, and he groaned.

Brazil jerked a thumb at him and addressed Robson curtly: "Take him and get out."

Robson went over to Conroy, stooped to lift his head and shoulders a little, shaking him and saying irritably: "Come on, Dick, wake up."

Conroy mumbled, "I'm a' ri'," and tried to lie down again.

Brazil said impatiently: "Get him out of here. The rain'll bring him around."

Robson started to speak, changed his mind, picked up his hat from the floor, put it on, and bent over the blond man again. He pulled him up into something approaching a sitting

position, drew one limp arm over his shoulder, got a hand around Conroy's back and under his armpit, and rose, slowly lifting the other on unsteady legs beside him.

Brazil held the front door open. Half dragging, half carrying Conroy, Robson went out.

Brazil shut the door, leaned his back against it, and shook his head in mock resignation.

Luise Fischer put Robson's pistol down on the table and stood up. "I am sorry," she said gravely. "I did not mean to bring to you all this —"

He interrupted her carelessly: "That's all right." There was some bitterness in his grin, though his tone remained careless. "I go on like this all the time. God! I need a drink."

She turned swiftly to the table and began to fill glasses.

He looked her up and down reflectively, sipped, and asked: "You walked out just like that?"

She looked down at her clothes and nodded yes.

He seemed amused. "What are you going to do?"

"When I go to the city? I shall sell these things" — she moved her hands to indicate her rings — "and then — I do not know."

"You mean you haven't any money at all?" he demanded.

"That is it," she replied coolly.

"Not even enough for your ticket?"

She shook her head no, raised her eyebrows a little, and her calmness was almost insolence. "Surely that is a small amount you can lend me."

"Sure," he said, and laughed. "But you're a pip."

She did not seem to understand him.

He drank again, then leaned forward. "Listen, you're going to look funny riding the train like that." He flicked two fingers at her gown. "Suppose I drive you in and I've got some friends that'll put you up till you get hold of some clothes you can go out in?"

She studied his face carefully before replying: "If it is not too much trouble for you."

"That's settled, then," he said. "Want to catch a nap first?"

He emptied his glass and went to the front door, where he made a pretense of looking out at the night.

As he turned from the door he caught her expression, though she hastily put the frown off her face. His smile, voice were mockingly apologetic: "I can't help it. They had me away for a while — in prison, I mean — and it did that to me. I've got to keep making sure I'm not locked in."

"I am sorry," she said. "Was it — very long ago?"

"Plenty long ago when I went in," he said dryly, "but only a few weeks ago that I got out. That's what I came up here for — to try to get myself straightened out, see how I stood, what I wanted to do."

"And?" she asked softly.

"And what? Have I found out where I stand, what I want to do? I don't know." He was standing in front of her, hands in pockets, lower-

ing down at her. "I suppose I've just been waiting for something to turn up, something I could take as a sign which way I was to go. Well, what turned up was you. That's good enough. I'll go along with you."

He took his hands from his pockets, leaned down, lifted her to her feet, and kissed her savagely.

For a moment she was motionless. Then she squirmed out of his arms and struck at his face with curved fingers. She was white with anger.

He caught her hand, pushed it down carelessly, and growled: "Stop it. If you don't want to play you don't want to play, that's all."

"That is exactly all," she said furiously.

"Fair enough." There was no change in his face, none in his voice.

Presently she said: "That man — your little friend's father — called me a strumpet. Do people here talk very much about me?"

He made a deprecatory mouth. "You know how it is. The Robsons have been the big landowners, the local gentry, for generations, and anything they do is big news. Everybody knows everything they do and so —"

"And what do they say about me?"

He grinned. "The worst, of course. What do you expect? They know him."

"And what do you think?"

"About you?"

She nodded.

"I can't very well go round panning people," he said, "only I wonder why you ever took up with him. You must've seen him for the rat he is."

"I did not altogether," she said simply. "And I was stranded in a little Swiss village."

"Actress?"

She nodded. "A singer."

The telephone bell rang.

He went unhurriedly into the bedroom. His unemotional voice came out: "Hello? . . . Yes, Evelyn. . . . Yes." There was a long pause. "Yes; all right, and thanks."

He returned to the other room as unhurriedly as he had left, but at the sight of him Luise Fischer half rose from the table. His face was pasty, yellow, glistening with sweat on forehead and temples.

"That was Evelyn. Her father's justice of the peace. Conroy's got a fractured skull — dying. Robson just phoned he's going down to swear out a warrant. That damned fireplace. I can't live in a cell again!"

Luise came to him with her hands out. "But you are not to blame. They can't —"

"You don't get it," his monotonous voice went on. He turned away from her toward the front door, walking mechanically. "This is what they sent me up for the other time. It was a drunken free-for-all in a roadhouse, with bottles and everything, and a guy died. I couldn't say they were wrong in tying it on me." He opened the door, made his automatic pretense of looking out, shut the door, and moved back toward her.

"It was manslaughter that time.

They'll make it murder if this guy dies. See? I'm on record as a killer."

"No, no." She stood close to him and took one of his hands. "It was an accident that his head struck the fireplace. I can tell them that. I can tell them what brought it all about."

He laughed with bitter amusement, and quoted Grant: " 'The strumpet's word confirms the convict's.' "

She winced.

"That's what they'll do to me," he said, less monotonously now. "If he dies I haven't got a chance. If he doesn't they'll hold me without bail till they see how it's coming out — assault with intent to kill, or murder. What good'll your word be? Robson's mistress leaving him with me! Tell the truth and it'll only make it worse. They've got me" — his voice rose — "and I can't live in a cell again!" His eyes jerked around toward the door. Then he raised his head with a rasping noise in his throat that might have been a laugh. "Let's get out of here. I'll go screwy indoors tonight."

"Yes," she said eagerly, putting a hand on his shoulder, watching his face with eyes half frightened, half pitying. "We will go."

"You'll need a coat." He went into the bedroom.

She found her slippers, put on the right one, and held the left one out to him when he returned. "Will you break off the heel?"

He draped the rough brown overcoat he carried over her shoulders, took the slipper from her, and wrenched off the heel with a turn of his wrist. He was at the front door by the time she had her foot in the slipper.

She glanced swiftly once around the room and followed him out.

She opened her eyes and saw daylight had come. Rain no longer dabbled the coupe's windows and windshield, and the automatic wiper was still. Without moving she looked at Brazil. He was sitting low and lax on the seat beside her, one hand on the steering wheel, the other holding a cigarette on his knee. His sallow face was placid and there was no weariness in it.

"Have I slept long?" she asked.

He smiled at her. "An hour this time. Feel better?"

"Yes." She sat up a little, yawning. "Will we be much longer?"

"An hour or so." He put a hand in his pocket and offered her cigarettes.

She took one and leaned forward to use the electric lighter in the dashboard. "What will you do?" she asked when the cigarette was burning.

"Hide out till I see what's what."

She glanced sidewise at his placid face, said: "You too feel better."

He grinned somewhat shamefacedly. "I lost my head back there, all right."

She patted the back of his hand once gently, and they rode in silence for a while. Then she asked: "We are going to those friends of whom you spoke?"

"Yes."

A dark coupe with two uniformed

policemen in it came toward them, went past. The woman looked sharply at Brazil. His face was expressionless.

She touched his hand again, approvingly.

"I'm all right outdoors," he explained. "It's walls that get me."

She screwed her head around to look back. The policemen's car had passed out of sight.

Brazil said: "They didn't mean anything." He lowered the window on his side and dropped his cigarette out. Air blew in fresh and damp. "Want to stop for coffee?"

"Had we better?"

An automobile overtook them, crowded them to the edge of the road in passing, and quickly shot ahead. It was a black sedan traveling at the rate of sixty-five or more miles an hour. There were four men in it, one of whom looked back at Brazil's car.

Brazil said: "Maybe it'd be safer to get under cover as soon as we can; but if you're hungry —"

"No; I too think we should hurry."

They rode through a crossroads settlement of a dozen houses, bumped over railroad tracks, and turned into a long straight stretch of road paralleling the tracks. Halfway down the level stretch, the sedan that had passed them was stationary on the edge of the road. A policeman stood beside it — between it and his motorcycle — and stolidly wrote on a leaf of a small book while the man at the sedan's wheel talked and gestured excitedly.

Luise Fischer blew breath out and said: "Well, they were not police."

Brazil grinned.

Neither of them spoke again until they were riding down a suburban street. Then she said: "They — your friends — will not dislike our coming to them like this?"

"No," he replied carelessly; "they've been through things themselves."

The houses along the suburban street became cheaper and meaner, and presently they were in a shabby city street where grimy buildings with cards saying *Flats to Let* in their windows stood among equally grimy factories and warehouses. The street into which Brazil after a little while steered the car was only slightly less dingy.

He stopped the car in front of a four-story red brick building with broken brownstone steps. "This is it," he said, opening the door.

She sat looking at the building's unlovely face until he came around and opened the door on her side. Her face was inscrutable. Three dirty children stopped playing with the skeleton of an umbrella to stare at her as she went with him up the broken steps.

The street door opened when he turned the knob, letting them into a stuffy hallway where a dim light illuminated stained wall paper of a once vivid design, ragged carpet, and a worn brass-bound staircase.

"Next floor," he said, and went up the stairs behind her.

Facing the head of the stairs was

a door shiny with new paint of a brown peculiarly unlike any known wood. Brazil went to this door and pushed the bell button four times — long, short, long, short.

After a moment of silence vague rustling noises came through the door, followed by a cautious masculine voice: "Who's there?"

Brazil put his head close to the door and kept his voice low: "Brazil."

The fastenings of the door rattled and it was opened by a small wiry blond man of about forty in crumpled green cotton pajamas. His feet were bare. His hollow-cheeked and sharp-featured face wore a cordial smile and his voice was cordial. "Come in, kid," he said. "Come in."

Brazil put a hand on the woman's arm and urged her forward saying: "Miss Fischer, this is Mr. Link."

Link said, "Pleased to meet you."

Luise Fischer bowed.

Link slapped Brazil on the shoulder. "I'm glad to see you, kid. We were wondering what had happened to you. Come on in."

He led them into a living room that needed airing. There were articles of clothing lying around, sheets of newspaper here and there, a few not quite empty glasses and coffee cups, and a great many cigarette stubs. Link took a vest off a chair, threw it across the back of another, and said: "Take off your things and set down, Miss Fischer."

A very blonde full-bodied woman in her late twenties said, "My God, look who's here!" from the doorway and ran to Brazil with wide arms, hugging him violently, kissing him on the mouth. She had on a pink wrapper over a pink silk nightgown.

Brazil said, "Hello, Fan," and put his arms around her. Then, turning to Luise Fischer, who had taken off her coat: "Fan, this is Miss Fischer. Mrs. Link."

Fan went to Luise Fischer with her hand out. "Glad to know you," she said, shaking hands warmly. "You look tired, both of you. Sit down and I'll get you some breakfast, and maybe Donny'll get you a drink after he covers up his nakedness."

Luise Fischer said, "You are very kind," and sat down.

Link said, "Sure, sure," and went out.

Fan asked: "Been up all night?"

"Yes." Brazil said. "Driving most of it." He sat down on the sofa.

She looked sharply at him. "Anything the matter you'd just as lief tell me about?"

He nodded. "That's what we came for."

Link, in bathrobe and slippers now, came in with a bottle of whiskey and some glasses.

Brazil said: "The thing is, I slapped a guy down last night and he didn't get up."

"Hurt bad?"

Brazil made a wry mouth. "Maybe dying."

Link whistled, said: "When you slap 'em, boy, they stay slapped."

Fan said: "Well, there's no sense of worrying about it now. The thing to

do is get something in your stomachs and get some rest. Come on, Donny, pry yourself loose from some of that booze." She beamed on Luise Fischer. "You just sit still and I'll have some breakfast in no time at all." She hurried out of the room.

Link, pouring whiskey, asked: "Anybody see it?"

Brazil nodded. "Uh-huh — the wrong people." He sighed wearily. "I want to hide out a while, Donny, till I see how it's coming out."

"This dump's yours," Link said. He carried glasses of whiskey to Luise Fischer and Brazil.

Brazil emptied his glass with a gulp.

Luise Fischer sipped and coughed.

Brazil said: "I left my car out front. I ought to bury it."

"I'll take care of that, kid," Link promised.

"And I'll want somebody to see what's happening up Mile Valley way."

Link wagged his head up and down. "Harry Klaus is the mouthpiece for you. I'll phone him."

"And we both want some clothes."

Luise Fischer spoke: "First I must sell these rings."

Link's pale eyes glistened. He moistened his lips and said: "I know the —"

"That can wait a day," Brazil said. "They're not hot, Donny. You don't have to fence them."

The woman said: "But I have no money for clothes until —"

Brazil said: "We've got enough for that."

Donny, watching the woman, addressed Brazil: "And you know I can always dig up some for you, kid."

"Thanks. We'll see." Brazil held out his empty glass, and when it had been filled said: "Hide the car, Donny."

"Sure." The blond man went to the telephone in an alcove and called a number.

Brazil emptied his glass. "Tired?" he asked.

She rose, went over to him, took the whiskey glass out of his hand and put it on the table with her own, which was still almost full.

He chuckled, asked: "Had enough trouble with drunks last night?"

"Yes," she replied, not smiling.

Donny was speaking into the telephone: "Hello, Duke? . . . Listen; this is Donny. There's a ride standing outside my joint." He described Brazil's coupe. "Will you stash it for me? . . . Yes. . . . Better switch the plates too. . . . Yes, right away, will you? . . . Right."

"Donny!" Fan called from elsewhere in the flat.

"Coming!" He went out.

Brazil leaned toward Luise Fischer and spoke in a low voice: "Don't give him the rings."

She stared at him in surprise. "But why?"

"He'll gyp you to hell and gone."

"But you say he is your friend. You are trusting him now."

"He's O. K. on a deal like this," he assured her. "He'd never turn anybody up. But dough's different. Any-

how, even if he didn't trim you, anybody he sold them to would think they were stolen and wouldn't give half of what they're worth."

"Then he is a —" She hesitated.

"A crook. We were cellmates."

She frowned and said: "I do not like this."

Fan came to the door, smiling, saying: "Breakfast is served."

In the passageway Brazil turned and took a tentative step toward the front door, but checked himself when he caught Luise Fischer's eye, and, grinning a bit sheepishly, followed her and the blonde woman into the dining room.

Fan would not sit down with them. "I can't eat this early," she told Luise Fischer. "I'll get you a hot bath ready and fix your bed."

She went out, paying no attention to Luise Fischer's polite remonstrances.

Donny stuck a fork into a small sausage and said: "Now, about them rings. I can —"

"That can wait," Brazil said. "We've got enough to go on a while."

"Maybe; but it's just as well to have a getaway stake ready in case you need it all of a sudden." Donny put the sausage into his mouth. "And you can't have too big a one."

He chewed vigorously. "Now, for instance, you take the case of Shuffling Ben Devlin. You remember Ben? He was in the carpenter shop."

"I remember," Brazil replied without enthusaism.

Donny stabbed another sausage. "Well, Ben was in a place called Finehaven once and —"

Fan came in. "Everything's ready whenever you are," she told Luise Fischer.

Luise Fischer put down her coffee cup and rose. "It is a lovely breakfast," she said, "but I am too tired to eat much."

Fan took her to a room in the rear of the flat where there was a wide wooden bed with smooth white covers turned down. A white nightgown and a red wrapper lay on the bed. On the floor there was a pair of slippers. The blonde woman halted at the door and gestured with one pink hand. "If there's anything else you need, just sing out. The bathroom's just across the hall and I turned the water on."

"Thank you," Luise Fischer said; "you are very kind. I am imposing on you most —"

Fan patted her shoulder. "No friend of Brazil's can ever impose on me, darling. Now you get your bath and a good sleep, and if there's anything you want, yell." She went out and shut the door.

Luise Fischer, standing just inside the door, looked slowly, carefully around the cheaply furnished room, and then, going to the side of the bed, began to take off her clothes. When she had finished she put on the red wrapper and the slippers and, carrying the nightgown over her arm, crossed the hallway to the bathroom. The bathroom was warm with steam. She ran cold water into the tub while

she took the bandages off her knee and ankle.

After she had bathed, she found fresh bandages in the cabinet over the basin, and rewrapped her knee but not her ankle. Then she put on nightgown, wrapper, and slippers, and returned to the bedroom. Brazil was there, standing with his back to her, looking out a window.

He did not turn around. Smoke from his cigarette drifted back past his head.

She shut the door slowly, leaning against it, the faintest of contemptuous smiles curving her mobile lips.

He did not move.

She went slowly to the bed and sat on the side farthest from him. She did not look at him but at a picture of a horse on the wall. Her face was proud and cold. She said: "I am what I am, but I pay my debts." This time the deliberate calmness of her voice was insolence. "I brought this trouble to you. Well, now if you can find any use for me —" She shrugged.

He turned from the window without haste. His copperish eyes, his face were expressionless. He said: "O. K." He rubbed the fire of his cigarette out in an ashtray on the dressing table and came around the bed to her.

She stood up straight and tall awaiting him.

He stood close to her for a moment, looking at her with eyes that weighed her beauty as impersonally as if she had been inanimate. Then he pushed her head back rudely and kissed her.

She made neither sound nor movement of her own, submitting completely to his caress, and when he released her and stepped back, her face was as unaffected, as masklike, as his.

He shook his head slowly. "No, you're no good at your job." And suddenly his eyes were burning and he had her in his arms and she was clinging to him and laughing softly in her throat while he kissed her mouth and cheeks and eyes and forehead.

Donny opened the door and came in. He leered knowingly at them as they stepped apart, and said: "I just phoned Klaus. He'll be over as soon's he's had breakfast."

"O. K.," Brazil said.

Donny, still leering, withdrew.

"Who is this Klaus?" Luise Fischer asked.

"Lawyer," Brazil replied absentmindedly. He was scowling thoughtfully at the floor. "I guess he's our best bet, though I've heard things about him that —" He broke off impatiently. "When you're in a jam you have to take your chances."

She took his hand and said earnestly: "Let us go away from here. I do not like these people. I do not trust them."

His face cleared and he put an arm around her again, but abruptly turned his attention to the door when a bell rang beyond it.

There was a pause; then Donny's guarded voice could be heard asking: "Who is it?"

Nothing was heard for a short while after that. The silence was

broken by the creaking of a floor board just outside the bedroom door. The door was opened by Donny. His pinched face was a caricature of alertness. "Bulls," he whispered. "Take the window."

Brazil's face jerked around to Luise Fischer.

"Go!" she cried, pushing him toward the window. "I will be all right."

"Sure," Donny said; "me and Fan'll take care of her. Beat it, kid, and slip us the word when you can. Got enough dough?"

"Uh-huh." Brazil was kissing Luise Fischer.

"Go, go!" she gasped.

His sallow face was phlegmatic. He was laconic. "Be seeing you," he said, and pushed up the window. His foot was over the sill by the time the window was completely raised. His other foot followed the first immediately, and, turning on his chest, he lowered himself, grinning cheerfully at Luise Fischer for an instant before he dropped out of sight.

She ran to the window and looked down. He was rising from among weeds in the unkempt backyard. His head turned swiftly from right to left. Moving with a swiftness that seemed mere unhesitancy, he went to the left-hand fence, up it, and over into the next door yard.

Donny took her arm and pulled her from the window. "Stay away from there. You'll tip his mitt."

Something heavy was pounding on the flat's front door. A heavy authoritative voice came through: "Open up!"

"I guess I better," Donny said, and went out.

Through the open window came the sound of a shot. She ran to the window and, hands on sill, leaned out.

Fifty feet to the left, on the top of a long fence that divided the long row of backyards from the alley behind, Brazil was poised, crouching. As Luise Fischer looked, another shot sounded and Brazil fell down out of sight into the alley behind the fence. She caught her breath with a sob.

The pounding on the flat's front door suddenly stopped. She drew her head in through the window. She took her hands from the sill. Her face was an automaton's. She pulled the window down without seeming conscious of what she was doing, and was standing in the center of the room looking critically at her fingernails when a tired-faced huge man in wrinkled clothes appeared in the doorway.

He asked: "Where's he at?"

She looked up at him from her fingernails as she had looked at her fingernails. "Who?"

He sighed wearily. "Brazil." He went to a closet door, opened it. "You the Fischer woman?"

"I am Luise Fischer," she said.

Donny's voice came through the doorway from another part of the flat: "I tell you I don't know where he's gone to. He just dropped the dame here and hightailed. He didn't tell me nothing. He —"

A metallic voice said "I bet you!" disagreeably. There was the sound of a blow.

The huge man went to the bedroom door and called toward the front of the flat: "Never mind, Ray." He addressed Luise Fischer: "Get some clothes on."

"Why?" she asked coolly.

"They want you back in Mile Valley."

"For what?"

"I don't know," he grumbled impatiently. "This ain't my job. We're just picking you up for them. Something about some rings that belonged to a guy's mother and disappeared from the house the same time you did."

She held up her hands and stared at the rings. "But they didn't. He bought them for me in Paris and —"

The huge man scowled wearily. "Well, don't argue with me about it. It's none of my business. Where was this fellow Brazil meaning to go when he left here?"

"I do not know." She took a step forward, holding out her hand in an appealing gesture. "Is he —"

"Nobody ever does," he complained, ignoring the question he had interrupted. "Get your clothes on." He held a hand out to her. "Better let me take care of the junk."

She hesitated, then slipped the rings from her fingers and dropped them into his hand.

"Shake it up," he said. "I ain't had breakfast yet." He went out and shut the door.

She dressed hurriedly in the clothes she had taken off a short while before, though she did not again put on the one stocking she had worn down from Brazil's house. When she had finished, she went quietly, with a backward glance at the closed door, to the window, and began slowly, cautiously to raise the sash.

The tired-faced huge man opened the door. "Good thing I was peeping through the keyhole," he said impatiently. "Now come on."

Fan came into the room behind him. Her face was very pink; her voice was shrill. "What're you picking on her for?" she demanded.

"Stop it, stop it," the huge man begged. His weariness seemed to have become almost unbearable. "I'm only a copper told to bring her in on a larceny charge. I got nothing to do with it, don't know anything about it."

"It is all right, Mrs. Link," Luise Fischer said with dignity. "It will be all right."

"But you can't go like that," Fan protested, and turned to the huge man. "You got to let her put on some decent clothes."

He sighed and nodded. "Anything, if you'll only hurry it up and stop arguing with me."

Fan hurried out.

Luise Fischer addressed the huge man: "He too is charged with larceny?"

He sighed. "Maybe one thing, maybe another," he said spiritlessly.

Fan came in with some clothes, a

blue suit and hat, dark slippers, stockings, and a white blouse.

"Just keep the door open," the huge man said. He went out of the room and stood leaning against an opposite wall, where he could see the windows in the bedroom.

Luise Fischer changed her clothes, with Fan's assistance, in a corner of the room where they were hidden from him.

"Did they catch him?" Fan whispered.

"I do not know."

Fan was kneeling in front of Luise Fischer, putting on her stockings. "Don't let them make you talk till you've seen Harry Klaus," she whispered rapidly. "You tell them he's your lawyer and you got to see him first. We'll send him down and he'll get you out all right." She looked up abruptly. "You didn't cop them, did you?"

"Steal the rings?" Luise Fischer asked in surprise.

"I didn't think so," the blonde woman said. "So you won't have to —"

The huge man's weary voice came to them: "Come on — cut out the barbering and get into the duds."

Luise Fischer turned to Fan. "Goodbye and I —"

The blonde woman put her arms around her. "There's nothing to say and you'll be back here in a couple of hours. Harry'll show those saps they can't put anything like this over on you."

The huge man said: "Come on."

Luise Fischer joined him and they went toward the front of the flat.

As they passed the living room door Donny, rising from the sofa, called cheerfully: "Don't let them worry you, baby. We'll —"

A tall man in brown put a hand over Donny's face and pushed him back on the sofa.

Luise Fischer and the huge man went out. A police-department automobile was standing in front of the house where Brazil had left his coupe. A dozen or more adults and children were standing around it, solemnly watching the door through which she came.

A uniformed policeman pushed some of them aside to make passageway for her and her companion, and got into the car behind them. "Let her go, Tom," he called to the chauffeur, and they drove off.

They rode seven blocks and halted in front of a square red brick building on a corner. The huge man helped her out of the automobile and took her between two large frosted globes into the building and into a room where a bald fat man in uniform sat behind a high desk.

The huge man said: "It's that Luise Fischer for Mile Valley." He took a hand from a pocket and tossed her rings on the desk. "That's the stuff, I guess."

The bald man said: "Nice picking. Get the guy?"

"Hospital, I guess."

Luise Fischer turned to him: "Was he — was he badly hurt?"

The huge man grumbled: "I don't know about it. Can't I guess?"

The bald man called: "Luke!"

A thin white-mustached policeman came in.

The fat man said: "Put her in the royal suite."

Luise Fischer said: "I wish to see my lawyer."

Luke said: "Come back this way."

She followed him down a bare corridor to the far end, where he opened a door and stood aside for her to go through. The room into which the door opened was a small one furnished with cot, table, two chairs, and some magazines. The window was large, fitted with a heavy wire grating.

In the center of the room she turned to say again: "I wish to see my lawyer."

The white-mustached man shut the door and she could hear him locking it.

Two hours later he returned with a bowl of soup, some cold meat and a slice of bread on a plate, and a cup of coffee.

He put the food on the table and left the room. She ate everything he had brought her.

It was late afternoon when the door opened again. "There you are," the white-mustached man said, and stood aside to let his companions enter. There were two of them, men of medium height, in dull clothes, one thick-chested and florid, the other less heavy, older.

The thick-chested florid one looked Luise Fischer up and down, and grinned admiringly at her. The other said: "We want you to come back to the Valley with us, Miss Fischer." She rose from her chair and began to put on her hat and coat.

They went to the street and got into a dusty blue sedan. The thick-chested man drove. Luise Fischer sat behind him, beside the older man.

Once, before they left the city, she had said: "I wish to see my lawyer."

The man beside her was chewing gum. He made noises with his lips, then told her politely enough:

"We can't stop now."

The man at the wheel spoke before she could reply. He did not turn his head. "How come Brazil socked him?"

Luise said quickly: "It was not his fault. He was —"

The older man, addressing the man at the wheel, interrupted her: "Let it alone, Pete. Let the D. A. do his own work."

Pete said: "Oke."

The woman turned to the man beside her. "Was — was Brazil hurt?"

He nodded.

She put both hands on his forearm. "How badly?"

He shook his head. "I don't know."

Her fingers dug into his arm. "Did they arrest him?"

"I can't tell you, miss. Maybe the District Attorney wouldn't like me to."

It was nearly nine o'clock by the dial in the dashboard, and quite

dark, when Luise Fischer and her captors passed a large square building whose illuminated sign said *Mile Valley Lumber Co.* and turned into what was definitely a town street, though its irregularly spaced houses were not many. Ten minutes later the sedan came to rest at the curb in front of a gray public building. The driver got out. The other man held the door open for Luise. They took her into a ground-floor room in the gray building.

Three men were in the room. A sad-faced man of sixty-some years, with ragged white hair and mustache, was tilted back in a chair with his feet on a battered yellowish desk. He wore a hat but no coat. A pasty-faced young blond man, straddling a chair in front of the filing cabinet on the other side of the room, was saying, "So the traveling salesman asked the farmer if he could put him up for the night and —" but broke off when Luise Fischer and her companions came in.

The third man stood with his back to the window. He was a slim man of medium height, not far past thirty, thin-lipped, pale, flashily dressed in brown and red. His collar was very tight. He advanced swiftly toward Luise Fischer, showing white teeth in a smile. "I'm Harry Klaus. They wouldn't let me see you down there, so I came on up to wait for you." He spoke rapidly and with assurance. "Don't worry. I've got everything fixed."

The story-teller hesitated, changed his position. The two men who had brought Luise Fischer up from the city looked at the lawyer with obvious disapproval.

Klaus smiled again with complete assurance. "You know she's not going to tell you anything at all till we've talked it over, don't you? Well, what the hell, then?"

The man at the desk said: "All right, all right." He looked at the two men standing behind the woman. "If Tuft's office is empty let 'em use that."

"Thanks." Harry Klaus picked up a brown briefcase from a chair, took Luise Fischer's elbow in his hand, and turned her to follow the thick-chested florid man.

He led them down the corridor a few feet to an office that was similar to the one they had just left. He did not go in with them. He said, "Come on back when you're finished," and, when they had gone in, slammed the door.

Klaus jerked his head at the door. "A lot of whittlers," he said cheerfully. "We'll stand them on their heads."

"Brazil?" she asked. "He is —"

His shrug lifted his shoulders almost to his ears. "I don't know. Can't get anything out of these people."

"Then —?"

"Then he got away," he said.

"Do you think he did?"

He shrugged his shoulders again. "We can always hope."

"But one of those policemen told me he had been shot and —"

"That don't have to mean anything but that they hope they hit him." He put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her down in a chair. "There's no use of worrying about Brazil till we know whether we've got anything to worry about." He drew another chair up close to hers and sat in it. "Let's worry about you now. I want the works — no song and dance — just what happened."

She drew her brows together in a puzzled frown. "But you told me everything —"

"I told you everything was all fixed, and it is." He patted her knee. "I've got the bail all fixed so you can walk out of here as soon as they get through asking you questions. But we've got to decide what kind of answers you're going to give them." He looked sharply at her under his hat brim. "You want to help Brazil, don't you?"

"Yes."

"That's the stuff." He patted her knee again and his hand remained on it. "Now give me everything from the beginning."

"You mean from when I first met Kane Robson?"

He nodded.

She crossed her knees, dislodging his hand. Staring at the opposite wall as if not seeing it, she said earnestly: "Neither of us did anything wrong. It is not right that we should suffer."

"Don't worry." His tone was light, confident. "I'll get the pair of you out of it." He proffered her cigarettes in a shiny case.

She took a cigarette, leaned forward to hold its end in the flame from his lighter, and, still leaning forward, asked: "I will not have to stay here tonight?"

He patted her cheek. "I don't think so. It oughtn't to take them more than an hour to grill you." He dropped his hand to her knee. "And the sooner we get through here the sooner you'll be through with them."

She took a deep breath.

"There is not a lot to say," she began. "I met him in a little place in Switzerland. I was without any money at all, any friends. He liked me and he was rich." She made a little gesture with the cigarette in her hand. "So I said yes."

Klaus nodded sympathetically and his fingers moved on her knee.

"He bought me clothes, that jewelry, in Paris. They were not his mother's and he gave them to me."

The lawyer nodded again and his fingers moved again on her knee.

"He brought me over here then and" — she put the burning end of her cigarette on the back of his hand — "I stayed at his —"

Klaus had snatched his hand from her knee to his mouth, was sucking the back of his hand. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded indignantly, the words muffled by the hand to his mouth. He lowered the hand and looked at the burn. "If there's something you don't like, you can say so, can't you?"

She did not smile. "I no speak Inglis good," she said, burlesquing a

heavy accent. "I stayed at his house for two weeks — not quite two weeks — until —"

"If it wasn't for Brazil you could take your troubles to another lawyer!"

"Until last night," she continued, "when I could stand him no longer. We quarreled and I left. I left just as I was, in evening clothes, with . . ."

She was finishing her story when the telephone bell rang. The attorney went to the desk and spoke into the telephone: "Hello? . . . Yes. . . . Just a couple of minutes more. . . . That's right. Thanks." He turned. "They're getting impatient."

She rose from her chair saying: "I have finished. Then the police came and he escaped through the window and they arrested me."

"Did you do any talking after they arrested you?"

She shook her head. "They would not let me. Nobody would listen to me. Nobody cared."

A young man in blue clothes that needed pressing came up to Luise Fischer and Klaus as they left the courthouse. He took off his hat and tucked it under an arm. "Mith Fither, I'm from the *Mile Valley Potht.* Can you —"

Klaus, smiling, said: "There's nothing now. Look me up at the hotel in the morning and I'll give you a statement." He handed the reporter a card. He cleared his throat. "We're hunting food now. Maybe you'll tell us where to find it — and join us."

The young man's face flushed. He looked at the card in his hand and then up at the lawyer. "Thank you, Mither Klauth, I'll be glad to. The Tavern'th jutht around the corner. It'th the only plathe that'th any good that'th open now."

He turned to indicate the south. "My name'th George Dunne."

Klaus shook his hand and said, "Glad to know you." Luise Fischer nodded and smiled, and they went down the street.

"How's Conroy?" Klaus asked.

"He hathn't come to yet," the young man replied. "They don't know yet how bad it ith."

"Where is he?"

"Thtill at Robthon'th. They're afraid to move him."

They turned the corner. Klaus asked: "Any news of Brazil?"

The reporter craned his neck to look past Luise Fischer at the lawyer. "I thought you'd know."

"Know what?"

"What — whatever there wath to know. Thith ith it."

He led them into a white-tiled restaurant. By the time they were seated at a table the dozen or more people at counter and tables were staring at Luise Fischer.

Luise Fischer, sitting in the chair Dunne had pulled out for her, taking one of the menus from the rack on the table, seemed neither disturbed by nor conscious of anyone's interest in her. She said: "I am very hungry."

A plump bald-headed man with a pointed white beard, sitting three

tables away, caught Dunne's eye as the young man went around to his chair, and beckoned with a jerk of his head.

Dunne said, "Pardon me — it'th my both," and went over to the bearded man's table.

Klaus said: "He's a nice boy."

Luise Fischer said: "We must telephone the Links. They have surely heard from Brazil."

Klaus pulled the ends of his mouth down, shook his head. "You can't trust these county-seat telephone exchanges."

"But —"

"Have to wait till tomorrow. It's late anyhow." He looked at his watch and yawned. "Play this kid. Maybe he knows something."

Dunne came back to them. His face was flushed and he seemed embarrassed.

"Anything new?" Klaus asked.

The young man shook his head violently. "Oh, no!" he said with emphasis.

A waiter came to their table. Luise Fischer ordered soup, a steak, potatoes, asparagus, a salad, cheese, and coffee. Klaus ordered scrambled eggs and coffee, Dunne pie and milk.

When the waiter stepped back from the table Dunne's eyes opened wide. He stared past Klaus. Luise Fischer turned her head to follow the reporter's gaze. Kane Robson was coming into the restaurant. Two men were with him. One of them — a fat pale youngish man — smiled and raised his hat.

Luise Fischer addressed Klaus in a low voice: "It's Robson."

The lawyer did not turn his head. He said, "That's all right," and held his cigarette case out to her.

She took a cigarette without removing her gaze from Robson. When he saw her he raised his hat and bowed and smiled ironically. Then he said something to his companions and, leaving them, came toward her. His face was pale; his dark eyes glittered.

She was smoking by the time he reached her table. He said, "Hello, darling," and sat in the empty chair facing her across the table.

Luise Fischer said: "This is Mr. Klaus. Mr. Robson."

Robson did not look at the lawyer. He addressed the woman: "Get your bail fixed up all right?"

"As you see."

There was a moment of silence. Then she said: "I shall send for my clothes in the morning."

"*Your* clothes?" He laughed. "You didn't have a stitch besides what you had on when I picked you up. Let your new man buy you new clothes."

Luise Fischer said softly: "Your friends will miss you if you stay away too long."

"Let them. I want to talk to you, Luise." He addressed Dunne impatiently: "Why don't you two go play in a corner somewhere?"

The reporter jumped up from his chair stammering: "Th-thertainly, Mr. Robthon."

Klaus looked questioningly at Luise Fischer. Her nod was barely per-

ceptible. He rose and left the table with Dunne.

Robson said: "Come back with me and I'll call off all this foolishness about the rings."

She looked curiously at him. "You want me back knowing I despise you?"

He nodded, grinning. "I can get fun out of even that."

She narrowed her eyes, studying his face. Then she asked: "How is Dick?"

His face and voice were gay with malice. "He's dying fast enough."

She seemed surprised. "You hate him?"

"I don't hate him — I don't love him. You and he were too fond of each other. I won't have my male and female parasites mixing like that."

She smiled contemptuously. "So. Then suppose I go back with you. What?"

"I explain to these people that it was all a mistake about the rings, that you really thought I had given them to you. That's all." He was watching her closely. "There's no bargaining about your boy friend Brazil. He takes what he gets."

Her face showed nothing of what she might be thinking. She leaned across the table a little toward him and spoke carefully: "If you were as dangerous as you think you are, I would be afraid to go back with you — I would rather go to prison. But I am not afraid of you. You should know by this time that you will never hurt me very much, that I can take very good care of myself."

"Maybe you've got something to learn," he said quickly; then, recovering his consciously matter-of-fact tone: "Well, what's the answer?"

"I am not a fool," she said. "I have no money, no friends who can help me. You have both and I am not afraid of you. I try to do what is best for myself. First I try to get out of this trouble without you. If I cannot then I come back to you."

"If I'll have you."

She shrugged her shoulders. "Yes, certainly that."

Luise Fischer and Harry Klaus reached the Links's flat late the next morning.

Fan opened the door for them. She put her arms around Luise Fischer. "See, I told you Harry would get you out all right."

They went into the living room.

Evelyn Grant rose from the sofa. She came to Luise Fischer saying: "It's my fault. It's all my fault!" Her eyes were red and swollen. She began to cry again. "He had told me about Donny — Mr. Link — and I thought he'd come here and I tried to phone him and papa caught me and told the police. And I only wanted to help him and —"

From the doorway Donny snarled: "Shut up. Stop it. Pipe down." He addressed Klaus petulantly: "She's been doing this for an hour. She's got me screwy."

Fan said: "Lay off the kid. She feels bad."

Donny said: "She ought to." He

smiled at Luise Fischer. "Hello, baby. Everything O. K.?"

She said: "How do you do? I think it is."

He looked at her hands. "Where's the rings?"

"We had to leave them up there."

"I told you!" His voice was bitter. "I told you you'd ought to let me sold them."

Luise Fischer asked: "Have you heard from —"

"Brazil?" Donny said before she could finish her question. He nodded. "Yep. He's O. K." He glanced over his shoulder at the girl on the sofa, then spoke rapidly in a low voice. "He's at the Hilltop Sanatorium outside of town — supposed to have D. T.s. You know he got plugged in the side. He's O. K., though — Doc Barry'll keep him under cover and fix him up good as new. He —"

Luise Fischer's eyes were growing large. She put a hand to her throat. "But he — Dr. Ralph Barry?" she demanded.

Donny wagged his head up and down. "Yep. He's a good guy."

"But he is a friend of Kane Robson's!" she cried. "I met him there at Robson's house." She turned to Klaus. "He was with him in the restaurant last night — the fat one."

The men stared at her.

Fan and Evelyn had risen from the sofa and were listening.

Donny began: "Aw, maybe it's O. K. Doc's a good guy. I don't think he —"

"Cut it out!" Klaus growled. "This is serious." He scowled thoughtfully at Luise Fischer. "No chance of a mistake on this?"

"No."

Evelyn thrust herself between the two men to confront Luise Fischer. She was crying again, but was angry now.

"Why did you have to get him into all this? Why did you have to come to him with your troubles? It's your fault that they'll put him back in prison — and he'll go crazy in prison! If it hadn't been for you none of this would have happened. You —"

Klaus said: "For God's sake let's stop this fiddledeedee and decide what we'd better do." He scowled at Luise Fischer again. "Didn't Robson say anything to you about it last night?"

She shook her head.

Donny said: "Well, listen. We got to get him out of there. It don't —"

"That's easy," Klaus said with heavy sarcasm. "If he's in wrong there" — he shrugged — "it's happened already. We've got to find out. Can you get to see him?"

Donny nodded. "Sure."

"Then go. Wise him up — find out what the layout is."

Donny and Luise Fischer left the house by the back door, went through the yard to the alley behind, and down the alley for two blocks. They saw nobody following them.

"I guess we're in the clear," Donny said, and led the way down a cross street.

On the next corner there was a

garage and repair shop. A small dark man was tinkering with an engine.

"Hello, Tony," Donny said. "Lend me a boat."

The dark man looked curiously at Luise Fischer while saying: "Surest thing you know. Take the one in the corner."

They got into a black sedan and drove away.

After half an hour Donny turned the machine into a road at the end of which a white building was visible. "That's her," he said.

Leaving the sedan in front of the building, they walked under a black and-gold sign that said Hilltop Sanatorium into an office.

"We want to see Mr. Lee," Donny told the nurse at the desk. "He's expecting us."

She moistened her lips nervously and said: "It's two hundred and three, right near the head of the stairs."

They went up a dark flight of stairs to the second floor. "This is it," Donny said, halting. He opened the door without knocking.

Besides Brazil, lying in bed, his sallowness more pronounced than usual, there were two men in the room. One of them was the huge tired-faced man who had arrested Luise Fischer. He said: "I oughtn't to let you people see him."

Brazil half rose in bed and stretched a hand out toward Luise Fischer.

She went around the huge man to the bed and took Brazil's hand. "Oh, I'm sorry — sorry!" she murmured.

He grinned without pleasure. "Hard luck, all right. And I'm scared stiff of those bars on the window."

She leaned over and kissed him.

The huge man said: "Come on now. You got to get out. I'm liable to catch hell for this."

Donny took a step toward the bed. "Listen, Brazil. Is there —"

The huge man put out a hand and wearily pushed Donny back. "Go 'way. There's nothing for you to hang around here for." He put a hand on Luise Fischer's shoulder. "Go ahead, please, will you? Say goodbye to him now — and maybe you can see him afterwards."

She kissed Brazil again and stood up.

He said: "Look after her, will you, Donny?"

"Sure," Donny promised. "And don't let them worry you. I'll send Harry over to see you and —"

The huge man groaned. "Is this going to keep up all day?"

He took Luise Fischer's arm and put her and Donny out.

They went in silence down to the sedan, and neither spoke until they were entering the city again. Then Luise Fischer said: "Will you kindly lend me ten dollars?"

"Sure." Donny took one hand from the wheel, felt in his pants pocket, and gave her two five-dollar bills.

Then she said: "I wish to go to the railroad station."

When they reached the station she got out of the sedan.

"Thank you very much," she said. "Do not wait. I will come over later."

Luise Fischer went into the railroad station and to the newsstand, where she bought a package of cigarettes. Then she went to a telephone booth, asked for long distance, and called a Mile Valley number.

"Hello, Ito? . . . Is Mr. Robson there? This is *Fräulein* Fischer. . . . Yes." There was a pause. "Hello, Kane. . . . Well, you have won. You might have saved yourself the delay if you had told me last night what you knew. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, I am."

She put the receiver on its prong and stared at it for a long moment. Then she left the booth, went to the ticket window, and said:

"A ticket to Mile Valley please — one way."

The room was wide and high-ceilinged. Its furniture was Jacobean. Kane Robson was sprawled comfortably in a deep chair.

Ten feet away, partly facing him, partly the fireplace, Luise Fischer sat, more erectly, in a smaller chair. She was in a pale negligee and had pale slippers on her feet.

Somewhere in the house a clock struck midnight. Robson heard it out attentively before he went on speaking: "And you are making a great mistake, my dear, in being too sure of yourself."

She yawned. "I slept very little last night," she said. "I am too sleepy to be frightened."

A nurse — a scrawny middle-aged woman in white — came into the room, panting. "Mr. Conroy's recovering consciousness, I do believe," she said.

Robson's mouth tightened and his eyes, after a momentary flickering, became steady. "Phone Dr. Blake," he said. "He'll want to know right away." He turned to Luise Fischer. "I'll run up and stay with him till she is through phoning."

Luise Fischer rose. "I'll go too."

He pursed his lips. "I don't know. Maybe the excitement of too many people — the surprise of seeing you back here again — might not be good for him."

The nurse had left the room.

Ignoring Luise Fischer's laughter, he said: "No; you had better stay here, my dear."

She said: "I will not."

He shrugged. "Very well, but —" He went upstairs without finishing.

Luise Fischer went up behind him, but not with his speed. She arrived at the sick-room doorway, however, in time to catch the look of utter fear in Conroy's eyes, before they closed, as his bandaged head fell back.

Robson, standing just inside the door, said softly: "Ah, he's passed out again." His eyes were unwary.

Her eyes were probing.

They stood there and stared at each other until the Japanese butler came to the door and said: "A Mr. Brazil to see *Fräulein* Fischer."

Into Robson's face little by little came the expression of one considering a private joke. He said: "Show Mr. Brazil into the living room.

Frauen Fischer will be down immediately. Phone the deputy sheriff."

Robson smiled at the woman. "A choice?" he asked. She was still.

The nurse came in. "Dr. Blake is out, but I left word."

Luise Fischer said: "I do not think Mr. Conroy should be left alone, Miss George."

Brazil was standing in the center of the living room, balancing himself on legs spread far apart. He held his left arm tight to his side, straight down. He had on a dark overcoat that was buttoned high against his throat. His face was a ghastly yellow mask in which his eyes burned redly. He said through his teeth: "They told me you'd come back. I had to see it." He spit on the floor. "Strumpet!"

She stamped a foot. "Do not be a fool. I —" She broke off as the nurse passed the doorway. She said sharply: "Miss George, what are you doing?"

The nurse said: "Mr. Robson said he thought I might be able to reach Dr. Blake on the phone at Mrs. Webber's."

Luise Fischer turned, paused to kick off her slippers, and ran up the steps on stockinged feet.

Robson was leaning over the sick man. His hands were on the sick man's bandaged head, holding it face down.

His thumbs were pressing the back of the skull. All his weight seemed on his thumbs. His face was insane.

Luise Fischer screamed, "Brazil!" and flung herself at Robson wildly.

Brazil came into the room, lurching blindly, his left arm tight to his side. He swung his right fist, missed Robson's head by a foot, was struck twice in the face by Robson, did not seem to know it, and swung his right fist into Robson's belly. The woman's grip on Robson's ankles kept him from recovering his balance. He went down heavily.

The nurse was busy with her patient, who was trying to sit up in bed. Tears ran down his face. He was sobbing: "He stumbled over a piece of wood while he was helping me to the car, and he hit me on the head with it."

Luise Fischer had Brazil sitting upon the floor with his back to the wall, wiping his face with her handkerchief.

He opened one eye and murmured: "The guy was screwy, wasn't he?"

She put an arm around him and laughed with a cooing sound in her throat. "All men are."

Robson had not moved.

There was a commotion and three men came in.

The tallest one looked at Robson and then at Brazil and chuckled.

"There's our lad that don't like hospitals," he said. "It's a good thing he didn't escape from a gymnasium or he might've hurt somebody."

Luise Fischer took off her rings and put them on the floor beside Robson's left foot.

THE BEST MYSTERY BOOKS OF 1949

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

SINCE we live in a period when the vagaries of publishers' promotional plans indicate occasionally that a formal detective story should be published as a straight novel, and occasionally that a crimeless romance should be published as mystery-suspense, precise statistics on the number of mysteries brought out in a year are next to impossible. But a rough count indicates that 191 mystery novels were published in America in 1949, plus 11 other volumes of mystery fiction — short stories, anthologies, *et cetera*.

Of these 200-odd volumes a provokingly large number were careless, shoddy jobs, hardly deserving the dignity of book publication, and another sizable group consisted of promising first drafts, rushed to the printer without needed editorial polishing — evidence that too many publishers look upon the mystery as standard mass-market merchandise, a commodity rather than a book.

But if the average of mystery production ran low in 1949, the highpoints of the year were very high indeed — in some cases so high that they are sure to figure on all future lists of The Best Detective Novels. If you've been depressed by some of the mass-production items, check over the following list for reassurance that the crime story at its best can still provide uniquely satisfying literate entertainment.

The ten top novels of 1949, arranged alphabetically by author, include:

1: John Dickson Carr's BELOW SUSPICION (Harper)

The formal detective story at its trickiest and most fascinating, with eerie occult overtones recalling the great Middle Period Carr of such masterworks as THE CROOKED HINGE.

2: Erle Stanley Gardner's THE CASE OF THE DUBIOUS BRIDEGROOM (Morrow)

In contrast to the more perfunctory recent Gardner products, a tour de force of legal gimmickry, plotting, and tempo. Those who admire Gardner's skill at producing stories which are hard but not hardboiled, fast but not fast-and-loose, will find the same virtues, with better prose and characterization, in Harold Q. Masur's SUDDENLY A CORPSE (Simon & Schuster).

3: Alan Green's WHAT A BODY! (Simon & Schuster)

The humorous whodunit in excelsis — witty, absurd, and yet extremely well-plotted, with a brand-new twist on the classic Locked Room problem.

The humorous mystery has done well this year; others especially recommended include Owen Cameron's outrageous and delightful THE OWL AND THE PUSSY CAT (Harper), Jack Iams' knowledgable account of comic-strip artists — DEATH DRAWS THE LINE (Morrow), and Richard Wormser's warm and spirited THE HANGING HEIRESS (Mill-Morrow).

4: Matthew Head's THE CABINDA AFFAIR (Simon & Schuster)

Combines the subtle and ironic psychological probings expected from Head with a more formal deductive plot than he has hitherto used. A similarly attractive combination occurs in Bruno Fischer's THE RESTLESS HANDS (Dodd, Mead).

5: Michael Innes' THE CASE OF THE JOURNEYING BOY (Dodd, Mead)

The finest Innes phantasmagoria in years, blending the most rarefied wit and erudition with a rousing adventure melodrama. Devotees of this form of criminous caviare, which is characterized by high literacy, off-beat humor, and a certain quality of chetongueek,* will likewise take great delight in Edmund Crispin's spoofing of politics and poltergeists, BURIED FOR PLEASURE (Lippincott); H. F. Heard's divagatious and entrancing THE NOTCHED HAIRPIN (Vanguard); Thomas Kyd's academic adventure-story, COVER HIS FACE (Lippincott); and Julian Symons' bibliophilous study in forgery, BLAND BEGINNING (Harper).

6: David Keith's BLUE HARPSICHORD (Dodd, Mead)

The year's most unclassifiable item, a mystery only by the most extended courtesy, but as imaginatively conceived, richly plotted, warmly written, and purely joyous a novel as you could ask.

7: John MacDonald's THE MOVING TARGET (Knopf)

A taut, powerful, compassionate novel which atones for all the sins committed this year in the name of the hardboiled detective story. One of the few other recent toughies to prove more than an almost parodistic pastiche is John Evans' HALO IN BRASS (Bobbs-Merrill).

8: Evelyn Piper's THE INNOCENT (Simon & Schuster)

In which a writer new to the field teaches the old hands how to write a suspense novel with the cumulative terror of the everyday-gone-askew. The much overworked "suspense" form has produced other noteworthy examples in Elma K. Lobaugh's I AM AFRAID (Crime Club); William P. McGivern's HEAVEN RAN LAST (Dodd, Mead); and William O'Farrell's

* which means, of course, *tongue* in *cheek*.

fusion of brutality and politics, THIN EDGE OF VIOLENCE (Duell, Sloan & Pearce).

9: Ellery Queen's CAT OF MANY TAILS (Little, Brown)

Combines the pure puzzle appeal of a new solution to an old mass-murder gambit with a broad and startlingly effective novelistic concept of a city as a protagonist.

10: Josephine Tey's THE FRANCHISE AFFAIR (Macmillan)

A modern reconstruction of the celebrated Eighteenth Century Canning case which is, to put it simply and flatly, a perfect detective story, from either a literary or a technical viewpoint.

You'd do well, too, to look into George Bellairs' DEATH ON THE LAST TRAIN (Macmillan) and Marten Cumberland's THE MAN WHO COVERED MIRRORS (Crime Club), which demonstrate that the detailed, methodical British detective story can be written with humor and humanity; and David Dodge's PLUNDER OF THE SUN (Random) and Hammond Innes' THE BLUE ICE (Harper), which are hardly mysteries, though published as such, but wonderful adventure stories of far places to thrill the Walter Mitty in you.

A special award for 1949 should go to Aaron Marc Stein (George Bagby/Hampton Stone), for producing five books under three names (his nearest rival, Gardner, offered only four under two names), and more especially for sustaining an unbelievably high level of skill and charm in each.

An odd phenomenon of the year was the number of "straight" novels stemming directly, in substance and structure, from the mystery and suspense story. Some of these were far less satisfactory as novels than the less pretentious works from which they stemmed; but mystery readers should not miss the sociological detection of Allan Chase's SHADOW OF A HERO (Little, Brown), the thoughtful espionage of Judith Kelly's A DIPLOMATIC INCIDENT (Houghton, Mifflin), nor the subtle middle-class terror of William Sansom's THE BODY (Harcourt, Brace). And two familiar and admirable murdermongers turned up with excellent novels much more closely related to their crime-books than their publishers would have had you believe: Richard Lockridge with A MATTER OF TASTE (Lippincott) and Margaret Millar with THE CANNIBAL HEART (Random).

First novels have been reasonably promising. The Alan Green and the Evelyn Piper mentioned above among the ten best are both firsts; and Dorothy Salisbury Davis in her THE JUDAS CAT (Scribner's) and E. Lee Waddell in her MURDER AT DRAKE'S ANCHORAGE (Dutton) reveal fresh, new, talents. The most interesting new detective protagonists to emerge are Detective

Captain Sam Birge, with his Maigret-like patience and perception, in William Krasner's WALK THE DARK STREETS (Harper), and brash, Bronx-born Assistant District Attorney Mortimer W. Mandel in N. D. and G. G. Lobell's THE SHADOW AND THE BLOT (Harper).

Aside from novels, the outstanding books of 1949 are:

SHORT STORIES: William Faulkner's KNIGHT'S GAMBIT (Random)

Not only the season's only undiluted volume of detective short stories, and not only a unique prestige item as detection by one of the tying contestants for the unawarded 1949 Nobel prize, but a distinguished and fascinating series of stories in its own right.

ANTHOLOGY: Howard Haycraft, Editor: FOURTEEN GREAT DETECTIVE STORIES (Modern Library)

An anthology of permanent value, matching the excellent but out-dated Starrett collection which it replaces. Readers of this magazine need no recommendation of the year's other major anthology, THE QUEEN'S AWARDS, 1949 (Little, Brown).

FACT-CRIME: Joseph Henry Jackson's BAD COMPANY (Harcourt, Brace)
Fredric Wertham's THE SHOW OF VIOLENCE (Doubleday)

Two volumes outstanding even in a better-than-average crop of fact-crime, the first a study of California bandits in the finest Pearson-Roughead tradition of genteel irony and detailed scholarship, the second an exciting blend of literary and psychiatric methods in examining many cases — including the lamentable case of our present society and its attitudes toward murder. Other fact-crime well worth your reading includes Homer Croy's folksy but sound JESSE JAMES WAS MY NEIGHBOR and Alexander Foote's confessional diagram of intrigue, HANDBOOK FOR SPIES (Doubleday).

HISTORICAL: John Dickson Carr's THE LIFE OF SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE (Harper)

Certainly no bush is needed to the biography of one Master by another.

Lost to the mystery field in 1949: Charles G. Booth, book, magazine, and film murder-writer, and Hollywood Oscar winner; Will Cuppy, most drily devastating of humorists, who published much of his humor for twenty years in the guise of mystery reviews; R. A. J. Walling, who began murder writing at 60 and was still chronicling the deductions of Philip Tolefree at 80; Arthur Leo Zagat, veteran pulpster and indefatigable worker for writers' rights. May they rest in peace . . .

Will Scott is not well-known to American readers, either of books or magazines. True, he has written only four novels, but he has probably had more short stories published than any other living writer — he is well into his second thousand. Yes, we said second thousand!

A man who has written that many short stories should have a philosophy of technique. Will Scott has precisely that, although his theories of literary craftsmanship stem more from his earlier pursuits than from his prolific output. Once an art editor and an art critic, his knowledge of painting still influences his thinking. It is natural, therefore, that as a writer he likes his stories to be pictorial. *Tales laid against a background of sweeping marshes, in empty houses, on strange streets — these are Will Scott's materia manhuntica. The hackneyed backgrounds — the library in the country house, the office of the chief of police — fill him with horror, as do (and we now quote) those awful French windows that go on year after year.*

A man who has a philosophy of writing technique should also have a philosophy of detective-story technique — especially if he writes detective stories, as Will Scott does. The major principle of Mr. Scott's detectival philosophy is that he loathes the straightforward "whodunit." He doesn't care a 'tec dam who dun it, and with equal fervor he detests last chapters or denouements which demand a "reconstruction of the crime" wherein all the characters sit around and listen to the great detective "telling all."

Here is one of Will Scott's finest short stories, and in our book it is light years away from the straightforward whodunit which Mr. Scott abhors. Judge for yourself if Will Scott practises what he preaches . . .

CLUE IN BLUE

by WILL SCOTT

EDGAR COPPEL was out of the world for two whole weeks. He had grown sick of the world and the horrible monotony of every day.

The only thing in Edgar Coppel's life that ever seemed to change was the number on the big round calendar on the office wall: 4, 5, 6. . . . And even that could get no further than 31, but had to start all over again at 1 till you wanted to take a ledger and smash it to bits. Which, of course, you couldn't do. The big round calendar belonged to the Firm. Just as the ledger belonged to the Firm. Just as Edgar Coppel belonged to the Firm.

"Is Mr. Hepplewhite in, please?" "What name?" "Brown." "Will you

sit down? I will see if Mr. Hepplewhite can see you." Out through the glass door. In through the glass door. "Will you come this way, please. Mr. Hepplewhite will see you."

Years of that. Asking people with names like Brown to sit down. Pretending that Mr. Hepplewhite might be too busy to see them. Going out through the glass door. Coming back. Asking people with names like Brown to come this way, please. *Years* . . .

Nothing of a life. But then it was nothing of a world. Edgar Coppel didn't want to change his bit of the world for any other bit. He loathed the lot of it. He loathed everything he read in his newspaper. That was what they called in stories Life with a capital L. He knew that his little career was just a cage. But who in his senses would want to fly out of a cage to the kind of freedom you read about in newspapers?

"Thousands sleep in the open on Southend beach." "Shop murder in Hornsey. Hammer clue." "Her legs insured for twenty thousand." "Paris talks resumed today." "Flat murder in Whitehaven. Number-plate clue." "Geneva talks suspended." "Heath murder." "Berlin talks." "Houseboat murder." "Thousand sleep in the open on Margate sands."

Edgar Coppel used to say that he could tell you, any January, what would be in any paper the following December.

He didn't know what to do about it. He didn't know where to go. He knew where he *would* go, when the fortnight in September came round. Margate or Bognor or Cromer or somewhere. Just where made no difference. It meant a pier and colored fairy lamps and lodgings where they weren't too civil by the end of the first week.

It meant this year's concert party with last year's jokes. It meant a confounded umbrella all the time, in case it rained. It meant dozens of postcards, written on your knee with your back against a slimy groyne that ruined your new sports jacket — postcards to people you'd love to offend, but who would be offended if you didn't send them a postcard.

And it meant more newspapers. You *had* to buy them at the seaside, for want of something better to do. Buy them and sit on a deck-chair for twopence and curse them because of what was in them. "Foreign Secretary snapped last evening on his departure for Monte Carlo talks." "Forest murder. Bus-ticket clue."

A fortnight in September. That's when he'd go. That's what he'd do.

And then, so suddenly that it almost startled him, he said, "Will I?" And then he said, "No, I'm damned if I do! Not again!"

And when the time came he pushed a toothbrush and his shaving things into a little tin box, put the tin box in his pocket, made sure he'd got his money, and went.

He just went.

He hadn't a map. He hadn't an idea. The first night he got as far as

Epping Forest, and slept behind a haystack. Ever since he was a small boy he had read of men sleeping behind haystacks. Now he had done it himself, and liked it. No gas to turn off, no dog to put in the kitchen, no door to lock. Just down and straight to sleep. He liked it exceedingly.

After the first day he never knew where he was. He lived on bread and cheese, or whatever they had, in country pubs. Sometimes he slept in the pubs. If there wasn't a pub handy, when night came, he would find another haystack, or a dry ditch, or a ruined barn. For the first time in his life he began to find it difficult to spend money.

He occupied an hour one afternoon at a forge in the middle of Essex, finding out that shoeing a horse wasn't as easy as it looked; and he passed a whole afternoon in a large field learning about the harvesting of clover.

When in a village he approached the little newsagent's, with its colored contents bills outside, he always turned aside and gave it a miss. Paris could talk, clues be found in ravines, men break the record to the Cape by six hours less than other men: he didn't want to know. He didn't want *news*. There was no news in the country pubs; nothing about Paris talks, nothing about insuring legs for twenty thousand, nothing about clues. Only urgent excitements about what they were going to do if there wasn't rain in twenty-four hours, and what old Pete was going to do now that his rick was burned.

On the thirteenth day, at sunset, he found himself on the top of the hill behind Benfleet. He didn't know it was Benfleet till a signpost told him. He had not known he was near the river. Of signposts he had seen little for many days.

The new Southend road was fifty yards away, with its procession of impatient cars, its noise, its twinkling junction lights, and a long billboard shrieking a red and blue message to tell Edgar Coppel he had left shoesmiths and clover fields behind and was back again in civilization.

PLAZA. ANN CAREY IN *Forgotten Lives.*

The same old world. . . .

He was in the corner of a field, his back propped against an old gate. All the shape had gone out of his suit. The heels of his shoes were down to the uppers, and the sole of one was cracked across. He did not care a straw. The day after tomorrow he would have to be spick and span for the Firm. For thirty hours or so he could still be as he liked for himself.

There was a wind from the river, and it blew a sheet of newspaper over a hedge and across the field, to come to rest against his foot. He did not stir to reach it. Enough of that sort of thing after the thirty hours. Paris would still be talking; clues would still be coming to light in luggage offices and garages; somebody would still be flying to the Cape in two days less than somebody else.

He turned, and the tin box in his pocket rattled. For some days it had

been rattling, annoying him. He had meant to pack it, somehow. He took it out of his pocket and opened it, reached to his foot and plucked the sheet of newspaper from its resting place. He folded the sheet of newspaper into a pad and thrust the pad into the gap made by a toothbrush which was too long for its fellows in the tin box and a shaving-stick which was growing too short. He shook the box. It did not rattle now. He put it in his pocket.

The sun went down behind London, a crimson ball in a field of smoky slate. Dusk fell and with it the red letters on the long billboard turned to black, the letters faded to nothing.

LAZA. NN AREY N *orgotten ives.*

That interested him for a moment. He wondered why it happened. But only for a moment. For the first time since he had started his eventless adventure, there was a chill in the air. It was coming up from the river. He rose and stretched the cramp out of his legs. He turned his back on the new Southend road and shuffled along a little lane. In half a mile he came to a sleepy inn. Here was a simple meal for him, and the promise of a bed. The momentary reminder of Talks and Speed and Insured Legs and the glass door was forgotten. He sat in the bar parlor, eating his bread and cheese and listening to the facts, from one who knew, about the dry summer of '87, when the pond on the Common dried right up.

By ten o'clock he was ready for upstairs. He ran his hand across the stubble on his chin. He had half a mind to shave before retiring, and so start his last day without even that responsibility. He thought it over, and liked the idea better than ever.

"Any hopes of a jug of hot water?" he asked the landlord.

"Anything we've got if you can wait, mister," said the landlord.

"I can wait," Edgar Coppel nodded.

And at twenty past ten, in front of a mirror covered with brown blotches, with his tin box on one corner of an ancient dressing-table and a jug of hot water on the other, he began his shave, by candlelight.

He was happy and depressed together. Happy in the shortening present, depressed at the prospect of the imminent glass door and the hundreds of people with names such as Brown who would so soon be wanting to see Mr. Hepplewhite.

The shave over, he replaced his things in the tin box and sat on the edge of the bed, stroking his smooth chin and looking at the parts of his face which missed the brown blotches of the old mirror. The shave had refreshed him. He no longer felt sleepy. But there was nothing to do, nobody to talk to.

On the dressing-table was the folded pad of newspaper. Edgar Coppel looked farther. Three or four books rested untidily on a home-made shelf. He rose and read the titles. Trash, as he might have expected. Turning, he noticed the newspaper, unfolded it, and spread it out on the bed. It would be, he knew, nothing but the same old

nonsense; but there was nothing else to help him pass half an hour. The sheet was page twelve from the *Sunday Sphere* of that week, and it did contain, as he had been so certain it would, nothing but the same old nonsense.

Continued from page one.

SUMMING-UP IN CASSIDY CASE

PRISONER'S OUTBURST AT SENTENCE OF DEATH

"MY LIFE SWORN AWAY BY LIARS!"

The final scenes in the trial of Herman Cassidy for the murder of Peter Bond in a barn on the outskirts of Cromer . . .

It has been said that the evidence in this case is purely circumstantial. Up to a point, this is true. But the testimony of the witness Woodward has not been shaken by the defense. The accused has sworn that on the evening and at the time of the crime he was on the yacht Mayfly, anchored off Cromer. He was, he asserts, asleep below decks. The defense has been unable to confirm this alibi, because, they say, Cassidy was the only man on the yacht at the time. In this, you may think, the accused has been merely unfortunate.

The witness Woodward has sworn that on the evening and at the time of the crime he saw the accused leave the barn. Cassidy was personally unknown to him, but the name of the Mayfly, knitted in pale blue letters on the front of Cassidy's white sweater, was plainly seen by him. At the identity parade Woodward picked out Cassidy at once. Cassidy is a man of striking appearance, quite unlike any other member of the little crew . . .

If Woodward's testimony were not supported by the other evidence, or if you had to consider the other evidence alone, without Woodward's testimony, you might be justified . . .

But you must be satisfied in your minds, beyond all reasonable doubt, that the foul deed perpetrated in the barn in the dusk of that July night . . .

Edgar Coppel found himself yawning.

He let the sheet slide to the floor, undressed, blew out the candle, and got into bed. In less than a minute he was asleep.

The next morning he was up as early as the landlord, too early for breakfast. For want of something better to do he walked lazily down the lane to the Southend road, empty and quiet at this time of the morning. He propped his elbows on the top bar of a gate and stood staring at nothing.

PLAZA. ANN CAREY IN *Forgotten Lives.*

Afterwards he told himself that he never really thought it out. It seemed to happen inside his head, as though somebody other than he were arranging a puzzle.

Daylight: PLAZA. ANN CAREY IN *Forgotten Lives.*

Dusk: LAZA. NN AREY N *orgotten ives.*

Funny. . . . The first letter of each word was in a palish blue; the rest in bright red. Easy to look at *now;* but the evening before, in the fading light, the red letters had turned to

black, the blue letters had vanished.

He recalled something from his boyhood days, when he had his first little "pinhole" camera and could not understand why girls in red dresses always "came out" in black dresses, whereas girls in blue dresses always "came out" in white. Somebody had once tried to explain it to him, but he could never take it in.

Strolling back up the lane another piece of the puzzle fell into place.

. . . if you had to consider the other evidence alone, without Woodward's testimony . . .

"Oh!" said Edgar Coppel.

. . . the name of the Mayfly, knitted in pale blue letters on the front of Cassidy's white sweater, was plainly seen by him . . .

"H'm!" said Edgar Coppel.

. . . in the dusk of that July night . . .

"Here!" said Edgar Coppel. And he put on a bit of speed and got back to the inn as quickly as he could.

"Breakfast won't be long," said the landlord.

"Any time for me," said Edgar Coppel.

He hurried upstairs to the little bedroom where he had left his hat and groped on the floor for the sheet out of the previous Sunday's *Sunday Sphere.* He sat on the edge of the bed and picked bits out of the report of the Cassidy trial. Not since he was a boy had he felt so strangely excited.

Yes! It all seemed to depend on the man Woodward — on his picking out the name Mayfly on Cassidy's sweater and thus leading the police to the yacht. And, afterwards, the identity parade . . . But in the first place it was Woodward's word for it that he had seen the name of the boat on Cassidy's sweater at the door of the barn. And if Woodward hadn't . . .

Edgar Coppel turned back and read bits again. *Blue letters — dusk* — and the width of a lane between Woodward and the man who came out of the barn . . .

Edgar Coppel laid the paper aside and tried to think.

If Woodward hadn't seen the name Mayfly on Cassidy's sweater — if he *couldn't* — then Woodward was lying, and the whole case against Cassidy went to pieces. And if the letters were really blue — pale blue — and it was really dusk. . . .

"Perhaps," said Edgar Coppel, "it's only a certain kind of blue. Perhaps the letters on that poster were of the certain kind, and other kinds —" And then, again, he recalled the blue dresses of his little girl friends that always "came out" white.

He found himself staring at the old books on the home-made shelf. Some were in blue binding, some in red. Here, in the light of morning, they looked blue and red. He rose and took down three of them; one in red, one in light blue, one in dark blue. He drew the curtains across the window and opened the door of the old-fashioned wardrobe. In the gloom of the wardrobe he held out the three books. The red book looked dark, the dark blue book looked dark, the light blue

book looked pale. Not so pale as to be colorless, but then this was not dusk. Perhaps it was the dusk that was wanted to complete the illusion — something in the light of the sky, or in the air.

He looked at the newspaper report again. Pale blue letters, it said. And dusk . . .

LAZA. NN AREY N *orgotten ives.*

There was no doubt about *that*, anyway. Perhaps it did require a certain kind of blue — a greenish blue, or a yellowish blue, or something. But it began to look as if *any* kind of light blue, at the distance of the width of a lane, in the dusk, would be pretty hard to see.

. . . *if you had to consider the other evidence alone, without Woodward's testimony* . . .

"I ought to see somebody!" thought Edgar Coppel.

In the middle of the newspaper sheet was a little "box" in which were set out the names of the judge, counsel for the prosecution and defense, and solicitors.

Simnel and Smith, solicitors for the accused.

He ate his breakfast slowly and thoughtfully. It was a very peculiar position for him to be in. If he had never noticed this strange trick which fading daylight played with light blue, all kinds of things might have gone wrong. Why had he not noticed it before? Perhaps it was one of those things that you noticed and didn't notice.

Like the way you read only the top half of a row of letters. You could lay a piece of paper across the bottom half of a row of letters and read every word in the row. But cover up the top half and try to read the words *then*. You couldn't. He had read that once, in a magazine, and tried it for himself. There must be lots of funny little things like that, if only you could find them out.

You *couldn't* see pale blue in the dusk, and you *could* see red twice as strong. He'd found that out.

Very well. If the dusk that fateful evening at Cromer had been sufficiently dusky, if the blue letters on Cassidy's sweater had been sufficiently blue, and if, therefore, Woodward could not have seen what he said he had seen, there was no real proof that Cassidy had been anywhere near the barn at the time of the murder.

"I *ought* to see somebody!" Edgar Coppel repeated.

It was an odd state of affairs. Our Mr. Coppel, of Hepplewhite's office, suddenly blossoming forth in the newspapers as the man who saved another from the gallows by the merest chance. . . .

"Simnel and Smith," said Mr. Coppel. "They'll be able to find out just how dusky it was, and how pale the letters on the sweater are. The police will have the sweater, no doubt. They can experiment. *We* can experiment."

He settled his modest bill at the inn, walked to Benfleet station, and took the first train to town. Nobody took

the slightest notice of him. To the passers-by he was just a shabby young man. This made him smile. They did not *know*.

He was home just after lunch-time, his holiday cut short by this new excitement. He bathed, changed, and became our spruce Mr. Coppel again, but our Mr. Coppel with a new fire in his eye. At three o'clock that afternoon he was in the outer office of Simnel and Smith, solicitors, and Simnel and Smith's own particular Mr. Coppel (who looked as if his name might be Brown) was trying to get out of our Mr. Coppel the nature of the business that had brought him there, before troubling either Mr. Simnel or Mr. Smith about it.

"I'm sorry," said Edgar Coppel firmly.

The man behind the counter pulled his lower lip and glanced at a clock. Both the heads of the firm were always so very busy.

Edgar Coppel pulled a piece of paper from his pocket and unscrewed the cap of his fountain pen. On the paper he wrote *Cassidy case — important information.*

"Give that to Mr. Simnel or Mr. Smith," he said, folding the paper and handing it to the clerk.

The clerk sighed, went out through a glass door, came back again with raised eyebrows, and said, "Will you come this way, please. Mr. Simnel will see you."

Mr. Simnel saw Mr. Coppel. A puzzled Mr. Simnel.

"Mr. — er — Coppel?" said Mr. Simnel.

"That's right," said Mr. Coppel.

Mr. Simnel was still holding the slip of paper.

"The Cassidy case," he said quietly. "You — er — you say here. . . ." He trailed off to silence and looked at Mr. Coppel.

Mr. Coppel stated his case, ticking his points off on the ends of his fingers and quoting from the judge's summing-up. He stated his case, as Mr. Simnel admitted (though not aloud), very well, making his last point clearly — that all the other evidence depended on the evidence of the witness Woodward, and that the evidence of the witness Woodward depended on the fact that the name on the sweater of the man he said he had seen coming out of the barn was the name of the yacht Mayfly.

"In that," said Mr. Coppel, "Woodward went to the police, and the police went to the Mayfly. The rest followed. But the rest would not have followed if Woodward had not seen the name Mayfly on the man's sweater. *And suppose he didn't?*"

Mr. Simnel blinked.

"Please proceed," he begged.

"If he didn't," Mr. Coppel proceeded, "perhaps he didn't see a sweater. Perhaps he didn't see a man. It was Cassidy's weapon, true. But weapons can be stolen — 'planted,' don't you call it? If Woodward couldn't see the name on the sweater the whole thing looks like a plot. Against Cassidy."

Mr. Simnel blinked again and looked more puzzled than ever.

"If Woodward *couldn't* see the name?"

"The evidence is," said Coppel, "that it was dusk, that there were no street lamps, that there was the width of a lane between the two men, and that the name on Cassidy's sweater was knitted in pale blue wool."

"Well?" said Mr. Simnel.

Mr. Coppel, thoroughly warmed up, rose and looked around the room.

"Excuse me," he said. And to Mr. Simnel's astonishment he picked up two books from Mr. Simnel's desk and suddenly drew the curtain across Mr. Simnel's window.

"This is not exactly dusk," said Mr. Coppel, "but it will give you the idea." Then he realized for the first time that he was not conducting himself quite as our Mr. Coppel of Hepplewhite's office should. "Give you the idea, sir," he amended.

He held up the two books in a dark corner of the room, but in front of a white blotter.

"This book in my left hand is a pale blue book," he said. "The one in my right hand is a bright red book. Can you see the pale blue book against the white blotter in this light, sir?"

"Scarcely at all," Mr. Simnel admitted.

"And the red book, sir?"

"Plainly. It looks almost black."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Coppel. "So that if, instead of being books, these were *words*, you wouldn't be able to make out the pale blue ones at all."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Simnel. "How very extraordinary!"

Thus encouraged, Edgar Coppel told of his discovery on the Southend road the night before, when ANN CAREY had changed to NN AREY before his eyes as the dusk fell.

"It all depends, you see, sir," he said, "on the — er — duskiness of the dusk and the paleness of the blue. It all depends in the Cassidy case, that is. If we could make certain."

"Excuse me," said Mr. Simnel, himself now very red about the cheekbones. And he went out of the room, muttering "Extraordinary!" to himself.

It was nearly ten minutes before he returned.

"*Quite* pale blue, the letters on the sweater," he said. "I've had it looked up. And the dusk must have been pretty advanced, because Woodward's tale was that, although he was not hiding in any way, Cassidy did not see him."

"It's lucky, sir, don't you think," said Edgar Coppel, "that I was on the Southend road last night?"

"Lucky?" echoed Mr. Simnel.

"For Cassidy."

"For Cassidy?"

"Well. . . ." Edgar Coppel stopped, fumbling for a way to say it that did not make him sound too much the hero. "Things can't be left *here*, can they, sir?"

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Simnel.

"If Woodward is lying," said Edgar

Coppel, "it upsets the whole case, sir, doesn't it?"

For a time so long that it made Edgar Coppel blush, Mr. Simnel sat looking at his visitor. Then he looked away and tapped the edge of his desk.

"I don't — I don't quite . . ." he began unsuccessfully. Then he looked up at Edgar Coppel again. "Where did you hear about this?" he asked.

"Sunday's paper," replied the now bewildered Edgar Coppel.

"*Sunday Sphere?*"

"That's right, sir."

"You read it?"

"Yes, sir."

"But ——" This seemed to be too much for Mr. Simnel. He opened the door of his office, gave an order, waited a moment, and then came back to his desk with a copy of the previous Sunday's issue of the *Sunday Sphere.*

"You *read* it, you say?"

"Yes, sir," Edgar Coppel answered. He could not for the life of him understand what had come over Mr. Simnel, of Simnel and Smith. Of course he had read it! That is . . .

"That is ——" he said.

"Well?" said Mr. Simnel.

"Part of it," Edgar Coppel confessed.

Mr. Simnel stared and then suddenly became alive. He opened the *Sunday Sphere* at page twelve.

"Do you mean that?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," said Edgar Coppel. And he had to explain that he had been holidaying far from civilization and newspapers, and that a stray sheet had blown against his foot the night before.

"I see," said Mr. Simnel. There was understanding in his eyes now, but there was more, and this something more startled Mr. Coppel.

"It says here," said Mr. Simnel, pointing to the top of the page, "'*Continued from page one.*'"

"I noticed that," said Mr. Coppel.

"And on page one it says ——"

Mr. Simnel handed the paper to Edgar Coppel, folded at page one. And Edgar Coppel read:

Famous Trials of the Past: No. 6.

THE CASSIDY CASE

THE MURDER IN THE BARN AT CROMER

At the Old Bailey, before Mr. Justice Stretton, on the third of October, 1886 . . .

"I ——" murmured Edgar Coppel, his face redder than ever.

"The Mr. Simnel mentioned in the paper here was my father," Mr. Simnel explained.

Edgar Coppel's face changed from red to an unpleasant gray.

"So that even if I'm right ——"

"As you may be," sighed Mr. Simnel. "As we may still be able to demonstrate you are. Nevertheless . . . Well, you see."

"Sixty-four years too late, you mean, sir?" said Edgar Coppel, groping for his hat.

"Sixty-four years too late," Mr. Simnel nodded.

"I see, sir," said Edgar Coppel.

THE CASE OF THE THREE OLD MAIDS

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

It was eight o'clock in the evening when a frowzy, red-faced woman came stumbling through the door of our kitchen, where my wife and I sat dawdling over a pick-up lunch.

"Doctor! Doctor! Come quick!"

I leaped to my feet. "What is it?"

"Miss Effie Higgins — she's — she's so quiet! She doesn't move! And her sister just died two weeks ago . . . oh, come quick —"

I snatched a ready-packed satchel from the front hall, and sprinted out of the door into the cloudy dusk. My wife and the terrified servant stumbled along, far behind . . . The Higgins' mansion was only two hundred yards distant.

Although I had but recently come to Poplar Bluff and opened an office, I knew well enough who the Higgins spinsters were. Rich, stuffy, conservative, the two surviving members of the family were of an age where cardiac ills often overtake the human race. Probably Miss Effie Higgins had suffered a lesion of that sort, or a paralytic stroke . . . Then, as I raced among the trees of a vacant lot which bordered the Higgins' grounds, the memory of Miss Eulalie Higgins' death struck me like a thunderbolt.

It had occurred only seventeen days before; our village paper was full of the details. The manner of Miss Eulalie's taking off had not been fitting for any aged virgin with so many government bonds. She had been found, early in the morning, in her garage, lolling forward over the wheel of the family sedan.

Perhaps it was this thought — an unconscious foreboding — which sent me galloping down the graveled driveway toward the frame garage, instead of into the huge, dark house. Sure enough — the garage doors were open. The sedan bulked in the gloom, and the door beside the driver's seat was ajar.

I saw a woman's hand, dangling at the end of a skinny wrist, swaying above the running board . . . I snapped on the garage light and peered into the wrinkled, thin-lipped face of Miss Effie Higgins . . . Carbon monoxide, of course. Sitting there in the car —

My wife and Olga, the frightened maid, came hurrying across the lawn.

"Janice!" I yelled. "Phone the fire department to bring their oxygen motor! You," I ordered Olga, "bring a blanket out on that side porch!"

I carried the limp, thin body up to the bleak piazza. No rigor mortis, yet. Perhaps there was still time . . . I made an injection.

A siren came wailing up the tree-lined road; the fire truck, with a host of cars following. We fastened the mask over the woman's face, and began to pump. It was nearly an hour before I opened a vein in Miss Effie's arm and decided to call it a day.

Archer was there — the coroner, and old Dr. Budlong, whom Olga had tried to summon before she appealed to me.

Budlong tugged at his goatee.

"Tragic," he declared. "Tragic, and incredible. Both of them — within a month. By the same means. . . . This is a horrible thing, my boy. I've known these girls all my life. Knew their father before them."

We had taken her into the house by that time. I looked down at the dead face, and said nothing.

"It's carbon monoxide?" He voiced it as a kind of doddering appeal.

"Undoubtedly," I agreed. "Every indication. Still —"

At that moment, there were only three of us in the room: Archer, Budlong and myself. Neighbors, fellow church-members, summoned by the astounding news, were buzzing about through the hallway. I could hear them talking at the telephone, trying to reach Miss Mary, the one surviving sister. She had gone to White Lake with the Watsons to attend some sort of a church meeting.

"Still — what?" asked Budlong.

"Oh, nothing," I said.

I went out on the porch. A rangy, round-shouldered man with silver hair had mounted guard at the summit of the steps. It was Regan, the town's chief of police. His wrinkled eyelids drooped as he stared at me in the glare of the porch light. "Dead?" he asked.

"Yes," I told him.

As the crowd slowly dispersed, Regan climbed the steps and stared up at me. "Two of 'em," he said. "Same way."

I nodded.

"Rich," he said. "Rich as all-get-out."

"Who are their heirs?" It was out before I could stop myself.

He drew out a frayed cigar and rubbed it lovingly along his wide, leathery mouth. "Well, Miss Effie and Miss Mary got everything Miss Eulalie had to leave. Miss Mary will get everything that Miss Effie's got to leave. After that —"

"Yes?"

"Nephew," he said.

"Where?"

He jerked his hand toward the south. "Chicago."

"I don't know him," I said. "Does he live here, and commute?"

Regan shook his head. "Comes around about every week or so . . . He's a chemist — chemical engineer, or something like that."

I felt him watching me, narrowly, almost fiercely. I felt a queer, clammy trickle along my spine. "Regan —" I began.

We were alone on that porch, under the dome light where insects fought and buzzed. In the house lay a dead woman — the second dead

woman in a month. Behind that house was a garage, and in the garage —

"Regan," I blurted, "you're no fool."

He shrugged. "No, I ain't."

"How about the coroner?"

"He is. An almighty one."

"I don't trade in professional gossip, Regan. But — how about Dr. Budlong? I know him only slightly."

The chief of police whispered, "Budlong is an old man — old and tired. He and Archer will talk to you and the hired girl. They'll examine Miss Effie. They'll find that she and Miss Eulalie were both killed in the same garage and by the same car, and it was poison gas that killed 'em. Well, maybe it did!"

"Let's go back," I suggested.

He nodded. "Got a flashlight?"

"Yes, here in my satchel."

"You go ahead," he said. "I want to get the hired girl and bring her along. Let's get hold of her before the fools do."

He chuckled suddenly, and walked into the house.

Through spongy darkness, I approached the garage. The light was still burning. I stood beside the ugly black sedan and looked at it closely.

The dash-light glowed feebly when I snapped the car switch. Mileage: 16643. A family car, an old maid's car, used for church-going, lodge meetings, fussy little trips across the county.

The ignition switch was not turned on, though a key had been inserted and other keys dangled in their leather case. I turned the key; pushed the starter; the motor purred softly. I sniffed. Not a heavy mixture. It seemed strange that here, in this innocent contraption, lay the riddle of two deaths.

Riddle it was. The ignition switch was off; when I first saw the body, the motor was not running. And yet Miss Effie Higgins had lain dead in the seat — dead of carbon monoxide, an evil vapor which she had breathed into her hard old lungs. I turned off the ignition — the motor stopped neatly . . . Turned it on again.

The key fitted into an ignition lock of a common type: when the key was turned, a round block of steel sprang automatically out from the lock, and this moveable block was in itself the switch. Pressed in, it shut off the motor . . . I stood there in the half-lit gloom, thinking. Dazed, half-overcome, the woman might have fumbled about — perhaps her hand had fallen forward and pushed the block, thus shutting off the motor. In that case the accumulated gas must have been of sufficient potency to kill her.

I was well aware of this popular supposition that the smell of burnt vapor from an exhaust pipe is in itself the fatal carbon monoxide, and knew the fallacy in this belief. Carbon monoxide was colorless, odorless — it accompanied the fumes of combustion, which were comparatively harmless. Yet in that garage I had detected no fumes of combustion, when I first arrived. The doors swung open; wisely, safely open. And the door beside the

driver's seat was open as well . . . her hand, dangling down . . .

Feet crunched in the gravel outside. Chief of Police Regan was coming, and with him the maid, Olga. The woman, middle-aged and Scandinavian, was sobbing loudly, her apron clenched in her hands.

"Hello," said Regan. Awkwardly, he nodded toward the tearful servant. "This here is Olga Gunderson, this lady. She's their hired girl. Been hired girl here for — how long, any way?"

"Thirteen years," Olga managed, between gasps.

Regan put one foot on the running board. "Now, tell me all about how it happened." His voice was smooth, sympathetic. "We don't want to bother you any more'n necessary, seeing you're all cut up this way. Just tell us about it."

Olga made a strenuous effort to control her voice. "Miss Effie went out to get the car. She was going to drive over to White Lake — fifteen miles — to the church assembly. Miss Mary had gone over in the afternoon, with the Watsons. And — and —"

"About what time did she come out here to the garage?"

"I guess it was around seven o'clock. She wanted to get there before eight, and she had to stop for Mrs. Pringle. She's — Miss Effie always drove real slow."

Regan drawled, "Probably. Now, how'd you come to find her?"

"I was busy in the kitchen and upstairs, too. All of a sudden it come to me in a kind of flash — I hadn't heard her go out of the driveway. That must have been pretty close to eight. Then the phone rang; it was Mrs. Pringle — she wondered if Miss Effie wasn't going to stop for her — I was scared. I — I remembered about Miss Eulalie — how she got —"

"Asphyxiated," I supplied.

"Yes. I ran out here to the garage. Miss Effie was — just sitting there in the seat — sort of leaning back. I called, and she didn't answer me. I opened the door and shook her. She — Then I ran in and tried to phone Dr. Budlong. Then I remembered about you living over here —" she turned toward me — "and so I ran over to your house."

Regan's kindly voice asked, "Now, Olga, think. Was the motor of the car running, when you found her?"

The woman blinked with swollen eyes. "I don't know, I don't know —"

"Did you turn it off?"

"No. Oh, no. I don't know nothing about cars. I just tried to — wake her up and —"

Regan's fingers drummed softly against the body of the car. "I see. Olga, who found Miss Eulalie when she — died?"

"It was her — Miss Effie. That was two weeks ago last Monday." She broke into a torrent of tears.

Regan narrowed his eyes. He looked absently at me. He scratched his chin. "If you remember hearing about it, Doctor —"

I said, "I think so. She was going

to the hospital, early, to see a sick friend. They had sent for her. Then she was found — out here in the car."

"Budlong was called," said the old chief of police.

"Yes. We'd better talk to him about it."

As if in response to my statement, we heard feet coming toward us from the back porch. Archer and Budlong entered the garage and paused, gazing silently at the car.

"We were just taking a look at things," said Regan.

Archer wagged his head. "Awful thing to have happened. Twice. Seems like people would be more careful —"

"Budlong," asked old Joe Regan, "when you were called here on account of Miss Eulalie Higgins, was the engine of the car still running?"

The aged physician shook his head. "I don't believe it was. I think Effie shut it off, when she found her sister. We — we didn't discuss it much," he added, lamely. "It was such a shocking thing. Eulalie was lying — ah — sprawled forward, you might say, over the steering wheel. Effie was chafing her wrists and trying to revive her, when I came."

"Garage doors open?"

"Why, yes, I believe so. One of them was, at least. I — I was considerably upset, Joe." Then he said, defensively: "It was a clear case of asphyxiation, due to carbon monoxide. Just as in the case tonight, with Miss Effie. I should not be surprised if the car were defective."

"Neither'd I," grunted Regan. There was silence for a moment. "You didn't hold an inquest for Miss Eulalie, did you?"

Archer bristled. "I didn't feel it necessary. An obvious case of accident."

"Doctor —" Regan glared into my eyes — "are you convinced that both of 'em died from carbon monoxide?"

"I didn't attend the first case," I told him. "But judging from every case I have ever seen, and to the best of my knowledge, I would contend that such was the cause of Miss Effie's death."

Regan's foot came down from the running-board. "That's that. No autopsy, then."

"I'll impanel a coroner's jury," said Archer, bustling with eager importance. "Folks in town will feel — everything has been as it should —"

"Go impanel it, then," muttered the old chief. He and I stood there in the garage while Archer and Dr. Budlong, with the maid, went away toward the house.

Presently Regan spoke. "We'll never know about that engine running, in Miss Eulalie's case. They jumped at conclusions."

"It wasn't running tonight," I said.

"No. The maid didn't shut it off. Someone else might of."

That's unlikely."

"Reckon it is . . . She could have fallen forward — tumbled, kind of, with her hand — and pushed the switch shut."

"It would be difficult."

Regan said: "Yes, sir, difficult.

Looks to me, doctor — between you and me, private — we've got two dead old maids, asphyxiated by a car that was never running when it asphyxiated them. I'll talk it over with you tomorrow."

After he had gone into the house, I poked about the old garage for half an hour, flashlight in hand. I found nothing. Then I went home and went to bed.

But I could not sleep. At two o'clock in the morning I was sitting on the edge of my bed, still trying to solve the ghastly puzzle which oppressed my mind. At last I put on my clothes, murmured something to my wife about a night call, and skulked out of the house.

I went across the lots to the Higgins' house. The clouds of evening were gone; damp starlight flickered overhead.

Once more inside the garage, I shafted my light about; I tapped along the wooden wall. In my pocket was the unfamiliar weight of a loaded .38, and it seemed very comforting . . . No space between these fatal walls. Just one layer of a siding . . . I had had a notion of hidden pipes buried under a false wall, whence had emanated the deadly fumes. There was no loft. I swung the straight beam across the rafters. Only the usual paraphernalia of a family garage: a few coils of wire, a sponge, a bucket — not even the gadgets which would have been present in a garage where some man of the family fancied himself a mechanic.

Working as deftly and silently as possible, in order not to awaken anyone in the black house beyond, I unfastened the hood hooks of the sedan and lifted the metal cover. Nothing there. Carburetor, steering-shaft, generator, fan, motor — all coated with dusty grease — all simple and ordinary as they should have been.

"The other side," I thought. If nothing appeared wrong on the other side of the engine, I'd crawl underneath and have a look at the chassis.

I had barely unfastened the right-hand hooks when a wide shaft of yellow light burst over me. I sprang back in foolish, guilty haste. Through those open garage doors, two yellow headlights stared at me. In my detachment, I had failed to observe the approach of a car which had turned in at the driveway.

A door slammed. Someone came quickly forward. "Who's that?" a man's voice demanded.

I faced him stupidly. The blaze of car-lamps showed me his body, though his face was thrown into a jet shadow. A tall man — something of the eager, frenzied eccentric about his movements.

"I'm Dr. Maine," I said. "Who're you?"

"What are you doing here, Dr. Maine?"

I gestured toward the car. "There's been a frightful tragedy. I was — examining things. And you haven't answered my question."

He swayed there, a tense, brutal threat in his stiff arms and shoulders.

Then, noticeably, he relaxed. "I'm Otis Belknap," he said. "Sorry, doctor. Feeling rather nervous. I just hustled out here from town — about Aunt Effie —"

I said: "Oh. You're the nephew."

"Yes."

I reached up and turned on the overhead light. Belknap's face was before me now.

"You see, Belknap, the maid called me when she first found your aunt. The fact of two such deaths seemed more than ordinary coincidence. The more I thought about it, the more certain I was that something is wrong with this car. A faulty exhaust — something like that. It's dangerous, perhaps, for anyone to operate it. I decided to come over and take a look."

He nodded. "Perfectly understandable, doctor. Sorry I was — brusque. But, naturally, when I turned in at the driveway and saw someone fooling around here . . . they had difficulty getting hold of me in town. A friend finally reached me and gave the details. There wasn't any train until morning, so I rented a car and drove out."

"I'm afraid we've waked your Aunt Mary." I pointed to a light in the house.

"Poor soul; probably she wasn't getting much sleep, anyway. This is terrible — both of them! God, there should have been some way to prevent it. I'll have an expert mechanic go over the car in the morning."

"Yes, you should do that." I closed the hood, and accompanied the man outside. His rented car — a brown coupe — still had its motor turning. He went over and switched off the engine. Up on the rear porch, there was a scuffling sound. A woman's voice — aged, taut, hysterical: "Otis. Is that you?"

"Yes, Aunt Mary." He hurried forward. I went away across the yard.

Back home, it still seemed impossible for me to sleep. In darkness, I lay down on the couch in our living room. Through my mind raced unruly, vicious phantoms; shaping and dissolving and reshaping before my closed eyes were four faces — two of which I was sure I could never forget, and two of which I had barely glimpsed. The three Higgins virgins and their nephew, Otis Belknap. Like lap dissolves of the cinema, they curdled and oozed and melted before me. I saw the car again, the garage with its stony hush of death. Weary, baffled, I began to slide away, drift down into disordered sleep.

Ninnnng. It was the telephone . . . Still dark. I hadn't been sleeping long. I fumbled across the room to the downstairs phone. "Dr. Maine!"

A man's voice came to me — a bare whisper, ghastly, chilled. "Doctor — right away — up here on Vardon Hill — there's been an awful accident — two girls — For God's sake, hurry! Vardon Hill — right at the summit, where you turn —"

Already I had become known as the trouble-shooter of Poplar Bluff; older

and more sedate doctors were willing enough to yield many emergency cases to a younger man. I called hastily to Janice; in another moment, fully dressed as I was, I had reached the garage. There was an emergency kit in the car. I jerked on my coat, and started my machine. The avenue was gloomy-brown, the first unearthly shudder of approaching dawn, as I swung my coupe out along the street.

Only three miles to the base of Vardon Hill, a twisting tree-lined slope which tangled itself amid some brushy ravines. It was a bad place, with more than one head-on collision to its credit. I was traveling at about fifty miles an hour when I swung off the main highway and up the narrower incline; then I had to slow down. Slowly, the motor growling, I snaked up to the top.

As I rounded the final curve, headlights washed over me. A car — yes, there was a car beside the road. No wreckage visible. Probably the other car had gone through the rail and over the edge. I skated off on the inside shoulder of the path, and opened my car door; had my satchel in my hand . . .

"Where are they?" I called toward the other machine.

A streak of orange leaped toward me. I tumbled back against the fender. Even as the shot rang in my ears, I knew that this was a deliberate frame-up, that someone was trying to kill me. And I remembered the .38 in my pocket. I brought it out, as the other gun stung toward me once more. I bent low, squatting half behind the door. Something *whushed* past my ear.

I pulled the trigger, and mingled with the report of this gun in my hand, I heard with satisfaction a resounding whack from the body of the other machine. Perhaps I had struck my unknown assailant as well, I thought. My hand shook with terror and rage; I tried to stand securely.

The world exploded above, under me, all around me. Light seemed to strike me in my face . . .

"Snowball," I thought, foolishly. "I've been struck by a snowball." There was a buzzing in my ears; I had the feeling that I had spent a very long time gliding through dark, watery canyons, and all the time with an aching, throbbing head.

My eyes were sticky; I fought to open them. I moved my face. Gravel and dust clotting in my mouth . . . At last I opened my eyes; my ears sang and throbbed.

I was lying on the ground, flat on my face. The world was a pale bowl of pink and blue — dawn flaming up out of Lake Michigan. Somehow I staggered to my feet. The other car —

There wasn't any other car. Someone had shot me: a bullet had raked my scalp, and I had been left for dead. When at last I managed to stagger up on the running-board and fall into the seat of my machine, I got a glimpse of myself in the mirror, and knew well enough why I had been left for dead. My face was a devil's mask of dried blood.

Slowly, I drove back to town. There

wasn't a soul visible anywhere around the square. I managed to climb the stairs to my office . . . The wound was neither deep nor serious, but half an inch lower would have made all the difference in the world. I scrubbed my face, took a small shot of codeine, and proceeded to dress my scalp. The light gauze bandage was concealed, very nearly, when I put on my hat.

I phoned Janice.

"I'm here at the office," I said. "Don't bother about breakfast. I've got some work to do here, and late in the afternoon I'll try to snatch a nap at home. Oh, yes — and I cut my head. Bumped into the rear-vision mirror as I climbed into the car. Cut quite a gash . . . nothing serious. Don't worry."

In twenty minutes, Chief of Police Regan was at the office. I had only to speak a few words to him over the phone before he cut me short with a peremptory promise to put on his clothes and hustle over there.

He ambled back and forth across the operating room, stubble-faced, half-dressed, as I told him in detail of everything which had happened since I left him the night before.

"That all?"

"Yes. Enough — isn't it?"

"Reckon so. He tried to kill you."

"If it was he."

He shrugged his round shoulders. "Nobody else. It's the car, Maine, the car is the whole thing. In fact, two cars."

"Two?"

"Certainly. The Higgins girls' — and the one he rented. I guess that's true. I remember him coming to see them, for years, and he never drove a car. Drove theirs when he was here, sometimes. But he never had one of his own. No, likely enough he rented it. And if that rented car of his has got a bullet hole in it, he's our man.

"That's half of it. The rest is: when he found you exploring around the Higgins' sedan, he knew that you were getting almighty warm. Liable to get next to his game, whatever it is. He hadn't expected us local officers to figure it out — dumb creatures, eh? Well we are, maybe. But here you were, smelling around and getting dangerous. He called you up — The voice. What about that voice on the phone?"

I said: "It was only a whisper. And it took me by surprise. I'd been asleep."

"Sure. He whispered, because likely he had sneaked downstairs to the phone at his aunt's, and didn't want them to hear. It worked, though. Got you out to Vardon Hill. And he thinks you're dead. Hm . . . I could go over there now — yank him out of bed, arrest him."

"You haven't got a case against him, yet."

Regan shuffled across the floor. "You're right." He turned abruptly. "We know that the windows of the sedan were closed when Effie died. But we'll never know, for sure, about the car windows when Eulalie died."

I stared at him. "Regan, that may mean something. If the gas —"

"If the gas came from *inside* the car instead of *outside*, it wouldn't have mattered whether the garage doors were open or not. Kill 'em, either way, with the car windows closed . . . And there's still Mary Higgins left."

I cried, "My God! Do you mean that you expect she might be —?"

"Avarice," said the chief. "Rich as can be, those Higginses. I remember the other girl: Vera, young Belknap's mother. When she married Belknap, Senior, old Higgins cut her off. Otis Belknap's father and mother are both dead — they didn't leave anything . . . Three old maids stood between Otis and the Belknap millions. Well." He reached for his hat.

"What are you going to do, now?" I asked.

"Send my wife over to do some nosing around. She belongs to the D. A. R. along with the Higginses — knows 'em well. Maybe she can find out something . . . And I'm going to ask Chicago to put a detective on Otis, and see what they can dig up . . . You stay in your office as much as you can, doctor. Don't give the lad another chance at you. I'll try to be back here in your office, late this afternoon."

More codeine helped me; I had a brief nap, and by eight-thirty was calling on my patients . . . I managed to eat some breakfast, and was feeling quite myself when Regan appeared in my operating room shortly after eleven o'clock. He had news, important news:

"Otis," he said, "got hit with the same economical streak that the rest of his mother's family have always had. He sent his car back to Chicago. Must have seemed shameful to him, to be running up a big bill with that rented coupe. So he had young Ernie Night drive her back, early this morning."

I said: "So. Did young Ernie Night happen to see a bullet hole in the body? Or isn't he back yet?"

"He's back. I was down to meet the ten o'clock interurban. Stalled around — he's a simple, thick-headed kid. He didn't notice that the car was busted up in any way. But it belonged to the Yellow Drive-It-Yourself Company, at 3981 North Hackett Street. I gave 'em a buzz on the long distance." His eyelids drooped until I could scarcely see the twinkling eyes underneath. "And they were awful mad when they went and looked and found a big rip in the rear fender. Course, I didn't suggest bullet hole to 'em . . . Told 'em Otis would come in and settle for the damage. That made 'em feel a lot better."

I studied the surgical shears in my hand. "Then — he was the one."

"Certainly. Didn't you know that all the time? Now, that much is good. But here's some bad: Otis is gone — in the Higgins' car."

I leaped to my feet.

"He'll destroy the evidence! Damn —"

Regan returned, with composure: "Can't be too sure of that till we know what the evidence is. He told Mary he was taking it down to Night's garage,

to have the exhaust all checked, and see what was the matter."

"And?" I demanded, desperately.

"And I went down to Night's. Old Ernie — young Ernie's dad — is a good mechanic, and a thorough one. I talked to him. He had that Higgins sedan up on the hoist, and went all over her. Not a thing. Said all the connections were in perfect order."

"There was nothing — funny about it? He's sure?"

"Dead certain. Nothing funny."

There was a long, baffled silence. "I thought something would be found," I said, at last.

"So did I. Something funny. But he had her up on the hoist. He was inside the hood and underneath."

"Where's Otis, now?"

"That's the point: where is he? Miss Mary Higgins thinks he's out, helping her, looking after 'details.' She's got backbone enough to manage all the details — crushed with grief as she is, poor lady. Well, let's go over and see her."

I nodded, blankly enough. "For what reason?"

He looked me squarely in the face. "I want to warn her," he said, "not to drive that car. And you — back me up in warning her. Do your best — she's pig-headed."

She was. It was, of course, not the only phrase with which one could describe Miss Mary Higgins. Slim, tiny, ascetic; there seemed to be a ramrod of militant pride along her skinny back.

"No doubt your advice is well meant, Mr. Regan. And yours, doctor. But most certainly there is nothing the matter with our car. I'm well aware of that; I bought that car, Mr. Regan. Picked it out myself." Her voice rose, hysterically. "Eulalie and Effie may have been — careless. Well, I can most heartily assure you that *I* am not careless. I won't get gassed as they did. Nonsense. Nothing to feel superstitious about." The words shook as they came from her throat.

We stood in the hallway. One door of the dim, high-ceiled parlor was partly ajar. I could look in and see a corner of Miss Effie Higgins' coffin, spectral in the gloom of drawn curtains.

"Anyway," Miss Mary was saying, "I've got Otis looking after things. He took the car down to have it thoroughly checked. If there's anything wrong with the motor, Night will find it."

Regan muttered, desperately: "But, Mary — I tell you it —"

"*Miss* Higgins, please." Her pale eyes flashed; Regan ducked his white head. "Thank you, sir. And you, Dr. Maine. You have been very kind. But — I'll 'tend to my own knitting."

The chief of the Poplar Bluff police did not speak until we were on the steps, outside.

"Didn't I tell you?" he growled softly.

A black sedan slid up to the curbing, with a soft squeal of brakes.

"Otis," I said.

Regan squinted. "Bet your life.

Here he comes. Looks like he never tried to kill you."

Belknap's face reflected nothing but the remote pain of a bereaved relative. Hours before, of course, he had learned that I had not died at the crest of Vardon Hill, but was instead the victim of a minor accident.

He halted, face to face with us, on the sidewalk.

"Good day, Mr. Regan. How-do-you-do, doctor?"

"I've got a headache," I said. I could not keep a vicious note out of my voice.

Belknap looked solicitous. "Why I see you're wearing a bandage! What —?"

"Got bumped on the mirror in his car," cut in Regan. "How about that car, Otis?" He pointed to the sedan.

Solemnly, the man shook his head. "I had Night examine it thoroughly. Not a thing wrong. It's simply incomprehensible, but both deaths must have resulted from — you know. Started the motor, sat there awhile, thinking. And —"

"Looks that way," said Regan. "Well, we'll be going. I know you folks have got plenty on your minds."

Belknap wagged his head. He could not control the nervous flexing of his fingers. "Yes, indeed. I've been to the cemetery — greenhouse — a dozen places. Took a brief ride, to clear my head. Thank you . . . Good day." He went up on the porch. We heard Miss Mary greeting him, inside.

Boldly enough, I strode across the parking and looked in at the dash-instruments of the big, black sedan.

"Look out!" warned Regan.

"I'm looking," I said. "But this had to be done."

Then we were in my car, and driving away. "Last night," I said, "the speedometer registered a mileage of sixteen thousand, six hundred and forty-three miles. Now it registers sixteen thousand, seven hundred and twenty-five. That means that Otis Belknap has run up eighty-two miles while doing his errands."

"Lots of miles," said Regan. He scratched his chin.

"Enough to take him in to town— to Chicago, and back. With plenty left over for Night's and the cemetery and all that. He was gone most of the forenoon, wasn't he?"

Regan growled, "Hours. Hours. He had time enough. Maybe I'll be getting a report from Chicago by tonight. Until then —" He faced me suddenly. "Something else my wife found out, over there. It's this: Otis was here in town, at his aunt's home, the night before Eulalie died. Also, day before yesterday — the day before Effie was asphyxiated. What does that mean to you, doc?"

"Was he the last person who drove the car, in each case — before those women met their death?"

"That's just the rub," sighed the old man. "He wasn't. Mary had it out the night before Eulalie got hers, and again yesterday morning. She put it in the garage, then, and nobody went near it before Effie did." He shook his bent head. "Regular conundrum.

Here — stop at the city hall. Let me out. G'bye. See you later."

In a little house on the remote edge of town, I spent the entire afternoon in attending the birth of a very tardy baby. It was one of the most protracted o.b.'s in my experience . . . When the father slipped in, at dusk, to tell me that Chief of Police Regan wanted to see me, I shook my head.

It wasn't until nine o'clock that night, with mother and child both resting comfortably, that I could leave.

As I came out into the darkness, a low whistle sounded from thick shrubbery which marked the edge of a woodland across the road. "Here," came Regan's staccato chirp.

I walked across the road, and found him, a stooped goblin in the dimness. "What on earth are you doing here?" I asked. "Is —?"

His fingers were a steel claw on my arm.

"Three of 'em," he said.

"Three — what?" I exclaimed.

"Three sisters. The Higgins girls. All of 'em dead. Died in the same car, the same way."

I cried fiercely, "Regan; for God's sake, tell me — Is the other one — is Mary —?"

He nodded beside me, in the dimness. "Dead. Dead as Effie. Nearly two hours ago. Went out into the driveway where the car was sitting; said she was going over to the Rector's. Otis and Olga were at the other end of the house. Pretty soon a neighbor happened past, and he noticed her sitting there . . . This time they called me, right along with Dr. Budlong. But she was dead — dead the same way."

"Good God!" I said.

His voice sank once more into a whisper. "Come over in these woods. I've got the car."

"Got the —"

"Their car. Understand? The Higgins' sedan. I grabbed it before Otis could get a chance. Lit out for your house, and they told me where you were. Drove it up into these woods and hid it."

He had my wrist, leading me forward into thick blackness. A branch scraped across my face like a dry, skeleton hand. Dully I felt its fangs sink in . . . "Regan, what good? What can we do? It's hopeless. That mechanic went over it —"

"I know it. But he missed something. We all missed something. You and I have got to find out what it is. Don't you savvy? Otis couldn't afford to wait — not with us smelling around and getting more suspicious every minute. He had to get rid of Mary, same as he had planned, but sooner. Of course he expected to get the car, then, and destroy the evidence. But I've beat him to it. Look out — here it is."

Suddenly we had come upon the death car, a huge lump in the darkness. Regan had parked it in an ancient, unused roadway which wound through the heart of this forest tract.

"Here it is, doctor. All here. If we knew . . ."

"We've got to know," I said.

"Yes . . . You're Effie. No, you're Eulalie. You come out to the garage, ready to drive over and see your friend. What do you do?"

My mind was a whirling mist.

"Open the garage doors. Then I walk over to the car. Open the door. Get in. I release the emergency. No, possibly I'd get the motor going, first. I'd — I —"

"You're Effie, now," came the chief's voice. "What do you do? You're going to pick up old lady Pringle and drive to White Lake."

"I come out to the garage. Open the doors — no, maybe they weren't closed. I open the car door, and get in. I —" Then I cursed savagely. "Where is this getting us? Let's look at this damn car!"

Silently, Regan pressed a flashlight into my hand. I let the sudden flare of it rinse over him, over the ghastly sedan which stood mutely waiting — perhaps waiting for another —

"Get in," I said. "Let's battle this out, right now."

The man mounted to the running-board. "I'm Eulalie. I get in. It's morning. Mary had the car, the night before. She's left it in the garage. I wonder if she had the brake on? Hell, I —"

"Were the windows up, when Mary died tonight?" I demanded.

"Yes. It kind of looked like rain. I guess — Otis had left 'em up, on that account. Not the garage, you see. We've got to forget the garage. Three dead old maids . . . one died out in the driveway. No, we'll forget about the garage. It's the car. And we think he had it in Chicago."

The trees rustled stealthily overhead.

"You're Effie," I prodded him.

"I'm Effie Higgins. I get into the car. I — sit down in the seat." With a weary gasp, he settled himself on the wide cushion of the front seat. Then he bent toward me, through the open door. "Got a report from Chicago. They had two men working all day on Otis Belknap. Looks like he had gambled away what little money he had, trying to play stocks. And he lost his job with the United Chemical Equipment Company, more'n a year ago . . . He came back to the office of the United Chemical Equipment Company, though, about four weeks since. *He bought a cylinder of carbon monoxide gas.*"

I said: "God." My tongue seemed to curl against the roof of my mouth.

"Somehow we'll get him." It was a fierce, unholy prayer, the way he said the words. He placed his hands on the wheel. "I'm Effie. Don't fit very well in this seat — not as well as she did." Then he cried rapidly, "I'll be a son of a —!"

The flashlight slid from my sweaty hands and thudded on the soft earth. It took me hours, it seemed, to find it. All the time I could hear Regan fumbling about in the car. "Yes," he kept saying. "Yes . . . Yes . . . Now I know. This is it. We'll get him."

When I had recovered the torch and pressed its light against his face, he

sat regarding me with a shrewd, bitter gaze.

It seemed a hundred miles to the Higgins' house . . . As we turned into the street, two blocks away, Regan leaned back suddenly. "Hold the wheel a minute. I want to look at my gun." He brought a huge .45 from his shoulder holster, swung out the cylinder, spun it, swung it back again. "He may get tough. Watch him. I'm going to put it to him the minute he comes out."

We turned in at the driveway; gravel crackled under the tires. There were many lights in the house. Two women, neighbors, sat on the porch railing. I saw Dr. Budlong's bald head at the door.

Before we could climb from the car, Otis Belknap had come running down the front steps and along the driveway. Shadows, a thick growth of lilac bushes, screened us from the porch.

I could not see Belknap's face in that light, but knew how it must look.

"Regan!" His tone was curling, venomous. "What's the big idea? Where did you have this car? The coroner —"

"Yes," growled Regan, "the coroner —" I saw Belknap leap and stiffen as the muzzle of the .45 bored against his side. "Keep your hands up, Otis."

Belknap's throat gurgled. "What — you —"

"See if he's got a gun, doctor."

I ran my hands over the tall figure. There was an automatic pistol in his coat pocket, a .32. "Yes. Here it is."

"Hang on to it. Take the car back into the garage. I'll bring him."

I obeyed. As I stepped to the garage floor, I could see them coming, silhouetted against the house lights. Regan kept pushing the weapon against Belknap's body; I could imagine how his finger itched on the trigger.

They came inside.

"Shut the doors, Maine."

I closed the garage doors, tightly.

"Regan," came the prisoner's voice, "for God's sake, what does this mean? Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not. Maybe you'll claim to be . . . Don't think it'll do you any good, though. Belknap, I want you to get into that car. Driver's seat. *Get into that car.*"

For a moment, the man stood rooted to the concrete floor. Then, with a quick stride, he had mounted the running-board. He slid into the driver's seat. His face turned towards us, a horrid, Cheshire-cat grin.

"Just one thing I want you to do, Otis Belknap. Just one thing. If you don't, I'll shoot and take the consequences! I used to be a pistol expert, long time ago in Cuba, and I ain't forgotten how."

Belknap's chin shook like jelly. He tried to find his voice. It came— ghastly, dry. "What — do you want me to do?"

"There was carbon monoxide gas in that car, Otis. It killed your three aunts; but it won't kill you. No — because it's not in there, now. I'm

winding up this glass window — see? . . . Now, I'm closing the door. You're inside, alone. The car is shut, tight. No carbon monoxide — it takes too long."

With sudden, startling agility he had swung up on the side of the car. His revolver muzzle tapped against the glass, a foot away from Otis Belknap's head. "No, there's something else in there. I had it put in, while I took the car tonight. I got it down at the high school laboratory — the chemistry teacher made it for me! He filled her up for me, Otis! It's an arsenic gas. You know what that is? You know how quick it works? Otis, *screw that seat back so you can get your long legs on the pedals!*"

The imprisoned man's hands dropped between his legs. Dazedly, he shook his head.

"The handle! Quick — it's down there in front of the cushion! You screw it — it takes the seat back for tall people, and up close for short ones. What's the matter? Scared? Why should you be scared — *of a seat handle*, a thing that moves the seat?"

Belknap leaned forward over the wheel. His shoulders quivered.

"I'll give you till I count five, Otis. Twist her back. Go ahead! One—two . . . three . . ."

Otis jerked his hands above his head. "Stop it, stop it! Don't shoot — my God, don't — *I did it!*"

Somehow, I knew that between us we had opened the door and dragged the gibbering figure out of the car. "Hold his arms," ordered Regan. I held them, tight — I remembered those shots up on Vardon Hill.

The chief brought out a clanking pair of handcuffs, long unused. With some difficulty, he fastened them on Belknap's wrists.

The man's knees began to sag under him — he went down upon the floor, a drooling, blaspheming pile of flesh, hateful to look upon.

"See here," Regan directed me. His hands were pushed beneath the front seat, exploring, tapping. "Ought to be springs there. Seemed like the seat didn't have as much give as it should've had. Still, I thought those poor girls liked hard seats, maybe. But when I felt underneath, out there in the woods, I could feel this tank. Feel?"

I tapped my fingers against a hollow, resounding surface of metal.

"Whole seat — apparently. He fixed it up for them. Cached that tube of gas somewhere in Chicago, and filled it up. Left the seat screwed forward. That was all right, as long as Mary drove the car. But when Eulalie got in, she wanted the seat back. Because she was tall and thin. She twisted the handle . . . She died.

"Same way for Effie. It had all been fixed up again. Mary was driving the car again, after Otis finished with it. Effie tried to take it out — tall, thin Effie — and she wanted the seat pushed back. It killed her, the same way.

"Today, he got excited and tried to hurry things up. Took the car into

town, filled up the gas tank — his special gas tank, on the under side of this front seat. And this time, she worked in reverse. When you brought the seat *forward*, the damage was done. Mary was little and short. She wanted it forward. She — Come on. Let's wrench this seat loose from the floor. We can do it, both of us pulling."

Belknap shrieked, "The gas — my God — don't — the gas will —"

"All the gas is out of that, you murdering devil. It was let out when Miss Mary screwed the seat forward, and died for her trouble . . . What? Arsenic gas? Hell, that was only part of my third degree! I believe in the third degree. Bet your life. For people like you —"

Someone was pounding on the garage door.

"Probably that's Archer, or somebody," grunted Regan. "Go let 'em in. Then they can help us take up this seat, and take a good look at the gas tank. Must be simple. Just a valve that opens with the handle-screw . . . I never would have got it, doctor, never in this world — if it had been Effie who died last. Because Mary had the seat pushed forward, and my long, old legs wouldn't fit comfortable on the pedals."

Winner of 2nd Story-Title Contest

The $100 prize for the best title for Jacques Futrelle's story in the November issue of *EQMM* was awarded to:

John B. Hughes
Colby, Kansas

In addition, because of the large number of entries and their high average of excellence, the judges decided to award Honorable Mentions to 22 other contestants, each of whom will receive a one-year free subscription to *EQMM*. The Honorable Mention winners were: M. Alden Countryman, Glenview, Ill.; V. D. Vinson, Detroit, Mich.; Miss Mildred J. Miller, Syracuse, N. Y.; L. G. Hitchcock, Santa Rosa, Calif.; Miss D. L. Dunning, New York, N. Y.; Myron Jonas, Bronx, N. Y.; Edward A. Falasca, Floral Park, N. Y.; Harry E. Wheeler, Jr., Annisquam, Mass.; Gerald C. Fitzpatrick, Berkeley, Calif.; John McManus, Seattle, Wash.; Mrs. K. C. Kelly, Hanover, N. H.; D. S. Moorhead, Brooklyn, N. Y.; Mrs. R. N. Sampson, Danville, Ky.; Jacques Francine, Ambler, Pa.; G. A. Engelking, Seattle, Wash.; Miss Elsbeth Olmsted, Everett, Wash.; A. C. Penner, Jr., Sacramento, Calif.; Walter Loop, St. Paul, Minn.; Miss Olive A. Ford Moody, North Andover, Mass.; Earl T. Murphy, Jr., Cincinnati, Ohio; Mrs. Ruth M. Savage, Southbridge, Mass.; Paul C. Boone, II, Catawissa, Pa.

HOWARD HAYCRAFT SELECTS . . .

Which are the twelve best detective short stories ever written? Last month we told you how a Blue Ribbon Jury composed of James Hilton, Howard Haycraft, John Dickson Carr, Anthony Boucher, Vincent Starrett, James Sandoe, August Derleth, Viola Brothers Shore, Lee Wright, Lew D. Feldman, Charles Honce, and your Editors, representing craftsmen, critics, connoisseurs, editors, bookdealers, and readers, selected the crème de la *crime — the finest detective short stories of all time, in the collective opinion of these outstanding experts. The final concensus tapped the following twelve stories —* THE GOLDEN DOZEN *— for immortality:*

The Hands of Mr. Ottermole . . . by Thomas Burke
The Purloined Letter . . . . . by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League . . . . . by A. Conan Doyle
The Avenging Chance . . . . . by Anthony Berkeley
The Absent-Minded Coterie . . . . by Robert Barr
The Problem of Cell 13 . . . . . by Jacques Futrelle
The Oracle of the Dog . . . . . by G. K. Chesterton
Naboth's Vineyard . . . . . by Melville Davisson Post
The Gioconda Smile . . . . . by Aldous Huxley
The Yellow Slugs . . . . . by H. C. Bailey
The Genuine Tabard . . . . . by E. C. Bentley
Suspicion . . . . . by Dorothy L. Sayers

Last month Anthony Boucher "sponsored" Thomas Burke's "The Hands of Mr. Ottermole," which received 8 votes out of a possible 12. This month Howard Haycraft is sponsor for Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," one of three stories which received 6 votes out of a possible 12.

As in the case of Anthony Boucher, Howard Haycraft needs no introduction to readers of EQMM — indeed, to readers of detective fiction all over the world. Few students of the genre — or for that matter, few among the experts themselves — would quarrel with the statement that Howard Haycraft is the world's leading historian of the detective story. His MURDER FOR PLEASURE *is a landmark in criminological criticism, and his editorial achievement in* THE ART OF THE MYSTERY STORY *is without ratiocinative rival. Vocationally, Mr. Haycraft is Vice-President of the H. W. Wilson Company, publishers of library and bibliographical works, and in this capacity Mr. Haycraft is joint-compiler of such authoritative reference books as* TWENTIETH CENTURY AUTHORS, BRITISH AUTHORS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, *and* AMERICAN AUTHORS: 1600–1900. *During the last war (and may it have been the last war!) he was*

Major Haycraft, with the Army Service Forces. The charming Mrs. Haycraft is the daughter of Thomas B. Costain, the famous novelist.

Readers of EQMM will remember Howard Haycraft as the founder of "Speaking of Crime," a department of comment and criticism in the pages of this magazine, a position which he relinquished to become advisor to Mystery Guild.

Mr. Haycraft's personal list of favorite detective short stories reveals the breadth of his knowledge and the certainty of his 'tec taste. He chose, in chronological order, from 109 years of homicidal history:

The Purloined Letter . . . . . by Edgar A. Poe
The Red-Headed League . . . . by A. Conan Doyle
The Problem of Cell 13 . . . . . by Jacques Futrelle
The Case of Oscar Brodski . . by R. Austin Freeman
The Oracle of the Dog . . . . . by G. K. Chesterton
The Age of Miracles . . . . . by Melville Davisson Post
The Genuine Tabard . . . . . by E. C. Bentley
The Yellow Slugs . . . . . by H. C. Bailey
The Door Key . . . . . by Frederick Irving Anderson
The Bone of Contention . . . . by Dorothy L. Sayers
The Lamp of God . . . . . by Ellery Queen
The Whosis Kid . . . . . by Dashiell Hammett
Dime a Dance . . . . . by Cornell Woolrich

It is with almost poetic precision that the "luck of the draw" couples Howard Haycraft, historian, with Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter," the most historically important selection among The Twelve Best Detective Short Stories. Of this classic of classics Mr. Haycraft has said: "Here, at last, we have the balanced *type — the detective story at its best."*

THE PURLOINED LETTER

by EDGAR A. POE

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18—, I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and meerschaum, in company with my friend, C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the

chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G——'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had the fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe and rolled toward him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh, no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively odd."

"Simple and odd?" said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little too self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha! — ha! ha! ha! — ho! ho! ho!" roared our visitor, profoundly amused. "Oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet."

"And what, after all, is the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff and settled himself in his chair, — "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold were it known

that I confided it to anyone at all."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known — this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession, that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendency over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendency," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare —"

"The thief," said G——, "is the Minister D——, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question — a letter, to be frank — had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D——. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses for some fifteen minutes upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the fact, in the presence of the third personage, who stood at her elbow. The Minister decamped,

leaving his own letter, one of no importance, upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendency complete, the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect; "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced every day of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in the possession of the Minister; since it is his possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G——; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the Minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite *au fait* in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"Oh, yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the Minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D—— Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the Minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D—— is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document, its susceptibility of being pro-

duced at a moment's notice, a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being destroyed," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly, then, upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigidly searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D——, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."

"Not altogether a fool," said G——, "but then he is a poet, which I take to be one remove from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggerel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why, the fact is, we took our time, and we searched everywhere. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police-agent, such a thing as a 'secret' drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is so plain. There is a certain amount of bulk, of space, to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table or other similarly arranged piece of furniture is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise."

"But you could not have removed, you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not, but we did better:

we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed, the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the gluing, any unusual gaping in the joints, would have sufficed to insure detection."

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets."

"That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed; "you must have had a great deal of trouble."

"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious."

"You included the grounds about the houses?

"All the grounds are paved with brick. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks and found it undisturbed."

"You looked among D——'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover with the most accurate measurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet and examined the boards with the microscope."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is not upon the premises."

"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect. "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"

"To make a thorough research of the premises."

"That is absolutely needless," replied G——. "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the hotel."

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin. "You have, of course, a description of the letter?"

"Oh, yes!" and here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external, appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before.

In about a month afterward he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said:

"Well, but, G——, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no overreaching the Minister?"

"Confound him! say I — yes; I made the reexamination, however, as Dupin suggested, but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal, a very liberal reward; I don't like to say how much, precisely; but one thing I will say — that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to anyone who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really — think, G——, you have not exerted yourself — to the utmost in this matter. You might — do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How? in what way?"

"Why — puff, puff — you might — puff, puff — employ counsel in the matter, eh? — puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure, hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of sponging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician as that of an imaginary individual.

" 'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, Doctor, what would you have directed him to take?'

" 'Take,' said Abernethy, 'why, take advice, to be sure.' "

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "I am perfectly willing to take advice and to pay for it. I would really give fifty thousand francs to anyone who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer and producing a checkbook, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunderstricken.

For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocketbook; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G—— detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D——, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory examination, so far as his labors extended."

" 'So far as his labors extended?' " said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed, but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

"The measures, then," he continued, "were good in their kind and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter in hand; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, 'Are they even or odd?' Our schoolboy replies, 'Odd,' and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself: 'The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his

amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd'; he guesses odd and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus: 'This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and in the second he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation. and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even';—he guesses even and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the schoolboy, whom his fellows termed 'lucky,'—what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the thorough identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is anyone, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the schoolboy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucauld, to La Bruyère, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin; "and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for anything hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much, that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency, by some extraordinary reward, they extend or exaggerate their old modes of practice without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D——, has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the build-

ing into registered square inches; what is it all but an exaggeration of the application of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter, not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg, but, at least, in some out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see, also, that such *recherchés* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed, a disposal of it in this *recherché* manner, is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance, or, what amounts to the same thing in the policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude, the qualities in question have never been known to fail. You will now understand what I meant in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the Prefect's examination — in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect — its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii* in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The Minister, I believe, has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician and no poet."

"You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet and mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect."

"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries? The mathematical reason has long been regarded as the reason *par excellence*."

"'*Il y a à parier*,'" replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "'*que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre.*' The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promul-

gation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance, if words derive any value from applicability, then 'analysis' conveys 'algebra' about as much as, in Latin, '*ambitus*' implies 'ambition,' '*religio*' 'religion,' or '*homines honesti*' a set of honorable men."

"You have a quarrel on hand, I see," said I, "with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed."

"I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called pure algebra are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are not axioms of general truth. What is true of relation, of form and quantity, is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually untrue that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry, also, the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value, when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of relation. But the mathematician argues from his finite truths, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability, as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned *Mythology*, mentions an analogous source of error when he says that 'although the pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually and make inferences from them as existing realities.' With the algebraists, however, who are pagans themselves, the 'pagan fables' are believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that $x^2 + px$ was absolutely and unconditionally equal to q. Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where $x^2 + px$ is not altogether equal to q, and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

"I mean to say," continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, "that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no

necessity of giving me this check. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold intriguant. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate — and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate — the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction, to which G——, in fact, did finally arrive — the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed — I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him on account of its being so self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiæ*, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed, and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word, the name of town, river, state, or empire — any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analagous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D——; upon the fact that the document must always have been at hand, if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search, the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the ministerial hotel. I found D—— at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of *ennui*. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive; but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes and lamented the necessity of the spectacles under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting-cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crum-

pled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle, as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D—— cipher very conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D——, the Minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

"No sooner had I glanced at this letter than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D—— cipher, there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S—— family. Here, the address, to the Minister, was diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the radicalness of these differences, which was excessive: the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D——, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document — these things, together with the hyperobtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

"I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more chafed than seemed necessary. They presented the broken appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, redirected and resealed. I bade the Minister good morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

"The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D—— rushed to a casement, threw it

open, and looked out. In the meantime I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a facsimile (so far as regards externals) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings, imitating the D—— cipher very readily by means of a seal formed of bread.

"The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without a ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D—— came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterward I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a facsimile? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly and departed?"

"D——," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers, since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni;* but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy, at least no pity, for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms 'a certain personage,' he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack."

"How? Did you put anything particular in it?"

"Why, it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank; that would have been insulting. D——, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clue He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words

" '—Un dessein si funeste,
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.'

They are to be found in Crébillon's *Atrée.*"

To the best of our knowledge (which becomes increasingly fallible with the passing years), no literary critic, bigwig or smallwig, has ever mentioned Damon Runyon and Michael Arlen in the same breath. Which is not surprising: the two authors seem so utterly dissimilar in every conceivable way. Yet, if one stops to think, they have at least one trait in common.

To illustrate our point, we offer you a detective double-entry — a typical Broadway fable by that master of the first person singular, Damon Runyon, and a typical Piccadilly fairy tale which, so far as we have been able to check, has never been reprinted, or included in any of Michael Arlen's books. The two tales were written six years apart — a petty difference from the standpoint of comparative criticism; both appeared originally in American "slick" magazines; and both are told in languages all their own — hereinafter referred to, respectively, as Runyonese and Arlenese.

The point of similarity is simply this: Michael Arlen squints through his monocle at London's upper crust in what might be called British Runyonese, and Damon Runyon takes a gander at New York's lower crust in what might be called American Arlenese. The words are different, the tone is different, but the prying, probing, inquiring, inquisitive approach is basically the same. One might say that the Arlen story is a comedy of manners, British style, and the Runyon yarn a tragedy of manners, American style.

And speaking of comparisons, it is revealing, twenty years after the fact, to quote the original blurbs which prefaced these two wholly unlike, yet curiously like, tales. The Runyon story is described, presumably by the author himself, as "the most peculiar romance of a lady who had her own interesting ideas on the subject of revenge"; and the Arlen story is introduced, presumably by the editor of the "slick" magazine, as a tale in which "the master milliner of THE GREEN HAT *turns his talent for society satire to a great green gem — and proves himself a master lapidarist."*

DREAM STREET ROSE

by DAMON RUNYON

OF an early evening when there is nothing much doing anywhere else, I go around to Good Time Charley's little speak in West Forty-seventh Street that he calls the Gingham Shoppe, and play a little klob with Charley, because business is quiet in the Gingham Shoppe at such an

hour, and Charley gets very lonesome.

He once had a much livelier spot in Forty-eighth Street that he calls the Crystal Room, but one night a bunch of G-guys step into the joint and bust it wide open, besides confiscating all of Charley's stock of merchandise. It seems that these G-guys are members of a squad that comes on from Washington, and being strangers in the city they do not know that Good Time Charley's joint is not supposed to be busted up, so they go ahead and bust it, just the same as if it is any other joint.

Well, this action causes great indignation in many quarters, and a lot of citizens advise Charley to see somebody about it. But Charley says no. Charley says if this is the way the government is going to treat him after the way he walks himself bow-legged over in France with the Rainbow Division, making the Germans hard to catch, why, all right. But he is not going to holler copper about it, although Charley says he has his own opinion of Mr. Hoover, at that.

Personally, I greatly admire Charley for taking the disaster so calmly, especially as it catches him with very few potatoes. Charley is a great hand for playing the horses with any dough he makes out of the Crystal Room, and this particular season the guys who play the horses are being murdered by the bookies all over the country, and are in terrible distress.

So I know if Charley is not plumb broke that he has a terrible crack across his belly, and I am not surprised that I do not see him for a couple of weeks after the government guys knock off the Crystal Room. I hear rumors that he is at home reading the newspapers very carefully every day, especially the obituary notices, for it seems that Charley figures that some of the G-guys may be tempted to take a belt or two at the merchandise they confiscate, and Charley says if they do, he is even for life.

Finally, I hear that Charley is seen buying a bolt of gingham in Bloomington's one day, so I know he will be in action again very soon, for all Charley needs to go into action is a bolt of gingham and a few bottles. In fact, I know Charley to go into action without the gingham, but as a rule he likes to drape a place of business with gingham to make it seem more homelike to his customers, and I wish to say that when it comes to draping gingham, Charley can make a sucker of Joseph Urban, or anybody else.

Well, when I arrive at the Gingham Shoppe this night I am talking about, which is around ten o'clock, I find Charley in a very indignant state of mind, because an old tomato by the name of Dream Street Rose comes in and tracks up his floor, just after Charley gets through mopping it up, for Charley does his mopping in person, not being able as yet to afford any help.

Rose is sitting at a table in a corner, paying no attention to Charley's remarks about wiping her feet on the Welcome mat at the door before she

comes in, because Rose knows there is no Welcome mat at Charley's door, anyway, but I can see where Charley has a right to a few beefs, at that, as she leaves a trail of black hoofprints across the clean floor as if she is walking around in mud somewhere before she comes in, although I do not seem to remember that it is raining when I arrive.

Now this Dream Street Rose is an old doll of maybe fifty-odd, and is a very well-known character around and about, as she is wandering through the Forties for many a year, and especially through West Forty-seventh Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, and this block is called Dream Street. And the reason it is called Dream Street is because in this block are many characters of one kind and another who always seem to be dreaming of different matters.

In Dream Street there are many theatrical hotels, and rooming houses, and restaurants, and speaks, including Good Time Charley's Gingham Shoppe, and in the summertime the characters I mention sit on the stoops or lean against the railings along Dream Street, and the gab you hear sometimes sounds very dreamy indeed. In fact, it sometimes sounds very pipe-dreamy.

Many actors, male and female, and especially vaudeville actors, live in the hotels and rooming houses, and vaudeville actors, both male and female, are great hands for sitting around dreaming out loud about how they will practically assassinate the public in the Palace if ever they get a chance.

Furthermore, in Dream Street are always many handbookies and horse players, who sit on the church steps on the cool side of Dream Street in the summer and dream about big killings on the races, and there are also nearly always many fight managers, and sometimes fighters, hanging out in front of the restaurants, picking their teeth and dreaming about winning championships of the world, although up to this time no champion of the world has yet come out of Dream Street.

In this street you see burlesque dolls, and hoofers, and guys who write songs, and saxophone players, and newsboys, and newspaper scribes, and taxi drivers, and blind guys, and midgets, and blondes with Pomeranian pooches, or maybe French poodles, and guys with whiskers, and night-club entertainers, and I do not know what all else. And all of these characters are interesting to look at, and some of them are very interesting to talk to, although if you listen to several I know long enough, you may get the idea that they are somewhat daffy, especially the horse players.

But personally I consider all horse players more or less daffy anyway. In fact, the way I look at it, if a guy is not daffy he will not be playing the horses.

Now this Dream Street Rose is a short, thickset, square-looking old doll, with a square pan, and square shoulders, and she has heavy iron-gray hair that she wears in a square

bob, and she stands very square on her feet. In fact, Rose is the squarest-looking doll I ever see, and she is as strong and lively as Jim Londos, the wrestler. In fact, Jim Londos will never be any better than six to five in my line over Dream Street Rose, if she is in any kind of shape.

Nobody in this town wishes any truck with Rose if she has a few shots of grog in her, and especially Good Time Charley's grog, for she can fight like the dickens when she is grogged up. In fact, Rose holds many a decision in this town, especially over coppers, because if there is one thing she hates and despises more than somewhat it is a copper, as coppers are always heaving her into the old can when they find her jerking citizens around and cutting up other didoes.

For many years Rose works in the different hotels along Dream Street as a chambermaid. She never works in any one hotel very long, because the minute she gets a few bobs together she likes to go out and enjoy a little recreation, such as visiting around the speaks, although she is about as welcome in most speaks as a G-guy with a search warrant. You see, nobody can ever tell when Rose may feel like taking the speak apart, and also the customers.

She never has any trouble getting a job back in any hotel she ever works in, for Rose is a wonderful hand for making up beds, although several times, when she is in a hurry to get off, I hear she makes up beds with guests still in them, which causes a few mild beefs to the management, but does not bother Rose. I speak of this matter only to show you that she is a very quaint character indeed, and full of zest.

Well, I sit down to play klob with Good Time Charley, but about this time several customers come into the Gingham Shoppe, so Charley has to go and take care of them, leaving me alone. And while I am sitting there alone I hear Dream Street Rose mumbling to herself over in the corner, but I pay no attention to her, although I wish to say I am by no means unfriendly with Rose.

In fact, I say hello to her at all times, and am always very courteous to her, as I do not wish to have her bawling me out in public, and maybe circulating rumors about me, as she is apt to do, if she feels I am snubbing her.

Finally, I notice her motioning to me to come over to her table, and I go over at once and sit down, because I can see that Rose is well grogged up at this time, and I do not care to have her attracting my attention by chucking a cuspidor at me. She offers me a drink when I sit down, but of course I never drink anything that is sold in Good Time Charley's, as a personal favor to Charley. He says he wishes to retain my friendship.

So I just sit there saying nothing much whatever, and Rose keeps on mumbling to herself, and I am not able to make much of her mumbling, until finally she looks at me and says to me like this:

"I am now going to tell you about my friend," Rose says.

"Well, Rose," I say, "personally I do not care to hear about your friend, although," I say, "I have no doubt that what you wish to tell me about this friend is very interesting. But I am here to play a little klob with Good Time Charley."

"Charley is busy selling his poison to the suckers," Rose says. "I am now going to tell you about my friend. It is quite a story," she says. "You will listen."

So I listen.

It is a matter of thirty-five years ago [Dream Street Rose says] and the spot is a town in Colorado by the name of Pueblo, where there are smelters and one thing and another. My friend is at this time maybe sixteen or seventeen years old, and a first-class looker in every respect. Her papa is dead, and her mamma runs a boarding house for the guys who work in the smelters, and who are very hearty eaters. My friend deals them off the arm for the guys in her mamma's boarding house to save her mamma the expense of a waitress.

Now among the boarders in this boarding house are many guys who are always doing a little pitching to my friend, and trying to make dates with her to take her places, but my friend never gives them much of a tumble, because after she gets through dealing them off the arm all day her feet generally pain her too much to go anywhere except to the hay.

Finally, however, along comes a tall, skinny young guy from the East by the name of Frank something, who has things to say to my friend that are much more interesting than anything that has ever been said to her by a guy before, including such things as love and marriage, which are always interesting subjects to any doll.

This Frank is maybe twenty-five years old, and he comes from the East with the idea of making his fortune in the West, and while it is true that fortunes are being made in the West at this time, there is little chance that Frank is going to make any part of a fortune, as he does not care to work very hard. In fact, he does not care to work at all, being much more partial to playing a little poker, or shooting a few craps, or maybe hustling a sucker around Mike's pool room on Santa Fe Avenue, for Frank is an excellent pool player, especially when he is playing a sucker.

Now my friend is at this time a very innocent young doll, and a good doll in every respect, and her idea of love includes a nice little home, and children running here and there and around and about, and she never has a wrong thought in her life, and believes that everybody else in the world is like herself. And the chances are if this Frank does not happen along, my friend will marry a young guy in Pueblo by the name of Higginbottom, who is very fond of her indeed, and who is a decent young guy and afterwards makes plenty of potatoes in the grocery dodge.

But my friend goes very daffy over Frank and cannot see anybody but him, and the upshot of it all is she runs away with him one day to Denver, being dumb enough to believe that he means it when he tells her that he loves her and is going to marry her. Why Frank ever bothers with such a doll as my friend in the first place is always a great mystery to one and all, and the only way anybody can explain it is that she is young and fresh, and he is a heel at heart.

"Well, Rose," I say, "I am now commencing to see the finish of this story about your friend, and," I say, "it is such a story as anybody can hear in a speak at any time in this town, except," I say, "maybe your story is longer than somewhat. So I will now thank you, and excuse myself, and play a little klob."

"You will listen," Dream Street Rose says, looking me slap-dab in the eye. So I listen.

Moreover, I notice now that Good Time Charley is standing behind me, bending in an ear, as it seems that his customers take the wind after a couple of slams of Good Time Charley's merchandise, a couple of slams being about all that even a very hardy customer can stand at one session.

Of course [Rose goes on] the chances are Frank never intends marrying my friend at all, and she never knows until long afterward that the reason he leads her to the parson is that the young guy from Pueblo by the name of Higginbottom catches up with them at the old Windsor Hotel where they are stopping and privately pokes a six-pistol against Frank's ribs and promises faithfully to come back and blow a hole in Frank you can throw a watermelon through if Frank tries any finagling around with my friend.

Well, in practically no time whatever, love's young dream is over as far as my friend is concerned. This Frank turns out to be a most repulsive character indeed, especially if you are figuring him as an ever-loving husband. In fact, he is no good. He mistreats my friend in every way any guy ever thought of mistreating a doll, and besides the old established ways of mistreating a doll, Frank thinks up quite a number of new ways, being really quite ingenious in this respect.

Yes, this Frank is one hundred per cent heel.

It is not so much that he gives her a thumping now and then, because, after all, a thumping wears off, and hurts heal up, even when they are such hurts as a broken nose and fractured ribs, and once an ankle cracked by a kick. It is what he does to her heart, and to her innocence. He is by no means a good husband, and does not know how to treat an ever-loving wife with any respect, especially as he winds up by taking my friend to San Francisco and hiring her out to a very loose character there by the name of Black Emanuel, who has a dance joint on the Barbary Coast, which, at the time I am talking about, is hotter than a stove. In this joint my friend

has to dance with the customers, and get them to buy beer for her and one thing and another, and this occupation is most distasteful to my friend, as she never cares for beer.

It is there Frank leaves her for good after giving her an extra big thumping for a keepsake, and when my friend tries to leave Black Emanuel's to go looking for her ever-loving husband, she is somewhat surprised to hear Black Emanuel state that he pays Frank three C's for her to remain there and continue working. Furthermore, Black Emanuel resumes the thumpings where Frank leaves off, and by and by my friend is much bewildered and down-hearted and does not care what happens to her.

Well, there is nothing much of interest in my friend's life for the next thirty-odd years, except that she finally gets so she does not mind the beer so much, and, in fact, takes quite a fondness for it, and also for light wines and Bourbon whisky, and that she comes to realize that Frank does not love her after all, in spite of what he says. Furthermore, in later years, after she drifts around the country quite some, in and out of different joints, she realizes that the chances are she will never have a nice little home, with children running here and there, and she often thinks of what a disagreeable influence Frank has on her life.

In fact, this Frank is always on her mind more than somewhat. In fact, she thinks of him night and day, and says many a prayer that he will do well. She manages to keep track of him, which is not hard to do, at that, as Frank is in New York, and is becoming quite a guy in business, and is often in the newspapers. Maybe his success is due to my friend's prayers, but the chances are it is more because he connects up with some guy who has an invention for doing something very interesting to steel, and by grabbing an interest in this invention Frank gets a shove toward plenty of potatoes. Furthermore, he is married, and is raising up a family.

About ten or twelve years ago my friend comes to New York, and by this time she is getting a little faded around the edges. She is not so old, at that, but the air of the Western and Southern joints is bad on the complexion, and beer is no good for the figure. In fact, my friend is now quite a haybag, and she does not get any better-looking in the years she spends in New York as she is practically all out of the old sex appeal, and has to do a little heavy lifting to keep eating. But she never forgets to keep praying that Frank will continue to do well, and Frank certainly does this, as he is finally spoken of everywhere very respectfully as a millionaire and a high-class guy.

In all the years she is in New York my friend never runs into Frank, as Frank is by no means accustomed to visiting the spots where my friend hangs out, but my friend goes to a lot of bother to get acquainted with a doll who is a maid for some time in

Frank's town house in East Seventy-fourth Street, and through this doll my friend keeps a pretty fair line on the way Frank lives. In fact, one day when Frank and his family are absent, my friend goes to Frank's house with her friend, just to see what it looks like, and after an hour there my friend has the joint pretty well cased.

So now my friend knows through her friend that on very hot nights such as tonight Frank's family is bound to be at their country place at Port Washington, but that Frank himself is spending the night at his town house, because he wishes to work on a lot of papers of some kind. My friend knows through her friend that all of Frank's servants are at Port Washington, too, except my friend's friend, who is in charge of the town house, and Frank's valet, a guy by the name of Sloggins.

Furthermore, my friend knows through her friend that both her friend and Sloggins have a date to go to a movie at 8:30 o'clock, to be gone a couple of hours, as it seems Frank is very big-hearted about giving his servants time off for such a purpose when he is at home alone; although one night he squawks no little when my friend is out with her friend drinking a little beer, and my friend's friend loses her door key and has to ring the bell to the servants' entrance, and rousts Frank out of a sound sleep.

Naturally, my friend's friend will be greatly astonished if she ever learns that it is with this key that my friend steps into Frank's house along about 9 o'clock tonight. An electric light hangs over the servants' entrance, and my friend locates the button that controls this light just inside the door and turns it off, as my friend figures that maybe Frank and his family will not care to have any of their high-class neighbors, or anyone else, see an old doll who has no better hat than she is wearing, entering or leaving their house at such an hour.

It is an old-fashioned sort of house, four or five stories high, with the library on the third floor in the rear, looking out through French windows over a nice little garden, and my friend finds Frank in the library where she expects to find him, because she is smart enough to figure that a guy who is working on papers is not apt to be doing this work in the cellar.

But Frank is not working on anything when my friend moves in on him. He is dozing in a chair by the window, and, looking at him after all these years, she finds something of a change, indeed. He is much heavier than he is thirty-five years back, and his hair is white, but he looks pretty well to my friend, at that, as she stands there for maybe five minutes watching him. Then he seems to realize somebody is in the room, as sleeping guys will do, for his regular breathing stops with a snort, and he opens his eyes, and looks into my friend's eyes, but without hardly stirring. And finally my friend speaks to Frank as follows:

"Well, Frank," she says, "do you know me?"

"Yes," he says, after a while, "I know you. At first I think maybe you are a ghost, as I once hear something about your being dead. But," he says, "I see now the report is a canard. You are too fat to be a ghost."

Well, of course, this is a most insulting crack, indeed, but my friend passes it off as she does not wish to get in any arguments with Frank at this time. She can see that he is upset more than somewhat and he keeps looking around the room as if he hopes he can see somebody else he can cut in on the conversation. In fact, he acts as if my friend is by no means a welcome visitor.

"Well, Frank," my friend says, very pleasant, "there you are, and here I am. I understand you are now a wealthy and prominent citizen of this town. I am glad to know this, Frank," she says. "You will be surprised to hear that for years and years I pray that you will do well for yourself and become a big guy in every respect, with a nice family, and everything else. I judge my prayers are answered," she says. "I see by the papers that you have two sons at Yale, and a daughter in Vassar, and that your ever-loving wife is getting to be very high mucky-mucky in society. Well, Frank," she says, "I am very glad. I pray something like all this will happen to you."

Now, at such a speech, Frank naturally figures that my friend is all right, at that, and the chances are he also figures that she still has a mighty soft spot in her heart for him, just as she has in the days when she deals them off the arm to keep him in gambling and drinking money. In fact, Frank brightens up somewhat, and he says to my friend like this:

"You pray for my success?" he says. "Why, this is very thoughtful of you, indeed. Well," he says, "I am sitting on top of the world. I have everything to live for."

"Yes," my friend says, "and this is exactly where I pray I will find you. On top of the world," she says, "and with everything to live for. It is where I am when you take my life. It is where I am when you kill me as surely as if you strangle me with your hands. I always pray you will not become a bum," my friend says, "because a bum has nothing to live for, anyway. I want to find you liking to live, so you will hate so much to die."

Naturally, this does not sound so good to Frank, and he begins all of a sudden to shake and shiver and to stutter somewhat.

"Why," he says, "what do you mean? Are you going to kill me?"

"Well," my friend says, "that remains to be seen. Personally," she says, "I will be much obliged if you will kill yourself, but it can be arranged one way or the other. However, I will explain the disadvantages of me killing you.

"The chances are," my friend says, "if I kill you I will be caught and a very great scandal will result, because," she says, "I have on my person the certificate of my marriage to you

in Denver, and something tells me you never think to get a divorce. So," she says, "you are a bigamist."

"I can pay," Frank says.

"Furthermore," my friend says, paying no attention to his remark, "I have a sworn statement from Black Emanuel about your transaction with him, for Black Emanuel gets religion before he dies from being shivved by Johnny Mizzoo, and he tries to round himself up by confessing all the sins he can think of, which are quite a lot.

"Now then," she says, "if you knock yourself off you will leave an unsullied, respected name. If I kill you, all the years and effort you have devoted to building up your reputation will go for nothing. You are past sixty," my friend says, "and any way you figure it, you do not have so very far to go. If I kill you," she says, "you will go in horrible disgrace, and everybody around you will feel the disgrace, no matter how much dough you leave them. Your children will hang their heads in shame. Your ever-loving wife will not like it.

"I wait on you a long time, Frank," my friend says. "A dozen times in the past twenty years I figure I may as well call on you and close up my case with you, but," she says, "then I always persuade myself to wait a little longer so you would rise higher and higher and life will be a bit sweeter to you."

Well, Frank sits there as if he is knocked plumb out, and he does not answer a word; so finally my friend outs with a large John Roscoe which she is packing in the bosom of her dress, and tosses it in his lap, and speaks as follows:

"Frank," she says, "do not think it will do you any good to pot me in the back when I turn around, because," she says, "you will be worse off than ever. I leave plenty of letters scattered around in case anything happens to me. And remember," she says, "if you do not do this job yourself, I will be back."

So [Dream Street Rose says] my friend goes out of the library and down the stairs, leaving Frank sprawled out in his chair, and when she reaches the first floor she hears what may be a shot in the upper part of the house, and then again may be only a door slamming. My friend never knows for sure what it is, because a little later as she nears the servants' entrance she hears quite a commotion outside, and a guy cussing a blue streak, and a doll tee-heeing, and pretty soon my friend's friend, the maid, and Sloggins, the valet, come walking in.

Well, my friend just has time to scroonch herself back in a dark corner, and they go upstairs, the guy still cussing and the doll still giggling, and my friend cannot make out what it is all about except that they come home earlier than she figures. So my friend goes tippy-toe out of the servants' entrance, to grab a taxi not far from the house and get away rrom this neighborhood, and now you will soon hear of the suicide of a guy who is a

millionaire, and it will be all even with my friend.

"Well, Rose," I say, "it is a nice long story, and full of romance and all this and that, and," I say, "of course I will never be ungentlemanly enough to call a lady a liar, but," I say, "if it is not a lie, it will do until a lie comes along."

"All right," Rose says. "Anyway, I tell you about my friend. Now," she says, "I am going where the liquor is better, which can be any other place in town, because," she says, "no liquor anywhere is worse."

So she goes out, making more tracks on Good Time Charley's floor, and Charley speaks most impolitely of her after she goes, and gets out his mop to clean the floor.

Well, along toward one o'clock I hear a newsboy in the street outside yelling something I cannot make out, because he is yelling as if he has a mouthful of mush, as newsboys are bound to do. But I am anxious to see what goes in the first race at Belmont, on account of having a first-class tip, so I poke my noggin outside Good Time Charley's and buy a paper and across the front page in large letters it states that the wealthy Mr. Frank Billingsworth McQuiggan knocks himself off by putting a slug through his own noggin.

It says Mr. McQuiggan is found in a chair in his library as dead as a doornail with the pistol in his lap with which he knocks himself off, and the paper states that nobody can figure what causes Mr. McQuiggan to do such a thing to himself as he is in good health and has plenty of potatoes. Then there is a lot about his history.

When Mr. McQuiggan is a young fellow returning from a visit to the Pacific Coast with about two hundred dollars in his pocket after paying his railroad fare, he meets in the train Jonas Calloway, famous inventor of the Calloway steel process. Calloway, also then young, is desperately in need of funds and he offers Mr. McQuiggan a third interest in his invention for what now seems the paltry sum of one hundred dollars. Mr. McQuiggan accepts the offer and thus paves the way to his own fortune.

I am telling all this to Good Time Charley while he is mopping away at the floor, and finally I come on a paragraph down near the finish which goes like this: "The body was discovered by Mr. McQuiggan's faithful valet, Thomas Sloggins, at eleven o'clock. Mr. McQuiggan was then apparently dead a couple of hours. Sloggins returned home shortly before ten o'clock with another servant after changing his mind about going to a movie. Instead of going to see his employer at once, as is his usual custom, Sloggins went to his own quarters and changed his clothes.

" 'The light over the servants' entrance was out when I returned home,' the valet said, 'and in the darkness I stumbled over some scaffolding and other material left near this entrance by workmen who are to regravel the roof of the house to-

morrow, upsetting all over the entranceway a large bucket of tar, much of which got on my apparel when I fell, making a change necessary before going to see Mr. McQuiggan.' "

Well, Good Time Charley keeps on mopping harder than ever, though finally he stops a minute.

"Listen," Charley says, "understand I do not say the guy does not deserve what he gets, and I am by no means hollering copper, but," Charley says, "if he knocks himself off, how does it come the rod is *still in his lap* where Dream Street Rose says her friend tosses it? Well, never mind," Charley says, "but can you think of something that will remove tar from a wood floor? It positively will not mop off."

THE GREAT EMERALD MYSTERY

by MICHAEL ARLEN

It cannot be too clearly understood that I do not know these people. Society has nothing to offer a serious man — that is my position. No one will deny, of course, that such a life has its uses. I am speaking of the life called high. No one will deny that it gives employment to a large number of people. Moreover, horses like it. On the other hand, it has aspects which must necessarily be offensive to a serious man. It is the intention to deal with those aspects truthfully and fearlessly.

You will be asking how I come to know such people. I do not. As a student of human nature, however, it is my duty to keep in touch with every corner of the community. Thus I hear of such people as Mrs. Angel and the fellow Dwight-Rankin from my cousin Pullman, who has degraded the exercise of a naturally feeble intelligence to the service of a man about town.

Mrs. Angel appears to have added to the advantages of being born the daughter of an admiral by having married a colonel. My cousin Pullman tells me that they are both dead. One can only regret, therefore, that one is too late to tender sympathy to the gallant men. Such women as Mrs. Angel are scarcely a credit to the Services; while as for that fellow Dwight-Rankin, one can only view with deep alarm the state of a country in which such men are permitted to die a natural death.

No one will deny that society should be a gathering of elegant people for the purposes of being elegant. One thinks of people in society as charming triflers. One imagines them as spending their days in bandying about airy nothings. One pictures

them as nonchalantly engaged in the high-class diversions of golf, tennis, and polo. One visualizes them as having a series of baths day and night with that fearless disregard for the after-effects of continual immersion in water which characterizes the inheritors of Vikings and Norsemen. One reads of them as going out in the evenings to dine off the more expensive fishes, the more picturesque birds, and the palest vegetables. One does *not* think of them as preying on their fellows.

My cousin Pullman says that the present industrial conditions are to blame for that. He says that a beautiful widow like Mrs. Angel, finding herself in straitened circumstances, will avenge herself on the world at large. He says that she is quite right to get what she can out of life. You can see that my cousin Pullman is already tainted by the flippant materialism of the people with whom he passes his time. The influence of that fellow Dwight-Rankin is not only ruining his life, but undoubtedly shortening it. My cousin Pullman says that Dwight-Rankin breakfasts off two green olives and a biscuit soaked in rum.

Apparently it was Dwight-Rankin who introduced him to the beautiful widow Mrs. Angel. One imagines Mrs. Angel, from her frequent photographs in the modish journals, as living in surroundings of inconceivable luxury and polish. Actually, my cousin Pullman says, she lives in a garage not far from Buckingham Palace, but not very near either. The garage has been converted into a pretty-enough little flat, and there the fellow Dwight-Rankin and my cousin Pullman will sit with Mrs. Angel of an evening before dinner, and she will give them to drink, and they, my cousin Pullman says, will drink.

One evening Mrs. Angel greeted them with an abstracted air. Responding at last, however, to Dwight-Rankin's raillery, she admitted that she was thoughtful because, acting under the grave provocation of repeated invitations, she had at last promised to dine with Mr. Buggenshaw.

My cousin Pullman says he was thunderstruck. He did not know Mr. Buggenshaw personally — but who, he asks, has not heard of him? Indeed, Mrs. Angel's immediate future filled my cousin Pullman with profound depression. He saw her on the downward path, dragged down into the depths by moneylenders. He saw her ruined and desperate. That fellow Dwight-Rankin appears, on the other hand, to have viewed the possibilities with considerably less alarm. He merely suggested, with that offensive air of rectitude which has done so much to bring public-school men into discredit in the more virile colonies, that it was highly improper for Mrs. Angel to dine alone with Mr. Buggenshaw.

One can instantly see the fellow Dwight-Rankin's true character in the suggestion. He wanted a free meal.

My cousin Pullman, on the other

hand, was actuated by the highest motives of chivalry in endorsing the fellow's suggestion. He says he drew a vivid picture of what might happen to Mrs. Angel if she dined alone with Mr. Buggenshaw. Mrs. Angel was undoubtedly affected by this. My cousin Pullman drove home his advantage by reminding her with what consternation her late father, the gallant Admiral, and her late husband, the gallant Colonel, would view from on high the spectacle of their beloved dining alone with Mr. Buggenshaw.

"In fact," the gross Dwight-Rankin concluded, "there is only one way to put the matter right. Pullman and I will also dine with Mr. Buggenshaw."

My cousin Pullman says that Mrs. Angel's acceptance of the suggestion was cast in a thoughtful mold owing, as she pointed out, to the difficulty of introducing at the last moment two strange young men into Mr. Buggenshaw's house for no other apparent purpose than to drink Mr. Buggenshaw's wines and to eat Mr. Buggenshaw's dinner. One can see the fellow Dwight-Rankin expanding at the mere mention of food and drink. At his suggestion it was finally decided that Mrs. Angel's maid should ring up Mr. Buggenshaw's house to say that Mrs. Angel's two elder brothers had suddenly arrived from South America and might she bring them to dinner too?

My cousin Pullman says that, though actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, he was far from feeling comfortable about the whole affair. He says that whereas his feelings for the beautiful Mrs. Angel were the very opposite of brotherly, the mere suggestion of such a relationship to Dwight-Rankin filled him with apprehension.

Musing thus, he sat staring at Mrs. Angel. She, thoughtful too, was playing with a ring on the third finger of her right hand. It was a great emerald, shining deep and dark in the shadows where Mrs. Angel sat resting. Staring at it, my cousin Pullman meditated on human vanities, on the worthlessness of precious stones in the ever after, on the salvation of the soul, on money.

"Why," he ventured at last, "don't you sell that emerald? It is, after all, better to sell everything than to dine with Mr. Buggenshaw. Why, a stone like that must be worth a couple of thousand pounds!"

"Oh, it was!" sighed Mrs. Angel. "In fact, two thousand five hundred was what I got for it."

"Do you mean to say," said the fellow Dwight-Rankin, "that you've sold the real emerald and that's a dud?"

"But it's a good dud, isn't it?" smiled Mrs. Angel, holding the great emerald up for him to examine. One can imagine the fellow devouring it with his conceited eyes. One can imagine him twiddling about with it under the light as though he knew a thing or two — which was obviously about all he *did* know.

"I paid forty-two pounds," sighed Mrs. Angel, "to have that copy made."

Dwight-Rankin at last gave it back to her, complimenting her on a perfect imitation emerald. "I'd bet anything," the fellow added, "that it would take in anybody who didn't know something about emeralds."

My cousin Pullman here makes a confession. He says it was he who suggested that they should try "the emerald" on Mr. Buggenshaw to see if he was as clever as he was rumored to be.

One cannot, in this whole business, help sympathizing with Mr. Buggenshaw. No doubt, he was not a good man. No doubt, he was a grasping and unscrupulous financier. Nevertheless, it appears that he welcomed my cousin Pullman and the fellow Dwight-Rankin in all good faith as Mrs. Angel's brothers, and was more than cordial in his hospitality. Moreover, of the ingredients of that hospitality, both separately and as a whole, my cousin Pullman speaks very highly.

The fellow Dwight-Rankin, it appears, was in high good humor from the very beginning. He did not so much drink the proffered cocktails as delete them. My cousin Pullman says that Mr. Buggenshaw was undoubtedly puzzled by some of the things the fellow said, and that, as they sat down to dinner, it was with an effort that the good man pulled himself together and, turning to the hitherto silent Mrs. Angel, said heartily:

"Well, well, it is indeed a pleasure to see you again, my dear Mrs. Angel. You have not allowed me the privilege for years — not since poor Angel died, I believe."

The last remark, my cousin Pullman says, was unfortunate, as it was well known that Mr. Buggenshaw had so pestered poor Colonel Angel to repay loans which the gallant Colonel had done Mr. Buggenshaw the honor to borrow from him, that the persecuted soldier had embraced death from pneumonia with relief. Therefore, actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, my cousin Pullman was about to change the subject when the fellow Dwight-Rankin, doubtless with the same idea in mind, in so far as he was capable of entertaining an idea, raised his very second-rate voice and said:

"Tell us about yourself, Mr. Buggenshaw. How is business these days? For my part, I am finding the usual difficulties. As a confirmed borrower of twenty years' standing I must say, Mr. B., that I find you moneylenders extraordinarily skeptical about the financial background of a gentleman's word of honor."

One sympathizes with Mr. Buggenshaw. He had been brought up in England on the clear understanding that a gentleman may commit murder but must never (a) shoot a fox, or (b) talk of money. And here, at his very dinner-table, was a so-called gentleman committing (b). My cousin Pullman says that the atmosphere throbbed with Mr. Buggenshaw's correct indignation.

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw at last, "I do not lend money. I negotiate loans."

My cousin Pullman says that, ac-

tuated by the highest motives of chivalry, he sought to distract his host by addressing him in the following terms:

"You will no doubt be wondering, sir," said my cousin Pullman, "how it is that my brother and I have different surnames."

"Now you mention it," said Mr. Buggenshaw coldly.

My cousin Pullman was then about to develop a lie or two in a cultured way when the fellow Dwight-Rankin, filling his inferior mouth with caviar, said:

"It is due to the fact that our mother, my dear Mr. B., had a highly developed talent for marriage."

"Quite," said Mr. Buggenshaw coldly.

"In all," continued the fellow Dwight-Rankin, sipping his champagne with offensive enjoyment, "our mother married three times, and we three are each the children of different fathers. Her last two husbands were not, unfortunately, up to the standard set up by the first, who was a remarkably able and handsome man, and whose son I am. Of her second husband, a Mr. Pullman, we cannot say too little. He died of drink, and his son, I regret to say, is an interesting if somewhat unwholesome example of the effects of heredity on a naturally weak constitution. Her third husband, on the other hand, Mrs. Angel's father, was a very lovable man, but singularly lacking in character. Having gambled away two fortunes, he died of eating pickled herrings on an empty stomach after a night's card-playing and left his daughter penniless — except for that magnificent emerald ring!"

Whereupon the fellow Dwight-Rankin kicked my cousin Pullman under the table to remind him to play up to the exceedingly overrated joke about the "emerald." But before he could so demean himself, Mr. Buggenshaw had turned to Mrs. Angel with a gentlemanly smile.

"I have," said he, "already remarked your emerald. As you know, Mrs. Angel, I am considered to be something of a connoisseur of precious stones. I therefore take this opportunity of congratulating you on the possession of a singularly fine emerald."

My cousin Pullman says he was thunderstruck. On the other hand, it was with difficulty that the fellow Dwight-Rankin repressed a boorish guffaw. The fellow turned with an objectionable air of solemnity and asked:

"How much, my dear Mr. Buggenshaw, would you, as a connoisseur, say an emerald like that was worth?"

My cousin Pullman says that it was with pleasure he heard Mr. Buggenshaw's dignified rebuke.

"One does not," said he, "talk of money while sitting at table."

"Well, get up and tell me," said the unattractive Dwight-Rankin.

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw indignantly, "if you must know, I could sell that stone tomorrow for two thousand five hundred pounds."

"You're not serious!" gasped my cousin Pullman.

"Seldom," said Mr. Buggenshaw indignantly, "have I been more serious."

It was with relief, my cousin Pullman says, that he heard Mrs. Angel's soft voice.

"Don't," she charmingly begged Mr. Buggenshaw, "don't let them tease you. For that is all they are doing. They know as well as I do that this isn't a real emerald at all."

My cousin Pullman says that Dwight-Rankin's uneducated laughter at his host's expense must have been peculiarly offensive to one who, like Mr. Buggenshaw, had been brought up in England on the clear understanding that gentlemen do not laugh with their mouths open. He then swears that the following conversation took place:

MR. B: "You are telling me, my dear Mrs. Angel, that the emerald on your finger is false?"

MRS. A: "Oh, come, Mr. Buggenshaw! Of course it is false! And the boys were just trying to —"

MR. B: "But it is you who are trying to tease me, Mrs. Angel! That stone is no more paste than I am!"

My cousin Pullman says that at this point Dwight-Rankin made an interruption which took this form: "Good old Bug! Go it, baby!"

"Why," said Mr. Buggenshaw, very properly ignoring Dwight-Rankin, "I don't even have to touch that stone to know whether it is real or not! Who told you that it was paste?"

"I didn't have to be told," said Mrs. Angel, "as I had it made for me. It cost me forty-two pounds."

My cousin Pullman says that Mr. Buggenshaw received Mrs. Angel's statement with gentlemanly restraint. The dinner continued. The food was distinguished, the wine peerless.

When they had done, the fellow Dwight-Rankin apparently again began making an ass of himself about that emerald, saying:

"Imagine being taken in by a dud like that!"

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw indignantly, "that is no dud!"

"Haw, haw!" said the fellow Dwight-Rankin. "Good old Bug!"

"I repeat," said Mr. Buggenshaw vehemently, "that Mrs. Angel is the fortunate possessor of a very fine stone worth two thousand pounds."

"You are not serious," said Mrs. Angel.

My cousin Pullman says that nothing made Mr. Buggenshaw more indignant than being told he was not serious.

"But," said Mrs. Angel, "it would be sheer robbery on my part to take even fifty pounds for a little piece of paste! I might be arrested!"

"Arrested?" said Mr. Buggenshaw. "What for?"

"Good old Bug!" cried the low Dwight-Rankin. "He'd know to a dot what one could be arrested for."

"Sir," said Mr. Buggenshaw, "I resent that."

"Rightly," said the tactful Dwight-Rankin.

My cousin Pullman says that, actuated by the highest motives of chivalry, he sought to distract his host's attention by breaking a few plates against the side of the table to the accompaniment of a minstrel song. He denies *in toto* the following allegations: (1) that he was under the influence of wine, (2) that he was under the influence of spirits.

On the contrary, he is ready to go into the witness-box and swear to the following conversation having taken place:

MRS. A: "Can it be that I am mistaken?"

MR. B: "It should not be possible — but that is a real emerald, Mrs. Angel."

D-R: "Good old Bug! What a man! What a connoisseur!"

MR. B: "Sir, I was not speaking to you."

D-R: "As your guest, Mr. B., I resent that."

My cousin Pullman says that at this point he would have arisen and left the building to mark his disapproval of Dwight-Rankin, had not the butler chosen that moment to pour him out a spot of brandy. As for the affair of the emerald ring, that was now quite beyond him. He was listening to the discussion with only half an ear, when a word woke him up. Nothing can be gained by concealing the fact that the word was "banknotes."

"What!" said my cousin Pullman, startled.

Mrs. Angel looked round at him.

"Can you imagine it!" she laughed excitedly. "He is offering me two thousand pounds for this thing!"

"In banknotes," said the attractive Mr. Buggenshaw. "I always keep a certain amount of ready cash on hand."

"But *look* at it!" cried Mrs. Angel, pulling off her ring and giving it to him. "You will see at once that it's only paste."

My cousin Pullman says that Mr. Buggenshaw's expression while examining the stone was one which manifested all the earmarks of an unusual degree of pleasure. He gave it back to Mrs. Angel with a smile.

"I shall get more than two thousand for it, Mrs. Angel," was all he said.

"And I can't be arrested for selling you an imitation stone?"

"The police cannot, and your conscience should not, trouble you, Mrs. Angel. You are not selling the ring under false pretenses."

"All the same, Mr. Buggenshaw, I am not going to let you spend such a large sum without first consulting an expert. I simply insist on that much, at least."

"As you wish, Mrs. Angel. But you are being unnecessarily careful of my interests. However, I will just ask Curzon to step round. He is a jeweler."

"Curzon?" said Dwight-Rankin. "You don't mean Curzon of Loot and Curzon, the pawnbrokers?"

"You know him?" said the good Mr. Buggenshaw.

"Since infancy," said Dwight-

Rankin nastily, "I have scarcely had time to know anyone else."

After dinner they entered a drawing-room furnished, my cousin Pullman says, in the earlier motion-picture manner with certain modifications showing a Tottenham Court Road influence. There, while the good Mr. Buggenshaw showed Mrs. Angel the sights, the fellow Dwight-Rankin drew my cousin Pullman aside and, recommending him to help himself to the cigars, as it was unlikely they would ever be asked to Mr. Buggenshaw's house again, whispered:

"I shall never hold up my head again if she doesn't get all she can out of him for that dud stone. Do you realize that two thousand pounds was the sum he kept dunning poor Angel for before he died, though he had actually lent him only five hundred pounds?"

"Did he get the two thousand pounds?"

"Eventually," said Dwight-Rankin gloomily, "from the estate. So he really did *her* out of fifteen hundred pounds, you see."

"But is the emerald *really* a dud?"

Dwight-Rankin looked pityingly at my cousin Pullman. "Didn't she," said the fellow, "*tell* us it was a dud?"

"Yes, but —" said my cousin Pullman.

"Then don't ask silly questions," said the fellow Dwight-Rankin.

At that moment Mr. Curzon was shown in. Dwight-Rankin and Mrs. Angel sat down to a game of bezique, while the situation was briefly explained to Mr. Curzon by Mr. Buggenshaw. The expressions of the two as they stood whispering together were fraught, says my cousin Pullman, with possibilities of immediate financial loss to gentlefolk. He was therefore actuated by the highest motives of chivalry in quietly approaching them and trying to catch what they were saying. Seeing, however, that Mr. Curzon was watching him, my cousin Pullman assumed a nonchalant air and, sipping his brandy with *savoir faire*, said gayly:

"May I say, Mr. Buggenshaw, that this is very fine old brandy?"

"Nothing," said the good Mr. Buggenshaw, "gives me more pleasure than to hear that you have at last come to the conclusion that it is brandy. From the action of your elbow for a considerable time past I could only judge that you were under the impression that you were drinking lager-beer."

My cousin Pullman says that he resented this unjust attack so bitterly that nothing could have prevented him from shaking the dust of the house from his feet forever had he not felt that it would be shameful to desert his friends.

My cousin Pullman then swears to the following conversation having taken place:

MR. B: "Would you be so kind as to allow my friend Curzon to examine your emerald?"

MRS. A: (*Giving it to him*) "With pleasure!"

MR. B: (*Giving it to Mr. C.*) "Thank you."

MR. C: (*Receiving it*) "Thank you."

My cousin Pullman says that he was watching the proceedings with an eagle eye. Nothing, he says, escaped him. He concentrated in particular on Mr. Curzon's face with such a degree of intensity that he could, he says, draw a map of it from memory. Mr. Curzon's features were arranged by Nature with a view to expressing (a) suspicion, (b) skepticism, (c) incredulity, and (d) downright disbelief. But so great was the effect produced on him by the emerald that, my cousin Pullman says, those same features straightway rearranged themselves into a form very often assumed by the faces of stamp collectors — Mr. Curzon radiated a childlike delight. "What a beautiful stone!" said Mr. Curzon.

"You mean," said Mrs. Angel, looking up from her cards, "what a beautiful imitation!"

"Imitation?" cried Mr. Curzon. "I would like to meet the man who can make 'imitations' like this!"

My cousin Pullman says he was now convinced that Mrs. Angel had made a mistake.

Mr. Curzon gave the ring back to Mrs. Angel.

"If my good friend Buggenshaw," said he playfully, "is offering you two thousand pounds for it, you may be sure he will sell it for half that again."

"You're not serious!" said Dwight-Rankin.

"You can't be!" sighed Mrs. Angel. "Considering I had the thing made for me for forty-two pounds."

My cousin Pullman says that the positions of everyone immediately preceding the *dénouement* were as follows:

Mrs. Angel sat looking thoughtfully at the ring in the palm of her hand.

Mr. B. and Mr. C., standing, looked playfully at each other.

Dwight-Rankin sat drinking brandy.

My cousin Pullman stood at Mrs. Angel's shoulder. His mind was troubled.

He was awakened from his uneasy reverie by Mrs. Angel asking him to lend her the fine linen handkerchief with which my cousin Pullman always adorns his breast-pocket, such being the vogue among the quality. He admits to an anxiety about the toy; which no doubt does him honor as a man of fashion. Never, he says, had that handkerchief been held to the nose for any but a strictly decorative purpose. Fearful, therefore, lest Mrs. Angel had contracted a cold in the head, a thing that might happen to anyone, he was about to turn his back upon the impending humiliation of his handkerchief when he was relieved, he was elated, to see that Mrs. Angel, far from putting it to base utilitarian uses, was but polishing her emerald with it. After which, giving it back to him — its temporary absence from his breast-pocket having giving him the feeling, he says, of being almost undressed — she looked at the ring with a sad smile.

"I should have thought," said she softly, "that anyone could see it was paste!"

"Then surely," said Mr. Curzon cheerfully, "you can have no reason for refusing to sell it to Mr. Buggenshaw for two thousand pounds."

"But won't he be annoyed when he comes to sell it and is told that it's worth nothing?"

"Ha — ha!" laughed Mr. Buggenshaw. "Well, a joke's a joke. Now, Mrs. Angel, may I bring you two thousand pounds from my safe?"

"I can't do it!" sighed Mrs. Angel finally, rising from her chair.

My cousin Pullman says he drew a breath of relief. Convinced now that the emerald was real, he felt positive that Mrs. Angel could sell it for more than the sum offered. Imagine, then, his consternation at hearing Mrs. Angel add that, unwilling as she was to sell a stone she knew was false, she would, under pressure, let it go for a mere fifteen hundred pounds. The transaction was straightway carried through on those terms. My cousin Pullman could do no more than stand by and watch while Mr. Buggenshaw, having playfully inserted a roll of banknotes into Mrs. Angel's vanity-bag, held out his hand for the emerald ring. Mrs. Angel, however, still appeared to hesitate. My cousin Pullman was delighted to notice a look of discouragement communicate itself from the face of Mr. Curzon to that of Mr. Buggenshaw. But, alas, such hopes were instantly dashed to the ground. Mrs. Angel held out her ring. The following conversation then took place:

MRS. A: "Mr. Buggenshaw, I sell you this emerald for fifteen hundred pounds on the clear understanding that in my opinion it is a paste imitation."

MR. B: "It is indeed a pleasure, Mrs. Angel, to do business with a lady of honor."

MRS. A: "These gentlemen are all witnesses of the contract."

ALL: "We are."

MRS. A: "You in particular, Mr. Curzon — I hope I can rely on you as a witness."

MR. C: "You can."

Whereupon the ring passed into Mr. Buggenshaw's eager hand, a bottle of champagne was opened to celebrate the transaction, and, says my cousin Pullman, since it was by then close on midnight, a move was made by Mrs. Angel and her two cavaliers towards the door. The good Mr. Buggenshaw did them the honor to escort them, and while the butler was seeking a taxicab in the neighborhood, the four stood on the door-step exchanging compliments and expressions of mutual esteem.

At the very same moment, however, that the taxicab drove up, something happened that radically altered the amiable exterior of the situation. This was the sudden appearance of Mr. Curzon from the drawing-room. Had it, of course, been a mere appearance, the situation could not have been instantly and radically disturbed. But it was more. Mr. Curzon can be

said to have exploded. Nor, says my cousin Pullman, was this singular detonation unaccompanied by sundry outward signs of extraordinary upheavals within Mr. Curzon's person. Mr. Curzon's features, in particular, assumed an arrangement that left no room whatsoever for expressing his faith in the life everlasting and the brotherhood of man.

"This," shouted Mr. Curzon, brandishing the emerald, "is an imitation!"

"Well," said the fellow Dwight-Rankin, "who said it wasn't?"

My cousin Pullman says he lacks words with which to describe the scene that then took place. There was a moment when he thought that nothing could save him from being embroiled in a vulgar fracas. It was Mrs Angel who put an end to the painful situation by stepping haughtily into the taxicab. The fellow Dwight-Rankin, says my cousin Pullman, only made matters worse by telling Mr. Curzon to go and boil his head.

But how, my cousin Pullman asked himself, two grown-up men like Mr. Buggenshaw and Mr. Curzon could first be misled by an imitation emerald into buying the same against every warning and then complain that it was imitation — how they could be so misguided, left him amazed and unsympathetic. He followed Mrs. Angel and Dwight-Rankin into the taxicab with a feeling, he says, of deep impatience at Mr. Buggenshaw's levity. Nor could he bring himself to reason politely with Mr. Curzon, whose levity took the form of insisting vociferously that the ring Mrs. Angel had finally handed over to Mr. Buggenshaw was not the same as that which he, Mr. Curzon, had examined and found good.

However, it was patent even to the two excited financiers that they hadn't, as the saying is, a leg to stand on. The good Mr. Buggenshaw's own butler couldn't but swear in a court of law to Mrs. Angel's honesty in repeatedly insisting on the falseness of the emerald. Nevertheless the *dénouement* had been so far from agreeable that my cousin Pullman could sympathize with Mrs. Angel's silence during the drive home. She spoke not a word until, at her door, he was about to help her alight, when she again asked him for the loan of his handkerchief. My cousin Pullman could not help wishing that she would try Dwight-Rankin's for a change, and indeed was about to suggest that, on the ground that his was soiled, when he noticed Dwight-Rankin grinning at him in a peculiar way. Whereupon, handing his handkerchief over with the best grace he could, he was thunderstruck at seeing the exquisite Mrs. Angel open it out in her lap and extract an emerald ring.

My cousin Pullman says it was at that moment that he made the vow which since he has kept it religiously, has caused no end of inconvenience to people crowding against him at balls, dinner-parties and such-like places at which society gathers. He carries a revolver in his hip pocket.

NO ALIBI

by HUGH MacNAIR KAHLER

IT WAS a wicked drive up Hogback, seven steep-tilted miles of timber track, of frozen ruts and out-cropping shale. The car crawled, while an arctic wind knifed through Murdock's overcoat and numbed his fingers.

Behind his muffler, though, he grinned at the jolts and the wind. He'd built his scheme on them. Ahead and above he saw the lighted windows of the camp, winking between naked trees. Almost there, now — almost —

The car stopped. The driver jerked out a silver watch and held it to the dash lamp. He chuckled thinly.

"Made it! Two minutes to ten! Fork over that there sawbuck!"

"Cheap at the price, Luddy." Murdock fished a wadded bill out of his change pocket. "Worth double fare to get a quick ride, weather like this!"

He lifted his kit bag out of the tonneau. Luddy turned the car and started back down the road. Murdock climbed the pathway toward the camp, still grinning. That extra five dollars had made sure that he'd be driven up that hill as fast as any other car could cover it tonight. It had bought him a witness who could swear to the very minute of his arrival. It would be a long time before he got any better value for his money.

His money! The words made a warm place in his mind as he went around to the back of the camp.

There was no car in the log garage. Murdock had counted on that — Waring always let his manservant drive down to Sparta to spend Saturday night with his family.

He opened the kit bag and took out of it a slim canvas bag, sausage-shaped, loosely filled with sand. He slipped this into his pocket before he tried the door. It wasn't locked. He shut it soundlessly. The hall was dark; he felt his way to the old-fashioned telephone on the wall. He lifted the receiver and waited till he heard the operator's voice. He hung up without answering, his grin widening. Not many men would have thought of making sure, beforehand, that the telephone was working.

He tiptoed toward the door into the living room. Beyond it he could hear the sound of faraway violins coming over the radio, and Waring's voice, dust-dry, talking a tone or two above the music. Murdock's lips twisted. Waring always kept the radio going while he dictated his dull stuff into that recording machine. It helped him think, he claimed. Think! As if a man who was capable of thought would bury himself alive up here, living like a hermit, writing books nobody read, sitting, like a dog in a manger, on

money he had no use for, keeping that money out of Murdock's hands.

Noiselessly Murdock pushed the door open. He laughed softly. He'd even guessed right about finding Waring in bathrobe and slippers. He took three swift steps. Three times, savagely, his hands rose and fell.

He ran back to the telephone and rattled its hook.

"Get me the sheriff. Quick. There's been a murder!"

He heard the girl's gasp. It seemed like a long minute before the sheriff's up-country voice answered him. He knew exactly what he was going to say. He yelled it, breathlessly:

"It's Murdock. I'm up at Waring's. Just this minute got here and found him on the floor, dead. He — what's that? . . . Of course I'm sure. Whole back of his head's bashed in. . . . What? No. Nobody here but me. Don't worry. I know that much. You'll find everything just the way it is."

He hung up. It was queer, not feeling scared, being able to keep on laughing, under his breath, even when he had to lift Waring's body. It wasn't heavy. He took the bathrobe off it before he carried it out to the porch. The sheriff couldn't possibly get here inside of an hour, and by then . . . those medical books in the library said it only took three or four hours for a dead body to cool down to ordinary room temperature. Out here, in those thin pajamas, with that wind blowing, it couldn't take anything like that long.

Murdock emptied the sand bag, scattering the sand on the dry leaves in front of the porch. He burned the bag and powdered its ashes in the embers under the blazing logs. He'd have to tell the sheriff that he'd found the fire almost out and put more wood on it before he remembered that he wasn't supposed to touch anything.

Nothing to do now except wait. And think — thinking about how wise he'd been to see that, inevitably a suspect, the surest way for him to seem innocent was to be where no guilty man would be.

Not elsewhere. Here.

Three times he went out on the porch and felt of Waring's body. When he caught his first glimpse of the headlights, still far down the hill, he carried it in, reclothed it in the bathrobe, laid it just where it had fallen, beside the dictating machine. He was in the doorway when the sheriff came up the path, Doc Avery a step behind him. Their faces reassured him — country faces, weatherbeaten, with a comforting suggestion of simplicity below their soberness. They answered Murdock's greeting in lowered voices. He stood beside the sheriff, fighting a desire to grin as Doc Avery felt of the body, flexed wrist and knee and elbow, wagged his head.

"Been dead three hours at the inside, Sheriff. Might be four or five."

The sheriff nodded. He stood still, only his sleepy-looking eyes moving.

"Things just like this when you found him?"

"Just like this. I had to put wood

on the fire, but I haven't touched anything else except the telephone. I'd have liked to shut off that radio, though, and stop that dictating machine, if you hadn't warned me to let everything alone."

The sheriff looked sympathetic. He moved closer to the machine and stood looking down at it.

"He was talking into it when it happened, seems as though." He rubbed his chin. "Any way to work it backward so we can hear what he was saying?"

Murdock switched off the radio and fiddled expertly with the mechanism of the dictating machine. He managed not to laugh as the thin, dry crackle of Waring's voice came from the mouthpiece. He handed the tube to the sheriff who held it to his ear, nodding.

"Hum. Had the radio going, sure enough. I can hear it playing, kind of underneath his talk."

He lowered the tube. His glance traveled slowly from the dead man at his feet to Murdock, to the doctor standing by the fire, to the door.

"Look, Doc, supposing Waring had been laying outdoors 'stead of in here 'side of that fire? Wouldn't need to've been dead much over an hour, would he, weather like this?"

Murdock hardly heard Avery's answer. It seemed to come from very far away. Almost as far away as the four chiming notes that whispered out of the mouthpiece as the sheriff set the needle back a little, almost as far away but no more deadly than the other voice, that slid into a pause in Waring's dictation:

"WBZQ — New York. Ten o'clock P.M., Tolliver Watch Time!"

Murdock's eyes flicked desperately toward the door but the rest of him was helpless, frozen. Even his mind felt paralyzed, so that it didn't seem to be listening to Waring's voice, coming faintly out of that tube, but to another, a voice with death in it:

"Alive, Waring was, at ten o'clock. Two minutes after you got here, Murdock, and a few seconds 'fore you called me up and told me he was dead! Hold out them hands!"

Behold, Sherlockian Idolatry!

Twice during 1949 "The Unicorn News," a house organ published by The Unicorn Mystery Book Club and superbly edited by Clayton Rawson, gave its readers a genuine first edition in the rarefied realm of Sherlockiana. . . . This type of first edition — all too uncommon these days — is almost as ephemeral as the privately printed broadside: it disappears from the bibliophilic scene with extraordinary promptness; it is eagerly sought after by later collectors who missed its original appearance; and finally, few first editions of fragile format fail to fetch a fancy figure from future fanatics (Peter Piper picked a peck and so forth). But seriously, the evanescent 'tecs become eventually the most elusive of "firsts," and often they end their detectival days immaculately housed in expensive leather slip-cases.

Hence our desire, this Sherlockian season, to give you one of these rarities before it is too late, before it passes into unblessed oblivion . . .

Vol. 1, No. 9 of "The Unicorn News" contained "The Adventure of the Conk-Singleton Papers," attributed to Dr. John H. Watson, but written by another famous John — John Dickson Carr. This Sherlockian skit was enacted as part of "The March of Crime" (1948 version), perpetrated annually by the Mystery Writers of America to award their coveted "Edgars." The role of Sherlock Holmes was played, with incidental music, by Clayton Rawson, Dr. Watson by Lawrence G. Blochman, and The Visitor by John Dickson Carr.

Vol. 2, No. 3 of "The Unicorn News" presented "The Adventure of the Paradol Chamber," again authored by John Dickson Carr. This Holmesian horseplay climaxed the 1949 Annual Award Dinner of the Mystery Writers of America, and again offered a hitherto unrecorded case of The Master.

The Baker Street Irregulars and its Scion Societies will find particular pleasure in the pursuit of Paradol's pants; all other fans will accept these Sherlockian shenanigans with, we hope, 'tec tongue in cheek . . .

Cast of Characters

SHERLOCK HOLMES . . . . . Clayton Rawson
DR. WATSON . . . . . Lawrence G. Blochman
LADY IMOGENE FERRERS . . . . . Audrey Roos
MARQUIS DE PARADOL . . . . . John Dickson Carr

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PARADOL CHAMBER

by JOHN DICKSON CARR

NARRATOR: (*Reading*) "I find recorded in my notebook that it was after dark on a hot evening in August, 1887. All day Sherlock Holmes had been moody and distraught. That evening he took up his violin. Leaning back in his armchair, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle, which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. (*In pitch blackness, a few unearthly chords from violin*) Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. (*Chords hop*) I might have rebelled had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favorite airs."

(*Violin plays a few bars of Mendelssohn's* Spring Song; *then fades. Lights slowly come up. Holmes and Watson are sitting on opposite sides of stage, facing audience; table at Holmes's side. Holmes has violin across knee, bow in right hand; lighted pipe in mouth; eyes fixed glassily ahead. Watson wears expression of ecstasy, hand in air as though it has been keeping time to music; copy of* Daily Telegraph *in his lap.*)

WATSON: My dear Holmes, your virtuosity is unrivalled. Pray continue!

HOLMES: (*grim; on edge*) I am in no mood for it, Watson. (*He puts down violin and bow on table; gets up*) My mind is tortured, *obsessed!*

WATSON: (*amused*) Surely not — again! — by Professor Moriarty?

HOLMES: He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson! You will find his spider-trace, I dare wager, in that very newspaper. What is the first item on which your eye falls?

WATSON: (*scanning paper*) By Jove, Holmes, this *is* curious!

HOLMES: Quick, Watson, the item!

WATSON: (*reading*) "Lord Matchlock, the Foreign Minister, collapsed in a faint as he was walking up Constitution Hill after leaving Buckingham Palace."

HOLMES: Ah!

WATSON: "We are happy to report, however, that Lord Matchlock's condition is not serious."

HOLMES: I wonder!

WATSON: "Messrs. Lestrade, Gregson, and Athelney Jones, all of Scotland Yard, pronounce it a heat-stroke. Lord Matchlock, on a hot day, was wearing a heavy frock coat, bombazine waistcoat, wing collar and Ascot tie, long flannel underwear, woolen socks, and Hessian boots. He therefore . . ." (*Violent reaction from Holmes; Watson starts*) My dear Holmes! What can be wrong with you?

HOLMES: *There's villainy here!*

WATSON: (*taken aback*) You jest, my dear fellow!

HOLMES: He was wearing no trousers, Watson! Lord Matchlock was wearing no trousers!

WATSON: (*pause; stunned*) Holmes, this is marvelous!

HOLMES: (*waving it away*) Elementary! But not uninstructive. Scotland Yard, of course, observed nothing.

WATSON: But why should Lord Matchlock, the Foreign Minister, have been walking up Constitution Hill without his britches?

HOLMES: (*sombre*) There lies our problem. If only . . .

(*Sharp knocking is heard off.*)

WATSON: A client, Holmes!

HOLMES: Perhaps even the answer to our problem. Come in!

(*Enter Lady Imogene Ferrers, in a state of restrained terror. She carries a paper parcel. In violent agitation she looks from Holmes to Watson; finally chooses Holmes.*)

IMOGENE: *You* are Mr. Sherlock Holmes! Every fibre of my woman's instinct tells me so! (*She rushes to seize Holmes by the shoulders*) Help me, Mr. Holmes!

HOLMES: (*Austerely*) Pray compose yourself, madam. I shall do my best. A chair, Watson! (*He leads her to Watson's chair, and goes to his own*) A cup of hot coffee, too, might be not unwelcome. I perceive that you are shivering.

IMOGENE: Alas, sir, it is not the cold which makes me shiver!

HOLMES: Not the cold? What then?

IMOGENE: It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror! I am Lady Imogene Ferrers. My father is Lord Matchlock, the Foreign Minister.

WATSON: (*bursting out*) They have stolen your papa's britches!

IMOGENE: I think you must be wizards, both of you! For I came here, Mr. Holmes, to show you . . . there! (*Rising dramatically, she opens the paper parcel and holds up in majesty a pair of trousers*)

WATSON: (*amazed*) Merciful heaven! Britches!

HOLMES: (*exalted*) It is for these dramatic moments that my soul lives! Tell me, Lady Imogene: are they your father's trousers?

IMOGENE: No, Mr. Holmes! No! I had not thought, until this moment, that dear papa was trouserless.

HOLMES: Hah! Then how came the trousers into your possession?

IMOGENE: This morning, Mr. Holmes, they were thrown from an upper window at Buckingham Palace. I saw them fall.

WATSON: Holmes, some fiend is snatching the britches from half London!

HOLMES: Good, Watson! But not, I think, quite good enough. May I see the evidence? (*She hands over the trousers. Holmes scrutinizes them through a magnifying-glass. Then to Lady Imogene*) Buckingham Palace, I think you said?

IMOGENE: Yes, Mr. Holmes. My father had gone there for a conference with the new French Ambassador,

Monsieur de Paradol, and Her Majesty the Queen. (*Faltering*) It . . . it concerned, I think, a secret treaty between France and Great Britain. Can you picture my dread — nay, my terror! — when I saw the trousers take wing from Her Majesty's window?

HOLMES: These are deep waters, my lady. Were you followed here?

IMOGENE: I hope not, Mr. Holmes! All day I have been riding in four-wheelers! And yet . . . (*Off, heavy and elaborate knocking*)

HOLMES: Quick, Watson! Make haste and hide the evidence! (*Holmes hands the trousers to Watson, who thrusts them inside his frock-coat. Watson turns and moves towards door.*)

WATSON: Holmes, this is no ordinary client! This is . . .

HOLMES: Speak out, man!

WATSON: (*stepping back to one side like a court chamberlain*) His Excellency the French Ambassador!

(*Enter M. de Marquis de Paradol: top-hat, frock coat, imperial beard. He swoops forward, center, removing hat, and adopts posture of immense dignity.*)

PARADOL: (*drawn up*) Messieurs! (*To Imogene, different tone*) Mademoiselle!

IMOGENE: (*crying out*) You have come here, sir, about the hideous enigma at Buckingham Palace?

PARADOL: (*fierce dignity*) I 'ave come 'ere, mademoiselle, to get *my pants!*

HOLMES: Are we to understand that Your Excellency's trousers have disappeared, too?

PARADOL: No, no, no! Not deesappear. At Buckingham Palace, in de presence of Her Majesty de Queen, I 'ave remove my pants and throw dem out of de window!

WATSON: No!

PARADOL: But yes! All of a sudden I see — in a mirror! — six men in de masks and de false whiskers, which are creeping up on me to attack me. I cry: *Vive la France!* — and do my duty. No pants.

IMOGENE: You performed this in the presence of Her Majesty?

PARADOL: I regret! She pushes a great cry and faints — boum! — on a gold sofa. And to you, mademoiselle, I weesh also to apologize.

IMOGENE: You owe me no apology.

PARADOL: I regret! It is I who have pinch the pants of your papa! I conk him on de onion wit a blackjack — *voila!* — because I must 'ave pants to follow *you.*

WATSON: The Diplomatic Service is sadly changed. But why should these wretches wish to purloin your britches?

PARADOL: You 'ave 'eard, perhaps, of the Paradol-Matchlock Treaty between England and France?

IMOGENE: The secret treaty! Yes!

HOLMES: (*to Paradol*) And the secret treaty, I think, is in Your Excellency's trousers?

PARADOL: (*staggered*) *Quel homme! Quel homme magnifique!*

(*As he speaks, Holmes takes the trousers from under Watson's coat.*)

HOLMES: A secret chamber — two thin plates of copper — hides the secret treaty. May I return these val-

uables to Your Excellency? (*Bowing*)

PARADOL: (*receiving trousers*) Monsieur! In de name of my government, in de name of all France, I . . . (*He breaks off, staring; and begins to examine the trousers feverishly.*)

IMOGENE: You are agitated, Monsieur de Paradol. Is the copper chamber not there?

PARADOL: The copper chamber, yes! But de treaty — is gone!

IMOGENE: *Gone!*

WATSON: *GONE!!*

HOLMES: Have no fear, my dear sir. The secret treaty is still in *this* room. It has merely been abstracted by a thief and a traitor!

WATSON: Not Professor Moriarty?

HOLMES: Not Professor Moriarty, no. But his chief lieutenant — and the second most dangerous man in London — stands — here! (*He whips the false mustache off Watson, who stands snarling.*)

IMOGENE: But that's Doctor Watson!

HOLMES: No, Lady Imogene. The real Watson lies bound and gagged in some den of infamy. May I introduce you to Colonel Sebastian Moran.

WATSON: (*shouting*) Curse you, Holmes! May you die of a bullet from my air-gun!

PARADOL: But how — why did you suspect de wretch?

HOLMES: A very simple matter, I assure you. When he recognized a *new* French Ambassador whose appointment has not yet been announced, I knew him for the villain he is. I gave him an opportunity to steal the treaty . . . (*Reaches into Watson's inside pocket and produces impressive-looking document*) . . . and he has done so.

PARADOL: (*exultantly*) The Adventure of de Paradol Chamber!

WATSON: (*snarling*) No, curse you! The Adventure of the Copper Britches!

. . . THE GREATEST OF THEM ALL

We have often commented on the fabulous bull-and-soda sessions in which John Dickson Carr and your Editors have indulged — sessions in which we talked shop for a dozen solid hours, forgetting to eat and drink but nevertheless being merry; sessions in which Time Takes a Holiday but Crime does not; sessions in which John has told us many anecdotes about his English colleagues-in-criminology and we have gossiped about our American brothers-of-the-blood. . . . One of John's 'tec tales concerned Howard Spring, author of MY SON, MY SON!, FAME IS THE SPUR, HARD FACTS, *and his most recent novel,* DUNKERLEY'S.

You may recall that Howard Spring was a famous newspaperman on the famous "Manchester Guardian"; that in the early 1930s the famous Lord Beaverbrook invited Mr. Spring to join the staff of the famous London "Evening Standard," where Mr. Spring took over the position of literary critic, made vacant by the death of Arnold Bennett. It was while Mr. Spring was serving in the capacity of literary critic that he became involved in an epic controversy on the subject of crime fiction.

The exact nature of the bone of contention is not clear, but the alignment of forces appears to have been sharply defined: for the offense, Howard Spring; for the defense, a group of English detective-story writers led by, according to John Dickson Carr, no less a stormy petrel than Anthony Berkeley. Sure and it must have been a battle royal! — with words flying thick as bullets, and printer's ink flowing thick as blood.

We were shocked to hear such tidings. The very existence of such hostilities, at any time, at any place, and between any adversaries, strikes at the roots of ratiocination, at the foundations of ferreting.

We could not refrain from asking John: "If Mr. Spring has so poor an opinion of detective stories, how could he bring himself to write an Introduction to a detective-story anthology?"

John's eyes lit up. "That's news to me. What anthology?"

We showed him a book titled THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE STORIES, *brought out in 1934 (note the date) by the Syndicate Publishing Company of London (one of Lord Beaverbrook's multitudinous enterprises?). The title of the anthology, by the way, is colossally misleading.*

"And that isn't all," we continued. "If Mr. Spring dislikes the detective story in all its forms and manifestations, how could he bring himself to write one?"

John's eyes blazed. "What's that? You mean, he actually wrote *one?"*

We showed him a story by Howard Spring titled "Murder by Mail," in a copy of "Cosmopolitan," issue of December 1938 (note the date).

Yes, he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone. . . . For the truth is that whatever Howard Spring may in the past have thought of detective stories in general, he must confess to a love of detective stories in particular: like so many other detractors, derogators, disparagers, depreciators, and disapprovers, Howard Spring carries the torch for Sherlock Holmes. Didn't Mr. Spring once write: ". . . at the name [of Sherlock Holmes] my heels click and I come to the salute before the greatest of them all."

CONVERSATION IN BAKER STREET

by HOWARD SPRING

I KNEW that he was at home, because as I passed the well-remembered door in Baker Street "his rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again."

So I rang the bell, which presently was answered by the stout landlady.

"Good evening, Mrs. Turner," I said.

She looked at me in some surprise. "Hudson to you," she said.

"Come, come," I protested. "Surely when Mr. Holmes was engaged on that small matter of the Scandal in Bohemia you were known as Mrs. Turner."

"Oh, *known*," she said. "That's as may be. What you're known as and what you are don't always come to the same thing. It's that Dr. Watson's fault. My! I wouldn't like to take a prescription from him! As like as not he'd write $C_{21}H_{22}N_2O_2$ when all he meant was H_2O."

I laughed lightly. "I see," I said, "that association with Mr. Holmes has not been wasted on you."

"He leaves things lying about," she said shortly. "And I've read his monograph on toxicology. But that Watson!"

"Oh, come," I said. "The good doctor is not all that bad. And we should always remember that he served his country under the blazing sun of our Eastern Empire. To this day, when the wind is in a certain quarter, the Jezail bullet troubles him, and so we should make allowances. Doubtless it is on such occasions that he slips up."

"Slips up! My word!" she said. "That's putting it mildly. Did you read that one about the Copper Beeches?"

"Oh, yes," I answered. "I thought it uncommonly good."

"That's as may be," she said darkly. "But did you notice the curious incident of the prolonged breakfast?"

"Now, now, Mrs. Tur — er, I mean, Hudson — you're using the doctor's own methods. You remember Silver Blaze? 'I would draw your attention to the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.' 'The dog did nothing in the night-time.' 'That was the curious incident,' remarked Sherlock Holmes."

"I see you've got it all off pat," said Mrs. Hudson. "But I still ask you: Did you notice the curious incident of the prolonged breakfast?"

"I can't say I did."

"I'm glad there's something you haven't noticed," she said with satisfaction. "Well, let me tell you. I have erred, perhaps, as Mr. Holmes so often and so rightly says of Dr. Watson, for it's not so much the breakfast. But there they are, at the beginning of that adventure of the Copper Beeches, sitting *after breakfast* on either side of a cheery fire. So obviously, Mr. — er — ?"

"The fewer names mentioned under this illustrious fanlight the better."

She gave me a shrewd look and continued: "Well, as I was saying, breakfast obviously can only have been just over. Then they have a bit of back-chat about that Jephro Rudcastle, and Miss Hunter comes in and they have some more back-chat, and then, says that Watson, 'she bade us both good-night.' I ask you, Mr. — er —?"

But I was not to be drawn. "A lapse, certainly," I admitted. "But if I remember aright it was a cold morning and 'a thick fog rolled down between the lines of dun-colored houses, and the opposing windows loomed like dark shapeless blurs through the heavy yellow wreaths.' Just the circumstances to start Dr. Watson's ache from the Jezail bullet."

"More than somewhat," she snorted on a startlingly modern note.

"Mr. Holmes himself," I reminded her, "once made the deep remark that human nature is a strange mixture. So let us be charitable."

"You're full of Mr. Holmes, aren't you?" she said rather tartly. "I see you've got him all off like a book. But let me remind you that Mr. Holmes himself has said some pretty sharp things about Dr. Watson."

"Mr. Holmes himself," I persisted, "has often stressed the importance of taking *all* factors into account when considering a problem. And so," I pursued, conscious of being, to say the least, a little rotund, "in considering an inadvertent expression or two which Mr. Holmes may have let drop concerning his dearest friend, we must consider Mr. Holmes's own state of mind. You will admit, Mrs. Hudson, that he is not, in all circumstances, one hundred per cent normal?"

"That's as may be, Mr. — er —?"

"You may call me General Reader," I conceded.

She was unimpressed. "Generals don't cut much ice here," she said. "We've had the highest in the land."

"I know," I said, "that you've had at least one 'big masterful aristocrat,' and I have formed my own conclusion as to the identity of the gentleman with heavy bands of astrakhan slashed across the sleeves and fronts of his double-breasted coat. If I remember accurately, the deep blue cloak which was thrown over his shoulders was lined with flame-colored silk and secured at the neck with a brooch which consisted of a single flaming beryl. His furry boots contributed to an appearance of barbaric opulence. In my opinion, he was none other than —"

Mrs. Hudson clapped a hand upon my mouth. "No!" she cried. "No — if you please, General." With a far-away sigh she added: "Those were the days! Now we're down to stock-brokers' clerks."

We looked at one another for a moment, lost in a dream of the great beginnings. Then I said: "I was saying, Mrs. Hudson, that in considering Mr. Holmes's occasional peevishness towards poor Dr. Watson, a loyal stooge if ever there was one, we must remember the great investigator's moments of high tension. It is to Dr. Watson himself that we are indebted for a description of one of those times of exaltation. 'His face flushed and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard, black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter. His face was bent downwards, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a purely animal lust for the chase, and his mind was so absolutely concentrated upon the matter before him that a question of remark fell unheeded upon his ears, or at the most only provoked a quick, impatient snarl in reply. He ran round like a dog.' "

"I've never seen him as bad as that," said Mrs. Hudson, cautiously.

"But remember that Dr. Watson has, and doubtless it was in such a bloodhoundly moment that he bayed and snapped at his loyal colleague."

"Perhaps there's something in what you say," she grudgingly conceded.

During these exchanges a light fog had been filtering into the street, and out of it there now appeared a blithe young figure whose coat was decorated with a row of shiny buttons. His face was fresh and smiling, young but very wise and tactful. He looked about fifteen, and as he ran lightly up the stairs he called: "Good evening, Mrs. Hudson."

"Good evening, Billy," she answered.

"So that's Billy," I cried.

"Yes, General, that's Billy," she admitted.

"Well, well," I said. "To my sure and certain knowledge he's been with Mr. Holmes for at least ten years, and, even to make an extreme concession,

I should think ten would be young to start as a page-boy. Why, the fellow can't be a day less than twenty!"

The fog was thickening quickly, pouring in through the open door. Down the stairs suddenly came the sound of a voice, sharp-edged as steel. "Billy, give me a pipe. You'll find them there with the tobacco in the coal scuttle."

Mrs. Hudson looked round apprehensively. "I'd better be getting in," she said. "When he starts smoking he starts thinking, and when he starts thinking anything may happen."

Again we were interrupted. A bluff, mustached figure, not unlike a doctor I had once known, named Conan Doyle, brushed past us and hurried up the stairs without so much as a word.

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Hudson, "if *he's* on the scene —"

"He doesn't look much changed, either," I said. "I'd have known him anywhere."

The fog was making the light shine dimmer behind the fanlight, so that I could scarcely read the magic incantation: 221B.

Mrs. Hudson, almost immaterial, became suddenly confidential. "The fact is, General," she whispered, "no one here changes at all. You remember what Dr. Watson wrote in The Mazarin Stone? 'It all seems very unchanged, Billy.' And it is. We don't get any older an' we don't get any younger. We're fixed here, for good an' all, just as we are, in 221B Baker Street."

"I hope you always will be, you old dear," I thought, and realized that the door had shut quietly in my face. I crossed the street in the thickening fog, made worse by the blackout, and all but fell into an immense hole torn out of the earth by a bomb. There was light enough, however, to see the faintly-illuminated blind of 221B defying the blackout. I could discern sinewy fingers drawing a bow across the strings of a violin, but presently the unheard melody ended, the instrument was laid down, and a hansom cab, as spectral as the hound of the Baskervilles, stopped at the door. A moment later, disregarding all physical considerations, it drove past me, moving smoothly through the air over the vast crater. I was able to glimpse the two faces within: the bony intense face of the great detective, collected into some impassioned analysis of a problem of evil, and the faithful dog-like visage of Watson, who surely on such a night must have found the Jezail bullet no small inconvenience.

They drove away, fading slowly down the long perspective of my own years, vanishing utterly at a point where a small boy was huddled over a kitchen fire with the *Strand* magazine upon his knee, heir of an age which he little guessed to include this lightless night, this horrid gash in the earth's solid structure, mercifully hidden by just such a fog as had seemed to his provincial imagination an ingredient of metropolitan enchantment.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Stephen Barr's "The Procurator of Justice" is one of the eleven "first stories" which won special prizes in EQMM's 1948 Contest. . . . The author was born in 1904 near London, of American parents. He came to the United States in his late teens, to be an architectural draftsman. Three years later, in 1925, he switched to commercial art, and in the years that followed he dabbled occasionally with writing, but never on a sustained basis. About six years ago Mr. Barr entered a field in which his two loves, art and writing, are seemingly wedded — a field peculiarly symbolic of our times — the comic book. In this medium it is possible for one to draw and, almost simultaneously, to write — a hybridization of the arts, if there ever was one! But it is significant that Mr. Barr tarried briefly in the realm of comic books. Apparently, there is no enduring artistic satisfaction in drawing comic-book cartoons, and no enduring literary satisfaction in writing comic-book dialogue. So we soon find our hero back in his original bailiwick — commercial art. But, like murder, writing will out: the discontented draftsman again substituted pen for pencil, typewriter for T-square, and in the summer of 1948 submitted his first piece of fiction to EQMM's Annual Contest.

Further comment after you have finished reading Mr. Barr's story . . .

THE PROCURATOR OF JUSTICE

by STEPHEN BARR

I was having lunch with Johnny Carter, a newspaper feature-writer, at Blake's which is an eating place in the West 40's noted for roast beef and Herald Tribune men. Three martinis had made me irresponsible, otherwise I would probably not have accepted his offer, and I would have missed something good. "I'm taking the 3:40 to Ossining," he said suddenly. "I'm going up to interview an old convict on a tip from a doctor I know there, and you ought to come along."

"Why me?" I asked.

"Well, you're English and so is he. Also he's a very interesting old cove: famous jewel thief and con man in the old days. He's by far the oldest prisoner in Sing Sing, and he hasn't long to live. The doc thinks he's crowding a hundred." Johnny hates to travel alone, so I tagged along.

A penitentiary is a grim place, but the little private room in the prison hospital was fairly cozy, and a bunch of flowers next to the window took the curse off the bars outside. Johnny's

doctor friend had explained things to us in advance. "Private rooms are supposed to be used only for infectious cases, but we put him in one because he's so old, and I imagine too, because he's really quite a distinguished old buffer."

Propped up in bed was a very ancient, very clean man with a fringe of white hair, and lively little eyes.

"This is 'London'," said the doctor, and introduced us. "I've got to make the rounds now but I'll look in later. Don't tire yourself, 'London'!"

When he had gone the old man turned to me and said, "You're English, aren't you?" His speech was that of a first-class valet of the old days, impeccable, perhaps too much so, and with no trace of Cockney whatsoever.

"They call me 'London' around here and I don't really mind, but my name actually is Phillip James. I suppose being old I talk about old times, and that's how I got my nickname, because what I like to think of as my career took place mainly in London." He looked at Johnny with an ironic smile. "It's quite an honor to be interviewed by the press, you know!"

Johnny grinned back at him. "I hate to be trite," he said, "but what would you describe as your greatest coup?"

"Ah!" said the old man. "That depends on what you mean by great, sir. There's the greatest in point of money, and the greatest in point of publicity. And then there's the greatest in my own mind."

Johnny said quickly, "The last, of course."

Phillip James looked at the flowers on the windowsill.

Well, my greatest coup [he said] happened long ago — during Jubilee Week in London. Not the Golden Jubilee in 'eighty-seven, but the tremendous one ten years later — the Diamond Jubilee. I picked that particular time because in those days the great families, who had anything worth taking in the way of jewelry or paper, usually stayed in town for the receptions, and of course all the real jewels came out of the bank vaults for those.

I was divided in my mind between three districts to work in: Mayfair, which has the most rich people in it; Belgravia, which at that time had some of the oldest families; and Bayswater. You know, sir, (turning to me) that part just north of the Park? It should be the best place to live in, but for some reason the real society people have always fought shy of it, so it's full of the *nouveaux-riches.* I've had to watch out for these snobbish considerations, just like a butler. Anyway, I decided on Belgravia: there were more pubs.

Now you gentlemen may wonder why pubs came into it, and I'll tell you. My plan was to take a house for the season, and be my own valet. I don't mean just doing for myself, but assuming the appearance of two people; using a bit of disguise at which I've always been an expert. I'd be

Jonathan Gibbs, gentleman's gentleman, but also I'd be Mr. James Phillimore, the employer of Gibbs, and the lessee of the house. I'd chosen a place on Eaton Terrace, just below Eaton Square, the center of Belgravia.

Well, now, just next to Belgravia is Pimlico, which is not at all stylish and there are pubs galore. The reason I wanted pubs was that as Gibbs, the valet, I planned to visit them and meet some of the valets and butlers from the nearby great houses. I had a housekeeper called Mrs. Gilpin, who was very short-sighted and rather deaf, which just suited me, and it wasn't hard to make her think I was two people. Of course, she never actually saw us together, but a few things like going into my bedroom as Gibbs while she was cleaning the stairs, and talking to myself and then coming out as Phillimore, and she'd have sworn in a court of law there was two of us.

Eaton Terrace was not a fashionable street and the house was smallish, but it struck just the right note. Behind it was a mews, so that there was a back way out — a very fortunate circumstance as it turned out.

After we got settled in, I went out to find a pub that valets and butlers frequented, and found the Wayfarers on the corner of Pimlico Road. I went as Gibbs, of course: dark coat, wing collar, bowler hat, and mutton-chop whiskers, which I could put on and take off in a hurry. Very nice little job they were, and Clarkson's charged me a lot for them. As Phillimore, on the other hand, I just took off the mutton-chops and wore pince-nez glasses, and usually a top hat. You'd be surprised the difference it made.

As soon as I walked into the bar-parlor of that pub, I knew I'd found the right place. You can't mistake them: gentleman's gentlemen, I mean. They give the place the air of a good club, only more formal. I ordered a half-pint of bitter and started examining the prospects, and they didn't look like the most approachable group in the world. Then I caught the eye of a man standing near me; he was tall and thin, with a rather beaky nose, and mutton-chop whiskers like mine. I've never seen a more typical example of a valet in all my life. Just as he started to turn his head away, I walked over to him with a smile.

"Pardon the intrusion, sir," I said, "I'm a newcomer, name of Gibbs." Then seeing his glass was empty, "Will you join me?"

"Very kind," he replied with a slight bow. "Fielding is mine. I perceive that you are also in service."

"Why, yes, I am," I replied, pleased that my disguise was so good. "My gentleman's house is in Eaton Terrace, number 42-A. It's small, but Mr. Phillimore is only in town for the season."

"You have a shorter walk than I have," said he. "I come all the way from Lyall Street, but I find this place — ah — suited to my tastes — ah, quiet." The barmaid brought him his small sherry and another bitter for me, and we touched glasses.

"Your health, sir," he said. "As a traveled man you might, I should think, find London in Jubilee week rather oppressive." At my look of surprise he went on: "A tanned complexion, even in June, is not as a rule typical of the Londoner. These guesses I indulge in — merely a habit, sir, a hobby, but a useful one in my calling."

The evening was warm, so when we had finished our drinks I suggested a stroll, having in mind to entice him to my house for a night-cap, thus breaking the ice still further. We walked towards Wren's Chelsea Hospital, which was silent and imposing in the gas-light, and Fielding talked of the great houses in which he had served in his time. After a while we turned back and I guided our steps to Eaton Terrace. When we came to my house I said, "Come in for a night-cap, Mr. Fielding."

He assented and we went in by the kitchen entrance in the areaway. All was dark, with Mrs. Gilpin snoring at the top of the house. Since I was to spend much of my time in it, I'd fitted out a comfortable den for myself. When we were settled in our armchairs with our glasses beside us, I started to draw him out about himself and his employer. Fielding wasn't reticent, for he answered all my questions, but somehow he revealed very little, and I was hard put to bring up the subject of jewels.

Sir William and Lady Cosgrave were both in Town, it appeared, and had dined out that evening.

"Do they go out much?" I asked.

"Well, this week they have gone out quite a bit, so my evenings have been pretty much my own."

"Ah!" I said, "and I expect her Ladyship dresses in the height of fashion for all the receptions they go to?"

"True," he said, lighting his pipe which gave off somewhat acrid fumes. "One does not wish to criticize, but I should say *too much* in the height of fashion. American, you know."

"Yes," I said, "one of those heiresses, I suppose, all covered with jewelry." But Fielding said no more, merely sending pungent clouds of smoke into the air.

"I should be interested to see the house you live in," I said, abandoning the jewelry approach. "What number did you say —"

"Good Heavens! I must go," he interrupted me, looking at his watch and jumping up, "I'd no idea of the time," and with a murmured thanks and good-night he was gone. He had not risen to the bait and I had got no invitation to return the visit. To tell the truth, I was left with the impression that I'd overplayed my hand.

The next evening I returned to the Wayfarers but saw nothing of Fielding. Instead, I got into conversation with an individual by the name of Brown. Brown was loquacious; he worked for very wealthy people in Eaton Square, whom he deprecated the more with each gin-and-bitters he drank. Eaton Square, you will remember, lies only a short distance

from Eaton Terrace, where I was living. Should Fielding continue obdurate, Brown might do as well.

My new acquaintance wouldn't come in for a night-cap, as he had to help his master undress, but he suggested that we see the Jubilee Parade together the next day. As he left chewing a clove, I thought I glimpsed a tall slender form at the corner, but I was not sure.

June the twenty-second dawned bright and sunny; all London was headed for one destination. Brown and I had arranged to meet at ten o'clock in front of his Eaton Square mansion and proceed on foot to a point of vantage in the Strand. The crowds were tremendous but we finally wedged into a place near St. Clement's Dane. The streets were lined with soldiery holding back the throng, their scarlet coats showing bravely against the civilian drabness. As I looked about, to my astonishment I saw the saturnine face of Fielding not far off. I had an uneasy moment wondering if the man had penetrated my disguise, but he caught my eye and smiled.

At that moment there was a roar, and the beginning of the procession came into view. It was led by Captain Ames, the tallest man in the British Army. Then hundreds of soldiers from all parts of the Empire; statesmen and visiting dignitaries; Mr. Whitelaw Reid, your Ambassador Extraordinary; and finally the tiny little Queen, almost hidden under a white parasol, God bless her!

The crowd relaxed after the Royal Presence had gone by, and I suggested a drink, to which my companion was agreeable. We fought our way to a side-street and quickly found a pub. No sooner were we at the bar but a hand tapped my shoulder, and I was not surprised to find Fielding behind me. "We meet again," he said with a smile.

I was somewhat taken aback; I certainly did not want a third party to my present endeavor. But he was oblivious. "An instructive spectacle," he went on. "I was particularly interested to observe that there were no less than sixteen pickpockets among the spectators across the road from us."

My astonishment at this remark was tempered by a dawning suspicion that this was no ordinary valet. Noting my expression he went on, "Simplicity itself, my dear Gibbs. Even at that distance I could see that a few of the crowd were contriving to move about and had eyes for everything but the Parade itself. And then when the Queen had passed, and they redoubled their nonchalance, I knew for certain."

What with the heat and the crowd, and the quick succession of gins-and-bitters, Brown was beginning to show signs of distress. "Go to 'nother place," he muttered thickly. "Cooler, have 'nother little drink!"

My eyes met those of Fielding over Brown's lowered head. "I think our friend has had enough," he commented.

"Yes, you're quite right," I said,

"I'll take him to his house." I led the unsteady Brown to the pavement, but to my chagrin it was Fielding who took charge, and hailed a passing hansom, empty for a miracle.

Upon arriving at the house in Eaton Square we found that the air, instead of reviving Brown, had only deepened his stupor. I was obliged to accept Fielding's offer of assistance if our entrance down the areaway steps was not to be too noticeable.

In the housekeeper's sitting-room which was empty — as was, evidently, the whole house — Fielding rapidly brewed coffee, and finding a little spirits of ammonia had Brown on his feet in no time. "If only he'd leave (I kept thinking), I'd soon undo his work." For I had spied a decanter of dubious port on the dresser. But I could not outstay him. I felt sure it was by design, and yet who could have known my intentions? But whether Fielding knew my plans or not, he exacted a promise from Brown that he would eat some luncheon, and then positively propelled me out.

Brown thanked us both shakily and suggested to me that I call on him the following day. I noted a faintly determined and ironic look to Fielding's face, and my suspicions were confirmed. Yet why, thought I to myself, should he play the role of guardian angel?

As we gained the pavement he said, "I'll walk along with you for a bit, if you don't object. A lovely day, now that we are free of the crowds." I could scarcely refuse, and we walked down the garden side of the street in silence, breathing in the scent of privet and cut grass. "When did you say that Mr. Phillimore was getting back?" he asked.

"Why, next . . ." I began unthinkingly, and suddenly stopped. I remembered having said that he was in residence and cursed myself for a fool. "That is to say, this afternoon, just before dinner," I went on sturdily.

"Ah, yes. Just so," said Fielding. "Perhaps we shall meet at the Wayfarers again this evening?"

"Perhaps," I rejoined, but thought otherwise.

Accordingly, that night I sat up late, pacing the carpet till all hours, sipping an old brandy and filling the air of my den with cigar smoke. But I reached no solution. On awaking the next morning I still had no clear plan, except that as Phillimore I had decided to keep a watch on Fielding.

So it was as the stately employer in pince-nez, top hat, and Prince Albert that I started out the next morning. "Now, Mister Fielding, if that *is* your name," I said to myself, "we'll see whether two cannot play at this game!" and I slipped out of the back entrance that gave on the mews.

The day was as fine as the one before, and the time near upon noon as I approached the corner of Eaton Terrace with caution. Sure enough, standing no more than twenty paces from me, was Fielding, his back turned, carelessly reading a newspaper but with his eye, I had no doubt, on my front door. "Long may you wait!"

thought I, as I reversed my steps toward Sloan Square to buy myself a paper too. If you are waiting to follow Gibbs, I can wait as long, and then follow you!

I was astonished and alarmed on my leisurely return a few minutes later to find him just beginning to turn, but his eyes were on his watch and he shook his head frowningly. He walked right by me without a glance, and I found no difficulty in following him back to Sloan Square, where he descended into the Underground. Only a few steps behind him I bought a ticket to the end of the line, as I had no means of knowing where he would get off. I boarded a smoking-carriage next to the one he had entered, and from there I could just see his long legs.

I was not far behind when he alighted at Regent's Park, and when we gained the upper air he turned abruptly into an old-fashioned-looking bank. I was close on his heels as he marched over to the counter and began to make out a check.

All at once I had a brain-wave — the second best in my life, the best to come later. I had, I remembered, some sovereigns, eight or so — at any rate, ample for my new plan. I watched Fielding closely as he cashed his check, and noticed with relief that no one waited behind him, for it was essential that I be the next in line. When he left I strolled over to the same window, and producing five of my gold pieces asked the Cashier for their equivalent in the form of a five-pound note. As you know, gentlemen, our banks never issued used paper currency. It was immediately withdrawn from circulation, and new notes paid out — and invariably with consecutive serial numbers.

I had watched the flutter of the Cashier's counting, and afterwards Fielding's slower confirmation of their number, so that I was confident that he had in his pocket six five-pound notes bearing a sequence of numbers. And I was equally confident, when I left the bank right after him, that in my pocket reposed a single note — *with the next number!*

As I went back to the Underground station I saw Fielding turn off into Baker Street, but I no longer needed to follow him. Let us hope, I thought, that he doesn't spend much of that before evening — or my scheme will fall flat!

I returned to my house and ate a late but excellent luncheon of cold chicken and a half-bottle of good Moselle with which, when properly chilled, nothing can compete in warm weather. I topped it off with a liqueur brandy and cigar, and slept until five in my armchair. On awakening I changed carefully back to Jonathan Gibbs, and taking my five-pound note and a pen I wrote my name and address (as Gibbs) very small in one corner. I left the house and began to saunter up the street, noticing after a time that my expected shadow was with me again.

I walked down to the Thames Embankment and admired the trees of Battersea Park across the River, then

at a leisurely pace on toward Chelsea, where I turned up Oakley Street. As I neared the corner I stooped as if to tie my boot-lace. People often drop things from their pockets in this way, and I contrived to drop the marked note. I was positive that my shadow would pick it up, and I felt sure that he would not hasten after me with it at this stage of the game.

Straightening up, I hurried on and as I gained the King's Road, I could see out of the corner of my eye my note go into his pocket. I had counted on a fairish crowd and an occasional policeman; the former I knew would bring my shadow up closer to me, and the latter . . . well, you shall see. I finally glimpsed the blue uniform and striped armlet of a Bobby, and I began stopping at shop windows and then dashing on abruptly, which served to shorten the distance between Fielding and myself. Then, at the distance of a few paces from the policeman, I suddenly shouted to him and pointed to my pursuer.

"Officer!" I cried, as heads turned and a crowd started to form, "Arrest that man! He's a pickpocket!" Fielding stood rooted, not daring to run, as the majesty of the Law lumbered up.

" 'Ere! Wot's all this?" asked the latter.

"This man has just taken some five-pound notes from my pocket!" I charged indignantly.

"Nothing of the sort!" replied Fielding. "He dropped *one* five-pound note which I picked up, and I was hurrying to catch up to him!" He produced the note in question which the Bobby regarded solemnly.

" 'Ave to ask you both to come along to the station," he said. "Move along there, now!" he added to our audience. Fielding shrugged but said nothing more than, "A ridiculous mistake, Officer, which I can soon explain!"

But at the police station he found otherwise.

"The note he admitted to," I said, "is marked with my name and address. If you will search him you will find the rest, although they are not marked as I had only intended spending the one tonight." I should explain here, gentlemen, that it was not uncommon in those days to mark one's paper money in this way.

"But this is preposterous!" fumed Fielding, "The other money is not marked and it belongs to me. How can you prove or even pretend that it is yours?"

"Because," I said triumphantly, "the numbers on the notes all run in series with the marked one. I received them from my bank only this morning!"

They took my name down then, and asked me to appear for the charge before the Magistrate the next morning. Fielding was in a dreadful state of indignation. "By Heaven," he cried, "you'll smart for this!" Then he tried to convince them that I was a notorious jewel thief, and that he was a famous private investigator; but his disguise as a valet was too com-

plete, and he had no other identification with him. As I left he was demanding that they get in touch with an Inspector La Rue, or Lestrade, or some such name at New Scotland Yard, which they flatly refused to do.

Glancing at my watch I found I had just time to get to my appointment. I was glad to find on arriving at the mansion in Eaton Square that the lights were out in the upper storeys and that Brown had not waited for my arrival to begin on his gin. In very short order I had him in a state half-maudlin and half-confidential. Indeed, it was a very different matter from dealing with the uncommunicative Fielding, and before he had fallen into a stupor (partly induced, I must admit, by the addition to his drink of a small quantity of laudanum), he told me of a safe in the library. The South African millionaires would not be back for some hours yet, but I decided to wait for them as I was sure they were wearing much of their famous collection of diamonds. To pass the time I went upstairs to have a look at the safe, and I could see that it would present no difficulties. In fact, I took the occasion to open it, thereby learning the combination to pave the way for a quick retreat later. From the empty velvet-lined cases it was obvious the finest and largest of the diamonds were gracing some reception in Mayfair. So I closed the safe and returned to my snoring host.

At last a carriage drove up and our South Africans went upstairs. In time all the lights were out and silence reigned. It was but the matter of a moment to open the safe again, pocket my booty, and leave. I felt lighthearted enough, since I carried with me the equivalent of over a hundred thousand pounds — even at the poor rates I would get in Amsterdam. The danger was that I'd taken far longer than I'd intended, and I could not get a boat train until nine the next morning.

I should never have gone back to my house, of course, let alone stay there overnight; but I was positive Fielding would be held until morning at the earliest, and I intended to leave very early indeed. So I went to South Kensington Station, put my precious bundle in a lock-box as a precaution, and then returned to 42-A Eaton Terrace for the very last time. I needed some luggage to travel with and I wanted to change back to Phillimore. I packed what I intended to take, made some coffee and ate a sandwich, then napped fitfully until the alarm clock woke me at six.

A dismal morning it was, overcast and muggy. At the window I saw something which shocked me: a policeman stood opposite the house! And there were others in the street!

I went upstairs to a back-bedroom window and perceived with sinking heart that more of them were in the mews, and one was in the backyard right beneath me. Had Fielding insisted so strenuously that they had gone to the Eaton Square mansion, awakened the owner, had him open his safe, and then come for me? How

could I have been such a fool as to risk this! I found out later from the newspaper accounts that he'd finally prevailed upon them to call up the man he knew at Scotland Yard, and he got them to do it at five in the morning, too. He achieved this remarkable feat by telling the sergeant so many details of police business, some of them so intimate, that they realized even a pickpocket couldn't know that much.

Well, gentlemen, there I was: in a fine pickle. But then I thought: they don't know that James Phillimore is Jonathan Gibbs. If they come in I'll tell them my valet failed to come home last night, and Mrs. Gilpin will back me up. Or, if they stay where they are, I can wait until a reasonable hour and walk out as bold as brass.

So I shaved and brushed up, and even managed to get down a little breakfast with the help of some whiskey, but it was the most nervous hour-and-a-half I've ever had. I couldn't imagine why they just kept on waiting.

As I did not realize then, the police had hesitated to disturb the wealthy South African at such an hour merely on a suspicion. Instead, they put a cordon around my house, placed an officer in the South African kitchen, and had waited. It may sound strange to you, but that's the way they do things in England, and it really was quite logical. Particularly, as I found out afterwards, since a very sharp-eyed Bobby, whom I had not noticed on my return home, was sure that he'd seen a man in a bowler hat go into my basement at two o'clock that morning.

My mind raced; I even thought of using some other disguise, but upon calming myself I realized that Phillimore was still the best one. Finally, at half-past seven I could stand it no longer. I put on the topper and the pince-nez and made for the front door.

When I opened it I saw two things: first, it had started to rain, and second, Fielding was standing at the foot of the steps, accompanied by the policeman on the beat who knew me as Phillimore, and a military-looking gentleman with a red face and a mustache. I realized at that moment I'd forgotten something of vital importance. Fielding would recognize my voice.

"Mr. Phillimore!" the Bobby began, "Your valet, is he . . .?" but before he could say any more I stuck out my hand and looked at the sky.

"My umbrella," I said in muffled tones and turned back into the house, being careful to close the door behind me. But just as it was closing I heard a police whistle and saw a Bobby waving from the corner; evidently the long-awaited signal. The South African must have arisen early. I could hear feet on the steps, and Fielding's voice; "Come on, Jenks! You wait here, Higgins, and collar him if he comes out this way!" The doorbell began to ring insistently and cries of "Mr. Phillimore!" rang out, but I knew Mrs. Gilpin would hear nothing for a long time.

Then I had my second brain-wave — the best I've ever had; and I knew what I must do, even though it unnerved me to think of it, for I am not a man of violence.

I went to the back door and opened it suddenly; I couldn't have hoped for a better chance. The sound of the whistles from over the tops of the houses made the officer at the back door look up. We all look in the direction of a sound, and I hit him with all my force in the solar plexus. He looked at me with his mouth open like a fish, and then sank to his knees gasping. I hit him again, on the back of the neck, and he sprawled on his face.

Hastily I tore off my collar and pince-nez and stuffed them into my pocket. My top hat I crushed flat, which is something a gentleman wouldn't think of doing, as only opera hats are meant for that, and put on the policeman's helmet. Then I put his water-proof cape over my shoulders, and concealing the flattened topper under it, I ran out shouting to the policemen in the mews:

"I came through from the front. Has he come out this way?"

It was all so sudden that they swallowed it, believing, no doubt, that I was a man from another precinct. They shook their heads and I tried to think of an excuse for leaving them. Then I heard the back door burst open, and I ran for it.

At the end of the mews I threw the policeman's helmet and cape into a dust-bin, and at the corner of Sloan Street I threw the topper down an areaway. I can't think why I'd brought it along. It must have been some instinct not to leave traces; but considering that all my effects were in the house, it was bloody silly.

Anyway, another instinct made me put on my mutton-chop whiskers, thinking, perhaps. that a man without a hat should look like a servant if he wants to avoid curious glances. And as it turned out, that one little thing and the absence of a collar is what led to all the excitement later.

Fortunately, there was a haberdashery open at South Kensington, so I went in and bought a hat, a fresh collar, a mackintosh and an umbrella. The clerk looked at me as though he thought I'd had a night of it. How right he was. I got the diamonds out of the lock-box and two days later I was in Amsterdam.

In another week I was basking in the sun on the Riviera, reading the English papers on the beach and looking for news of what had happened. Well, there was considerable excitement about the jewelry, but the big news was what they called "The incredible mystery of Mr. James Phillimore." It seems that I'd stepped back into the house to get my umbrella, and was never more seen in this world!

Fielding nearly went wild. Neither he nor anyone else ever suspected that I had been two people, and old Mrs. Gilpin's evidence made it even more conclusive. She swore that Mr. Phillimore had been in all evening, whereas Gibbs, the valet, had come in after she had gone to bed. When the

poor chap at the back came to, he described me quite wrongly, which is not surprising in his condition. When he heard the clerk's description of me later, he thought he'd seen mutton-chop whiskers, too.

But Phillimore just disappeared into the house. The Bobbies in the mews were quite positive that Gibbs, the masquerading policeman, had come out that way, but they made it equally plain that no one else had.

They nearly took the house apart, trying to find Phillimore. They'd even had a man watching the roof, so they knew he couldn't have got out that way; and nothing was buried.

I went to Cannes eventually, and bought a yacht. I had a wonderful time for a few years and then I was broke again. So here I am . . .

He broke off and stared at the window again, a faint smile on his lips. "Ah, the old days . . ." he began again, but Johnny Carter and I leaned forward simultaneously.

"Do you remember Fielding's real name?" we asked.

Phillip James contracted his brows, and his hand rose to his forehead in the attitude of one who probes the deeps of memory.

"Fielding's real name?" he murmured. "Now isn't it strange, gentlemen, that I cannot call it to mind."

Why were we so attracted to Stephen Barr's story, "The Procurator of Justice," that we gave it a special prize in EQMM's 1948 Contest? We grant the tale has faults and shortcomings, both in style and substance. For example, the device of one character playing two parts is certainly not new — not even the specific variation which Mr. Barr uses, that of gentleman and gentleman's gentleman. The basic theme of the disappearance of Mr. James Phillimore (perhaps the most fascinating of all the untold tales of Dr. Watson) has been treated by other writers, and, it must be confessed, with greater ingenuity than Mr. Barr has brought to the solution of the mystery. Yet, with all these admitted weaknesses and drawbacks, we still were irresistibly drawn to Mr. Barr's story. Why?

Because "The Procurator of Justice" is an exceedingly clever take-off not so much of a famous character as of a famous story. The title reveals the true source of Mr. Barr's inspiration. "The Procurator of Justice" is a detective-story version of Anatole France's "The Procurator of Judea," surely one of the finest short stories in the history of literature. The twist in the title gave you a clue at the very outset, but the take-off does not reach its culminating effect until the last few lines of the story, where Mr. Barr virtually repeats Anatole France's tag-line — and with the same devastating irony.

Wondrous are the ways of wile! Infinite are the instruments of ingenuity!

THE PATCHWORK MURDER

by ROY VICKERS

INGENIOUS murders are rarely the product of ingenious minds. The imaginative murderer tends to delude himself that safety depends upon originality. By contrast, Gerald Banstead took pains to cultivate the obvious. His crime was a patchwork of the clichés of other crimes: the originality, if any, lies in the neatness of the pattern.

Banstead approached his murder as a dull but methodical student approaches a qualifying examination. There was no need, he decided, to outsmart anybody. All you had to do was to make sure beforehand that you could answer all the questions likely to be asked. From the study of past examinations, held by coroners and judges, he compiled a list of more than four hundred questions applicable to that particular model of murder which seemed the most adaptable to his circumstances.

Banstead was a prosperous plumber and contractor. He lived on the edge of the market town of Grodbury, a dozen or so miles from Oxford, but his business extended throughout the county. In the first world war he had served with efficiency in the Army Service Corps. On his first leave he had married the daughter of the local parson. To a brother officer Banstead wrote that his bride was *plump, pretty and prim. She will keep me in order, but that's rather what I want.* Banstead always knew what he wanted.

For sixteen years the marriage was a happy one, no more humdrum than most of its kind. In that time Maud's primness did not diminish, but Banstead continued to like it. She was gentle without being docile; her natural kindliness would be as much in evidence as her overconscientious stubbornness.

Banstead's active interest was in his ever-growing business and in his son, Roderick, who was sixteen at the time of the murder. His eye never roved because it never wanted to. That disaster could come through entanglement with another woman would have seemed absurd to him until it happened in May 1934.

Roderick was at school. Maud went to spend a fortnight at Brighton with an aging uncle, leaving their large house and staff of four in charge of a temporary housekeeper, so that Gerald should not be annoyed by the servants asking him for orders. While his wife was away, Banstead met Arabella Louisa Chanford.

It is conceivable that this string of formidable names may have contributed to the turbulence of the girl's nature — a turbulence which was strangely fascinating to some men, including Gerald Banstead. Swinging, as it were, to the opposite extreme of

inappropriateness, she had adopted the name of "Birdie."

She was tall, very well formed, dark, with heavy eyebrows which she did not trim. An ugly-pretty, with large vivacious eyes, a shapeless nose, and a gash of a mouth that caught your eye and made you wonder about her. Her predominant expression was sulkiness, which could be shattered by sudden, boisterous gaiety. She drifted in and out of various allied occupations. When Banstead met her she was a barmaid.

He ordered a double whiskey in a large glass. While she was filling up with soda she decided she liked the look of him, and smiled.

"Hullo!" said Banstead. It would not have mattered if he had said it in the ordinary, cheerful sort of way; but it came out as a near whisper, charged with discovery. It was as if he had found something for which he had been looking for twenty years without understanding what it was he had been looking for.

But he did understand that the only sensible thing to do would be to leave that whiskey standing on the counter and go while the going was good. He made a half-turn towards the exit, and then crumpled up.

"Have one yourself, won't you?"

She glanced over her shoulder at a door marked *Private.*

"Thanks, I will. It'll bring me luck."

While his cheeks burned, he was aware that she was babbling nonsense. He kept his eyes on her face, thinking that she was rather ugly — which seemed an advantage, in a way, though he was not clear in what way. The door marked *Private* was opened and the manager approached.

"Don't hurry over your drink, Miss Chanford. When you have finished it, you can draw your money."

"Oh, thanks a lot, Mr. Hendricks, for saving me the trouble!" She made a noise with her nostrils, deemed to indicate contempt. "Give my love to the Boy Scouts!"

He was able to perceive that she was crude and witless, and this also, in a way, was an advantage. Assuredly she was neither plump nor pretty nor prim.

"I say! I've got you the sack. Let me see the manager and explain."

"Don't worry about me. I knew what I was doing. I wanted a drink with you and I've had it, and that's that."

"Then let's have the next one somewhere else."

He spent a week with her in London — a week of absorption, in which both past and future slipped out of his consciousness. When it was over, he told himself that he was glad it had begun and glad that it had come to an end. There were to be no regrets on the part of anybody. He gave her a parting present which would have maintained her in idleness for two years at her normal standard of living.

He arrived home two days before Maud. The housekeeper had shown no interest in his tale of a business

trip. As Maud, too, was to be without regrets, he repeated the tale of the business trip. Maud was unsuspicious. She did not want to know anything about the business details he was eager to offer, but she did want to know how comfortable or otherwise he had been in the various hotels and, particularly, how he had managed with his clothes, as she knew he could never be trusted to pack a suitcase.

Now, the kindly, probing interest of an overconscientious wife can easily assume the proportions of a cross-examination. He had not guessed that there was a mechanism in his wardrobe, a kind of accountancy, which enabled her to detect the smallest evasion even in the matter of handkerchiefs and socks. He fared very badly with shoes and finally contradicted himself beyond redemption on how he had managed about dress shirts.

"I've never lied to you before, Maudie. I think you know that. Tonight was the first time, and — thank God! — it didn't work. I'm going to tell you the truth now."

He told her the truth. He watched her face harden, but she did not lose her composure. Her emotional being was untouched; but her dignity and her excessive sense of propriety were outraged. Without a word she got up and would have left the room if he had not barred the way.

"Surely you're not going upstairs without a single word to me!"

"I've nothing to say, Gerald." Her voice was steady and cold. "If you insist — well, of course, I suppose you want me to divorce you."

"Divorce be damned! You can't have listened to what I said. That girl is absolutely nothing to me. She let me pay her off — she's not of our world at all — and I shall never see her again, nor want to. I've tried to explain; it was simply a sort of madness — not wholly of the flesh, perhaps but — well, just a sort of madness!"

"I thought our marriage meant as much to you as it did to me."

"It did, and it does! Good heavens, you wouldn't hand me that stuff if I'd confessed that I had got beastly drunk, or taken a shot of cocaine or something. I tell you it's the same as that!"

"That's childish, Gerald. The terms of the marriage vow are definite." She added: "Tomorrow I'll run down to Bournemouth. Perhaps I can stay for a few days with Cousin Emily. Then I shall be more able to discuss plans for our future."

In a few days she met him in London and produced her plans, to which he gave agreement, believing that she would soon get off her high horse and return. She was to have custody of Roderick. Her own maintenance would be covered by her own income of a hundred and fifty pounds a year. He said he would allow her twelve hundred a year for Roderick but she insisted that half that would be sufficient and even then she would pay his school bill, which was two hundred.

With Maud's departure, the servants gave notice. In a small market

town it was not easy to get servants when the breath of scandal had touched the house. In six weeks he was dependent upon intermittent charwomen. It would have been more comfortable to shut the house up and live in one of the three decent hotels. But he would not do this because he hoped Maud would get to hear of his difficulties and return. When he turned into the drive of an evening, he would often fancy he could see signs that she had returned during the day.

One evening, the last of July, when he let himself in with his latchkey, he found Birdie in the hall.

Her hair was covered with a turban of striking red. She had removed her dress and was wearing an apron, but her silk stockings were taking their chances. Her garments, of all kinds, were always effective in color and line, although they tended to a provocative untidiness, like her eyebrows.

"I heard you were in trouble," she said. "Gawd, what a mess too! I've given the ground floor a lick-and-a-promise, but the rooms want turning out, really. It'd take me a fortnight to get the house clean."

"You oughtn't to have come here, Birdie."

"But she's left you, hasn't she! I'm sorry if it was on account of me."

"It's not your fault. But it would make everything rather worse if anyone were to find out that you had come to this house."

"Okay! I'll buzz off."

That made him feel that he had been ungracious. He wanted to say something friendly, but the right words eluded him. Her arms were raised above her head as she loosened the turban. The rich, sheeny black of her hair crashed against the red of the turban. The large mouth twitched as if she were going to cry. His wife's mouth was a prim little cupid's bow.

"There's no hurry for an hour or two." Again the words came in a whisper of self-revelation. Every time this woman called to him he would respond, whatever the cost to his self-respect.

Around midnight she prepared supper for him, smiled when he said he would drive her back to her lodgings in Oxford after supper. He did not know there was any champagne in the house until she found it. He drove her back on the following morning, which made him late at the office.

Alone in the house that night he felt for the first time the sense of being pursued by the avenging furies. That he knew they were furies of his own creation was no comfort.

Maudie calling. I am unexciting. I bore you with my conversation, because I have warped my intelligence in ministering to your comfort. My primness, which you now despise, helped you to keep yourself in order. Your son respects you. Your business is successful. But you're selling it all for an ecstasy.

Why the devil didn't Maudie come home? She wasn't wounded in her feelings. She was only insulted, and she wouldn't accept an apology.

The next morning came a letter from Maud. She had no objection to Roderick spending part of his summer holidays with his father. She suggested the second week in September. She must, however, request an assurance that Roderick would not meet any person, of either sex, whom she herself would regard as an undesirable acquaintance for an impressionable boy.

Banstead gave the promise. He hated writing humbly to Maud, when he actually felt indignant at her behavior. But he badly wanted to keep in touch with Roderick.

The first week of August dragged along in a heat wave. The gardener had remained loyal and the garden was still a pleasant spot in which to sit in the evening. But it emphasized his loneliness. By the end of the week he had sunk into melancholia. He definitely wished he had made a date with Birdie. He might never see her again — a reflection which brought a touch of panic.

She turned up in the following week, very much as she had turned up before. Apparently, she felt the same kind of need for him as he felt for her. She stayed in the house for five days, doing as much cleaning as a team of charwomen. The scandal, Banstead decided, could rip. Everybody had been very cool since Maud had left him. They could cut him outright if they liked. They were only a prim lot of sheep, anyway.

During those five days there were quarrels — not a bit like the icy little quarrels he occasionally had with Maud. There was a zestful turbulence about them, a bawdy, brawling forthrightness, which would fade inconsequently into a passionate reconciliation. In one of these bouts she snatched a book out of his hand and flung it across the room. He twisted her arm until she screamed and picked it up. Both seemed to enjoy this sort of thing.

She came again before the end of August. He told her that Roderick was coming for the second week in September, that he and Roderick would take their meals at the Red Lion, and would she please keep away for that week.

She was in the house when he arrived in the evening with Roderick. She had been drinking just enough to give her an extra liveliness.

"Gawd awmighty, if I didn't clean forget what you told me!" she exploded. "But your little boy won't mind me, will you, dear!"

Roderick was in no sense a "little" boy and felt deeply insulted. Banstead was horrified. He faltered, failed to take immediately one line or the other.

"I say, dad! I think we'd better make it next hols. instead, if you don't mind. Cheerio!"

Banstead neither spoke nor glanced at her. This was not an occasion for one of the forthright quarrels. This was a crisis.

He walked past her to the little room which was called his study. He sat down at the writing table, hugging

his self-contempt. From the bottom drawer he brought out his Service revolver, laid it on the blotting pad, and stared at it.

Roderick had been disgusted. That probably meant the end of Roderick, so far as his father was concerned. And he had promised Maud that the boy would not meet Birdie. Also, he had told her, with some emphasis, that he intended never to see Birdie again. That meant that Maud would never return.

"Your son *used* to respect you . . . Your business *used* to be successful."

With a feeling of utter degradation he knew that, even now, he lacked the determination to finish with Birdie. With this woman he had taken a kind of Devil's marriage vow which some twist in his nervous system made him unable to break: "Forsaking all persons and ideas that are precious to me, I will continue to desire her until death us do part."

"What's the gun for, Gerry?"

He wondered how long she had been standing there. Even when you hated her you could not deny her beauty of form, nor the queer, courageous vitality of the ugly-pretty face.

"I have decided to use it on myself." Already his words sounded phoney to himself. "It would serve you right if I were to do it in your presence."

Without the least intention of shooting himself he picked up the revolver.

Birdie laughed.

"I've seen the gun act put on before, ducky. The gun's never loaded."

"You cocksure little fool!" he exclaimed irritably. "Look here!"

He pressed the catch which opened the chambers. The automatic ejector tipped six cartridges on to the blotting pad. He slowly re-loaded, snapped the chambers back.

"And now get out and stay out."

"Oh, I'll get out, don't you worry! I'll go, all right, and I won't come back ever — not if you was to go down on your bended knees, I wouldn't. But before I go, I may as well tell you I could do with a spot of the needful to be getting on with."

"Very well! As long as you go away where I can't see you." He took out his pocket check book. "How much?"

"Make it three hundred, darling, and part friends."

"We're not friends. You can have a hundred." He began to write her name.

"Don't forget to make it three hundred, or maybe the coroner will think you *did* shoot yourself after all."

He had not seen her pick up the revolver. The muzzle was about three feet from his chest. She was holding it unsteadily, but her finger was on the trigger. Possibly, it would look like suicide — and she would get off scot free. Not that he feared she intended to shoot. Even she would know that in those circumstances arrest would be inescapable.

But suppose he were to pretend that he was in fear of his life? If he were to knock the muzzle upwards and backwards over her wrist, the

bullet would go into *her.* Accidental death! Death. Until death us do part.

But death might not be immediate. She might live long enough to give the police her own version.

He wrote the check for three hundred. He could stop it at the bank in the morning — she didn't seem to know that.

When he gave her the check she put the revolver down on the table. How a gun-moll would have laughed, he thought.

"Thank you, Gerald. You may as well know it was an honest-to-God mistake, my forgetting the date. I didn't want to put you wrong with the boy. Why should I?"

"I didn't say you did it maliciously." His mood was changing. He put the revolver back in the drawer and got up.

"You needn't drive me home. I can catch the 'bus."

He looked her in the eyes. *Forsaking all persons —*

"There's no hurry for an hour or two."

The next morning he did not stop the check. Viewed from her angle, he had refused her an extra two hundred pounds: she had snatched up a revolver, whereupon he had dithered and given her the money. With a little contrivance the whole thing could be made to happen over again — with every circumstance underlined which he wished to be underlined.

He began to study cases in which a person was killed in the course of a scuffle with a revolver, no third person being present. The survivor would maintain that it was an accident. Sometimes he would be believed at once; sometimes he would be sent for trial, in which case he was generally, though not invariably, convicted. In the verbatim reports, lawyers and expert witnesses always explained exactly how the prisoner had blundered or miscalculated.

In borderline cases the angle at which the bullet entered the body was always a vital factor. Both the doctors and the gunsmiths had already given so much evidence in the last thirty years that one need not make a mistake. It took him the evenings of three months — evenings on which Birdie was not in the house — to settle the question of angle and make it foolproof.

And then there were the antecedent circumstances. What a good thing he had kept his head that afternoon in the study! If he had attacked her then, he would either have failed to kill her or, if he had succeeded, he would have been convicted on the antecedent circumstances. Even his true statements in his own favor might have been disbelieved. There must be independent witnesses for every point in the accused's favor.

While his studies were thus progressing, autumn passed into winter. Outwardly his life was very much the same as it had been during the first three months of Maud's defection. But in himself there was considerable

change. He was never melancholic. He pulled up on the whiskey, confining himself to a modest ration. He gave close attention to business. He was working for a definite object — the return of Maud and Roderick, and freedom from his obsession.

Birdie would come for a day or so, three or four times a month, and depart — with a maintenance check. Of her way of living apart from him he knew only that she shared a flat in Oxford with a girl friend, presumably of related tastes. Whether she entertained other lovers he neither knew nor cared. As a person she did not exist for him, yet the fascination never weakened. Their attachment could be compared with that of two musicians who hate each other but find that in music they are perfect partners.

He spent Christmas alone, but she arrived on Boxing Day. Being ready to create the antecedent circumstances he began to inflame the forthright quarrels. In the first week in January she threw a coffee cup at him. Fortunately, it cut him on the eyebrow. He rang for a doctor to dress the cut and the next day took out a summons against her for common assault. He paid her fine of ten shillings and costs and gave her a hundred pounds, to show how sorry he was. He was encouraging her extravagance.

By February he was ready to kill her. The revolver was still in the drawer, untouched since that evening when she had held him up. He took it out and examined it, against the chance that there might be some feature of the weapon itself for which there was no precedent in the many cases he had studied.

It was of the heavy six-shooter type in general use in the Army in the 1914 war. As you held it in front of you, the chambers revolved anticlockwise. On the left you could see the tip of the rim of one cartridge and nearly the whole of the percussion cap of another. Similarly on the right. Thus the user was able to tell at a glance how many cartridges had been fired.

No danger to him in that: the revolver would only be fired once. There were no tricks in the revolver part of the plan — except the difficult trick of getting Birdie to steal it.

He tipped the cartridges onto the table, then locked them in a deed box. He put the revolver back in the drawer, leaving the drawer unlocked.

During February and March the revolver remained in the drawer. The part of his plan which he had assumed would be easy was proving insuperably difficult. In April he began to lose confidence. In May melancholia was creeping back and with it thoughts of surrender. Indeed, when Birdie told him that she was tired of living with Amy Fenton and had her eye on a small house in Oxford, he virtually promised to take it for her, sell the house in Grodbury, and live with her. On a Saturday afternoon he went with her to inspect the house.

It was a six-room house on the

southern outskirts, whose owner had recently died. It was to be sold with furniture — £1,800 for a quick sale.

"But a thousand could go on mortgage if you're short of the ready," Birdie pointed out.

"We'll buy it outright or leave it alone," he said. He could see that she was determined to have the house, and as for him, one house was as good as another.

"Then if you post the check as soon as we get back, I could move in on Monday. Give me a week to get things to rights —"

"There's no need to rush it. I'll have to think it over."

His hesitation provided the background for a zestful quarrel that night. In the course of the reconciliation he told her she could ask for a contract of sale for the house in her own name; he would look at it and give his final decision.

On Monday afternoon she telephoned him at the office that the contract would be ready on Thursday and she would bring it to him on Thursday evening. By the way she spoke it was clear that she was taking for granted that he would buy the house for her. He took it for granted himself — until the evening. Sitting gloomily in his study after his evening meal, he found that the revolver was missing from the drawer.

In an instant the melancholia vanished. He went to the deed box and transferred the six cartridges to his pocket.

On Wednesday morning he rang Birdie's flat. Amy Fenton answered his inquiry.

"She's at the Art School, Mr. Banstead, and she'll be in the nude till twelve thirty, so I don't suppose she can answer if you ring her. Can I give a message?"

"Well — er — it's just this, Miss Fenton. Birdie has got my revolver" — a catch of her breath told him that she knew — "I daresay she's showed it to you. She only took it as a joke, of course. Will you ask her to be sure to lock it up in a safe place? If it happened to be stolen from her by a crook, there'd be no end of trouble."

That, thought Banstead, was very satisfactory. Birdie, never intending to kill him, had seen no danger in boasting to her friend how she meant to frighten a rabbit of a man into doing what he was told.

For the last of the antecedent circumstances he required his secretary.

"Take this letter to Miss Arabella Louisa Chanford — here's the address. 'My dear Birdie, This is a formal warning, dictated to my secretary, that I have no intention of buying the house in South Oxford in which you are interested. Any costs incurred in negotiation will therefore be at your own risk. Yours sincerely'."

She would receive the letter on Thursday morning. It would put her in a vile temper and she would doubtless blow off steam at Amy Fenton. She would be just as angry when she turned up with the contract to demand his check.

When she arrived on Thursday

evening, in a taxi from the station, she showed no sign of anger — was in fact smiling. With her bag she was also holding a long envelope containing the contract. Evidently she meant to wheedle instead of threaten. It did not matter.

He relieved her of the bag, opened it. It was untidy and messy. He had some difficulty in freeing the revolver. Pinkish face powder had been spilled along the barrel: some fell on the hall floor.

"I'll put this away first, then join you in the drawing-room."

He turned towards the study as she went into the drawing-room. He loaded the revolver, put it in his pocket. When he entered the drawing-room she was standing about where he had planned that she would stand.

He came close to her, fired with the muzzle against her blouse, pointing upwards.

He wiped the revolver thoroughly, put on gloves, placed it in her hand, making imprints at the required points. Next, he removed the gloves and made his own imprint on the barrel. Finally, he pressed hard, with his fingernails, on the underside of her wrist.

Then he called the police.

In gun-and-scuffle killings Scotland Yard is almost invariably called in at once, if only to provide experts in firearms and in forensic medicine.

The wound from the Service revolver was of such colossal proportions that the more subtle points of exact angle did not arise. The evidence of both gunsmith and doctor fitted into Banstead's pattern.

He was represented at the inquest. Not by eminent counsel — that would have suggested anxiety — but by a promising youngster who obediently asked him the questions that enabled Banstead to bring out at once and with complete frankness every point that could be made against him. Thus, he admitted that the deceased had been his "paramour," and that he had wished to disentangle himself but lacked the firmness to do so. She had been pressing him, he said, to buy her a small house in Oxford.

"On Monday she telephoned me that she had asked the agent for a contract of sale and would bring it to me on Thursday evening for my inspection, adding that it would be necessary to close the deal at once, as there were other applicants. I did not pay much attention — I thought she was only putting pressure on me. On Monday night I discovered that my revolver was missing and was sure that it was she who had taken it. On Tuesday morning I telephoned her flat. She was out and her roommate, Miss Fenton, admitted that she had seen the revolver."

"Was it in your mind," asked the coroner, "that she intended to use the revolver to menace you into buying the house?"

"If it was in my mind, it was very much at the back of it. Certainly, she was a violent woman — I once had to

take out a summons against her for assault. Perhaps the incident unsettled me a little. I began to fear I had not made my refusal sufficiently clear, so on Wednesday I dictated a formal letter to her — through my secretary — warning her definitely that I would have nothing to do with the house project.

"When she came to my house on Thursday evening, she was carrying a long envelope. I said at once: 'You got my letter? If that's the contract, I don't know why you've brought it.' She did not answer but went straight to the drawing-room. I followed her. Her manner made me remember about the revolver and at once I asked her about it.

" 'I've got it here,' she said. She took it out of her bag and pointed it at me. 'You'll get it when you've signed a check to the agent for eighteen hundred pounds. I mean to have that house, no matter how many letters your secretary writes.' And I said, 'Don't be silly. If you get excited, you may press the trigger without meaning to.' She gave me pert back-answers. I didn't think she intended to shoot me if I refused — if I had thought that, I would have given her a check and then stopped it at the bank. But I did think she might shoot me by accident. So I pretended to give in, then suddenly jumped at her.

"I gripped her wrist pretty hard and tried to turn the barrel sideways with my left hand — to my left — for safety. But she bent over her own wrist, trying to keep hold of the gun, and her right shoulder came round, so that the barrel was lying on the upper part of her chest, pointing upwards, when the gun went off."

The coroner put a number of questions, but for elucidation only. Banstead's story, backed by the evidence of the expert witnesses, was holding its own. A juryman obtained leave to ask a question.

"I'd like to ask whether the barrel of the gun touched the woman's cheek while you were doing all that, Mr. Banstead. I ask, because I see there's some pink make-up on the barrel — might be lipstick."

"I've no recollection of it touching her face," said Banstead.

"That's accounted for, sir," a local sergeant told the coroner. "It isn't lipstick — it's face powder. The lid had come off one of those disc tins, and everything in the bag was smothered with the powder. We found some of it on the floor in the hall."

"And in the drawing-room too, I expect," said the coroner. The sergeant fluttered the leaves of his notebook. "Don't bother, sergeant. You will not be sworn for that evidence. It has no relevance, so far as I can see."

Amy Fenton also took her appointed place in the pattern of antecedent circumstances. Deceased had shown her the revolver on Monday night and had definitely said that if there was any trouble about getting the check she intended to frighten Mr. Banstead with his own gun.

Amy's evidence was the cornerstone of the edifice which Banstead had built by months of painstaking research. But his self-congratulation was cut short by the same juryman, who wanted to ask another question.

"What about Thursday morning, Miss Fenton? Did deceased say any more about frightening Mr. Banstead with the gun after she had read his letter?"

"Not to me, she didn't." Miss Fenton had turned hostile. "I never saw her on Thursday morning. I had one of my headaches, and I didn't get up till past twelve."

The jury returned a verdict of accidental death, there being no reasonable alternative. But they were in an unfriendly mood, feeling vaguely that Banstead was more irritatingly innocent than anyone had a right to be. So they added a rider censuring him for having kept a loaded revolver without proper precautions against its theft.

On the day after the inquest Maud arrived, as Banstead was leaving for the office.

"I've come to tell you I'm sorry you've had this terrible experience, Gerald," she said. "I cannot hold myself wholly blameless for all that has happened."

It was the primmest apology his imagination could conceive, but he was delighted with it. After a little mutual face-saving she accepted his offer to return.

It would be better, she said, not to sell the house and live elsewhere, for that would be like running away from punishment.

By the time Roderick's summer holidays were over, Banstead's life had resumed its interrupted course. He no more thought about the murder than he thought about the woman who had stirred forces in his nature which had now burned themselves out.

Maud had drilled a new staff into the old routine, so smooth that her husband was hardly aware of its existence. At Christmas they filled the house with her relations and Roderick's school friends. A week after Easter the shadow fell — not on Banstead himself but on Maud.

She was getting over a bad head cold, having breakfast in bed for a few days. Among her morning letters was one in an illiterate hand, postmarked Paddington.

Dear Sir, Seeing as the lady —

She snatched up the envelope. The writer had not used the form 'esquire,' to which the servants were accustomed. The 'r' of Mr. had a flourish, mistakable for an 's'. Nevertheless, for a prim little purpose of her own, Maud read on.

Seeing as the lady I thought was Mrs. Renneth was reely the lady which was killed accidentally in your house, which is what Mr. Renneth told me only last week, having to leave me without paying all his rent through no fault of his own. He tole me he put all her things in a tin trunk and he tole me I could sell them for the rent owing, which is only

three pound twelve, but I see her cloes is worth much more. So I thought maybe by law they belong to Mr. Banstead reely, if he bought them, and I've never had any trouble with the law so I am sending the tin trunk to you, sir, carridge forward. Asking nothing, but if you wish to send me three pound twelve I shall be grateful I'm sure. Yours respectfully, Mrs. Martha Lane.

When she had read the letter three times, Maud absorbed the gist of it. She assessed the situation with a shrewd sense of moral values. On the one hand was a poor woman to whom was owed a small sum which she needed. On the other hand was a trunk of the dead girl's possessions which could have no property value for Gerald — could be only a painful embarrassment.

"I promised him I would let bygones be bygones. He has settled down and his mind is at peace. He must be allowed to forget."

Maud always lived up to her own little aphorisms, whatever the inconvenience to herself. She telegraphed three pounds twelve shillings to Mrs. Lane. And she went to the police station.

To the Superintendent she showed the letter, explaining why she had opened it.

"My husband suffered terribly over that affair, Mr. Hall. If ever a man was punished for his folly, he was. I don't want him to know about this letter — nor the wretched tin trunk."

Two years ago she had been of considerable service to the superintendent's wife and was ready to remind him of it if necessary.

"The trouble is, Mrs. Banstead, now you've told me, I shall have to tell Scotland Yard. And they may want to see the contents of the trunk, as a matter of form."

"I assumed there would be some such complication — that's why I came at once to you, Mr. Hall. I want you to have that trunk collected from the station — I will pay all expenses, of course — do whatever is necessary, and then destroy the contents, or sell them for a police charity. Anything — so long as you don't worry my poor husband about it. Please, please don't let the trunk come to our house."

A week later the trunk was opened by Detective Inspector Rason in the Department of Dead Ends. In addition to a quantity of clothing of good quality he found a half-foolscap envelope addressed to 'Mrs. Renneth' — unopened, and with an Oxford postmark. Inside the envelope were three correspondence-sized envelopes addressed to 'Miss Chanford' at the Oxford flat, also unopened. One of the unopened envelopes contained the letter dictated by Banstead to his secretary, explaining that he would not buy the house at Oxford.

A taxi to Mrs. Lane, the landlady in Paddington — a day trip to Oxford, where he frightened the truth out of Amy Fenton — and he was ready to report to Karslake.

"Chanford was running other men besides Banstead. Particularly a hard-

up artist called Renneth, with a part-converted flat in Paddington. When Chanford was away, her pal Fenton used to forward letters under cover. On the Tuesday, Chanford, after hearing from Fenton that Banstead had 'phoned, took the gun with her when she went up to Town to Renneth, being afraid Banstead might turn up at the flat and take the gun himself. Fenton was lying when she said at the inquest she stayed in bed all the morning. She got up at the usual time. Not knowing that Chanford was coming back that day, she forwarded her letters as usual under cover. The letters forwarded included this one."

Karslake read Banstead's dictated letter.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Anything *what!*" Rason was indignant. "Can't you see that we've got something, sir?"

"No, I can't! You've found that Banstead's letter never reached her. How can that affect the gunplay?"

"Never mind the gunplay. At the inquest Banstead said the girl referred to a letter written by his secretary —"

"He might have fed her that line. He might have said, 'Did you get the letter written by my secretary?' Anyway, he'll say he said it — not that he'll ever be bothered by us to say anything at all!" Karslake coughed and became a dignified senior officer. "I don't want to preach to you, Rason, but I'm going to tell you that you spoil a lot of your own painstaking work by your refusal to study the rules of evidence. Take this case: You ought to know it doesn't matter a tittle now how many lies Banstead told unless you can prove that he was telling a substantial lie about what happened with *that* gun in *that* drawing-room. And you tell me to never mind the gunplay!"

"There was that face powder found on the floor of the hall," offered Rason rather weakly.

"So I read in the report. And are you going to tell me that you've found some on the roof?"

Rason retired to his room. Karslake, he thought, overdid it. A good man at heart, but a pig-headed, do-nothing routinarian, jealous as a cat of anybody who had a spark of imagination, meaning Rason.

Imagination, Rason thought, was his own strong line. Beginning with Banstead's letter and proceeding via the face powder on the hall floor, he built up a fantasy which pleased him. That small part of him which was a trained detective sent him to the science department. They turned you down much more politely than Karslake.

Another week had passed before he appeared in Karslake's room grinning.

"Reference Chanford, deceased. Ever heard of Osmo-kaolin?"

"Gibberish to me. What's it about?"

"Gunplay, sir!" The grin widened. "Banstead is in my room, sir, and I was wondering, *sir*, whether you could spare a minute to help me get this case buttoned up."

In Rason's room the roll of his desk

was shut. He introduced Karslake to Banstead. Banstead was calm and indifferent. Karslake was near to perspiring with anxiety, lest Rason should drag him into some outrageous flop.

"Mr. Banstead, I wanted my senior officer to be present because I have to ask you some very important questions. As you know, you need not answer. You can have your legal representative in here with us. Or you can reserve your defense."

Karslake squirmed. Reserve your defense! No recruit would have made a mistake like that. Banstead, of course, jumped on it.

"Defense?" he echoed, smiling tolerantly. "You haven't mentioned the charge yet."

"Murdering Chanford, of course. Anything you say may be used in evidence against you. D'you want to talk or not?"

Banstead glanced at Karslake, whose smouldering anger was patent to the eye.

"Certainly, I will talk. I resent this treatment, but we'll see it through. I have nothing to add or subtract from the evidence I gave at the inquest."

"Good enough!" chirped Rason. "At the inquest you said that you followed the girl into the drawing-room, that she then opened her bag, took out the gun — and off we go! Okay?"

"I've nothing to add or subtract," repeated Banstead.

"But I've got a lot," said Rason. 'I've had scrapings taken from that revolver — meaning bits scraped off for analysis under a microscope. Scrapings from the barrel and the stock and the chambers. *Analysis!* And here's the result. D'you happen to know what that means?"

He passed a slip of paper to Banstead, explaining in a stage whisper to Karslake: "Osmo-kaolin."

"Osmo-kaolin . . . Barium . . . Rice starch. Why, yes!" Banstead laughed outright. "Unless I'm hopelessly wrong, that's the chemical formula for the ordinary commercial face powder."

"S'right!" approved Rason and added ominously: "Scrapings from the barrel and the stock and the chambers, Mr. Banstead."

"That very point was raised at the inquest and I —"

"It was raised with respect to the barrel. How the devil did that face powder get *into the chambers*, Mr. Banstead?"

Banstead leaned back in his chair. There was silence for a full half-minute, broken by a clattering roar as Rason flung up the roll of his desk.

On the desk lay Banstead's revolver and the bag in which Birdie had carried it. Rason snatched up the revolver, pressed the catch that freed the chambers:

"Look in these chambers — all six of 'em clean and shining bright, aren't they? They are! I polished 'em myself." From his pocket he took six dummy cartridges and inserted them in the chambers. He offered the revolver to Banstead.

"There's the gun — *loaded.* There's the bag in which she carried it. Here is a tin of face powder, five times the size of the tin she carried. Empty all the powder into that bag, Mr. Banstead. Put the gun in the bag. Shake the bag all you like. If you can get a single grain of that face powder into those chambers, Mr. Banstead, now that there are cartridges in 'em, you'll walk out of this room a free man — with my senior officer's apologies."

Banstead made no move to take the gun from Rason's hand.

"You can't do it! I've spent hours trying, myself. But look here!" He tipped the dummy cartridges on to the floor. "Put that gun in the bag with the chambers *empty,* and you'll have some Osmo-kaolin in at least four of the chambers before you can wink.

"She didn't get your letter about not buying the house, Banstead. She came in all smiles. You took the gun out of her bag as soon as she was in the hall — some of the powder fell off the barrel there. She went ahead of you into the drawing-room, so she didn't see you load the gun —"

"Stop, for God's sake!" moaned Banstead. He had buried his face in his hands.

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