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JANUARY

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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*

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 17, No. 86, JAN. 1951. Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A. and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union; $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H. Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter, Aug. 28, 1941, at the post office at Concord, N. H. under the act of March 3, 1879.

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In December 1949 we received a letter from T. S. Stribling which began:

Dear EQ:
I am sending you something for a Christmas present — a story which is a literary criticism of the title of your magazine . . . I take exception to the word "Mystery." You don't really publish "mysteries" in your magazine — not in the true sense of the word. You publish — but we'll let my new Poggioli story settle that . . .

So, our Christmas present from Tom Stribling last year is your Christmas present this year. We think most of you will agree that "The Mystery of the Choir Boy" is the second most unusual Poggioli story Mr. Stribling has ever written, and we hope most of you will find it, as we did, not only a moving and mature "mystery" but a deeply philosophical story of the Christmas spirit . . .

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHOIR BOY

by T. S. STRIBLING

It was the night before Christmas, and at the dinner table Professor Poggioli took me to task about the word "mystery," which I use in the titles of my accounts of his criminological investigations. He said they were not mysteries; there was no such thing as a "mystery" in crime — riddles, perhaps, but not mystery.

I got out my dictionary and read to him: "Mystery: something hidden, unknown, unexplained. . . ."

He brushed all that aside as the crudest modernism. "Mystery," he said, "is really a religious term; it has to do with the inscrutable ways of Providence — the Mysteries of Dionysus, the Mysteries of Ishtar, the early Christian Mysteries — until our Western world went consciously or unconsciously materialistic, and true mysteries ceased to be. . . ." Here, happily, our doorbell rang and his flood of erudition was dammed.

To my surprise, on our stoop stood Dr. V. Olin May, rector of the Church of Tiamara. I knew at once he had come to the wrong address. Dr. May's parishioners start in at a minimum of half a million and go on up to several millions a head. So when I saw him on our stoop I knew he had missed his address by at least four hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. I redirected him in all good will, saying:

"Dr. May, this is 13 Acacia Street. I imagine you are looking for 13 Ocean Drive, which is a hundred blocks east, or for 13013 Acacia Street which is a hundred blocks north."

He referred to an address on a slip of paper. "I was looking for Dr. Henry

Poggioli, the . . . er . . . psychologist."

Years of association with Poggioli have made me almost as clever at analyzing people as he is. I knew when Dr. May hesitated over the word "psychologist" that he had started to say "criminologist," but of course the rector of the Church of Tiamara could hardly be going around hunting for a "criminologist"; so he switched, professionally, to "psychologist." I wondered what had brought him. Poggioli is very good at looking at a person and knowing what he wants, so I thought I would make a stab at it myself.

"You want to see him," I suggested in a casual fashion, "about your . . . mmmm . . . your collections, say?"

He was quite surprised. "No-o, I'm not soliciting contributions."

I saw I was completely wrong, so I said no more and invited him in to see my friend.

As we entered the breakfast alcove and I announced our visitor, Poggioli gave him an appraising glance and said, "Yes, Dr. May, you want to see me about . . . James Berelli, I believe."

The minister's face took on an expression of bewilderment. "Dr. Poggioli, I don't quite see how you . . ."

"That was a deduction — a fairly simple deduction. You see, I was reading about Berelli as you came in. . . ."

"But I don't see why you should connect me with a . . ." Dr. May hesitated, unwilling to use the term "racketeer," which Berelli was.

"I will explain. I was just reading an article in the paper giving Berelli's life history, and in a very sympathetic way. Now, the only reason a man like Berelli courts publicity would be to change his status in society. He contemplates making some sort of social or spiritual change — a reformation."

"But why did you think that would involve my church?" queried the rector curiously.

"Well, in the first place, you came to me as a criminologist — so it would be something about a criminal. But my basic reason was this: if Berelli approached any church in Tiamara it would be yours. In the Middle Ages churches grouped themselves according to their creeds. Today churches group themselves according to their wealth and social position. Therefore, if Berelli wished to cast his lot with any congregation in Tiamara, it would be with yours, Dr. May."

"Well, it was fairly simple, after all, wasn't it?"

"Oh, very — in fact, it was obvious."

"And . . . just for curiosity . . . what do I want to ask you about him?"

"Mm —— mm . . . as a practitioner of criminal psychology, I would say you wish to ask me if his conversion is genuine or assumed."

"No, that isn't it. He doesn't claim to have made any spiritual change at all."

Poggioli cleared his throat. He doesn't like to misfire even on the most trivial details. "Then he has offered some contribution to your

church and you want to know whether or not to accept it."

"That's closer, Dr. Poggioli. Our board met last night. We were in session until three o'clock this morning. We decided to accept it. So that's settled — that isn't why I need your help."

It does me good to see Poggioli get in a hole and try to squirm out. He's always getting me in holes. He said, "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you just what you do want, Dr. May?"

The divine turned and included me in the controlled but contagious enthusiasm which has made him the leader of the wealthiest church in the wealthiest city (according to population) in America.

"I'll tell you what has happened. The most remarkable answer to prayers that has ever come to my ministry. As you know, our church attempts to reach the very lowliest strata of society in our city, but heretofore we have not been signally successful."

"Yes, I knew you had not been signally successful."

"Well, the other day the most wonderful thing happened to me. Mr. Berelli came into my study. He said to me, 'Dr. May, my life has been a failure. I have thrown it away.' I said to him frankly, 'Mr. Berelli, if you had used one-tenth your energy and courage serving God that you have used in serving yourself, you would be the most famous and beloved man in America today.'

"He gave me a kind of smile and said, 'Instead of the most notorious.'

" 'You said that, Mr. Berelli, I didn't.'

" 'Well, anyway, I have come to you to see if I could start over again, Dr. May.' "

Here I interrupted to say, "So he did want to join your congregation, just as Poggioli said?"

"No, no, he didn't. His idea was one of the most imaginative, one of the most inspired . . ."

"Go ahead," I said, "what was it?"

"Simply this. He wanted to start over. That was his basic idea. He wanted me to choose a boy from the social level from which he himself had sprung. He wanted this boy to have a beautiful voice, so that he could enter our boys' choir class. Then, after we had chosen such a boy, he would see that boy through grammar school and college and . . . then adopt him as a son."

Even I caught my breath at the extent of such a plan. It was amazing and good and benevolent, but mainly it was amazing. The boy would become a many-times millionaire; he would be reared in conformity with the strictest religion and morality, and if he did not actually become a priest himself, he would grow up in the warmest and tenderest relations with the church. I don't think that having another multi-millionaire in his church weighed too heavily with Dr. May — he had more than his share already; but it would allow his church to reach down among the lowest classes — which had been the object of all his hopes and prayers.

"And you want me, as a psychologist, to help you pick the boy," said Poggioli, understanding this visit at last.

"That is correct. I know you will agree with me, Dr. Poggioli, that we must help every sinner, no matter how criminal his background, to find the door to truth and the path to goodness. So, will you come to the rectory at twelve minutes after three tomorrow afternoon? I'll have a number of boys there. I would like to meet you earlier but we have a board meeting tomorrow morning to decide what we will do with ten lots left to our church by Samuel Draggs, who was a pioneer of Tiamara. We must decide whether or not to sell these lots to the First National Bank for their new skyscraper, or lease it to them for ninety-nine years."

In this undecided state the minister made his adieus and went out to his Cadillac, which during this interview had been parked incongruously in front of our apartment door.

Naturally, Poggioli and I discussed Berelli's extraordinary proposal. I suggested that Berelli, in his heart, had longed for the peace and purity of a cloistered life even during his involved and ruthless criminal career; now he hoped to obtain that calm, religious existence by proxy. Poggioli didn't think so. He thought Berelli hoped to make some sort of shift in his social position that would place him more in accord with his financial status; and, incidentally, many racketeers were now making conspicuous gifts to charity — for its effect, no doubt, on public opinion.

As a last thought I said to Poggioli, "How do you think Berelli's organization is going to take this?"

"In good stead, I should think. Berelli is an excellent organizer — undoubtedly he has already talked the matter over with his lieutenants and gotten their approval."

"You don't think one of them will assassinate him?"

"I'm not sure — we can only hope not. If I made a guess, I would say Berelli is arranging a kind of moral-pension plan, which will allow his lieutenants to retire into private life after a certain number of years in crime, with the good will of the country, and, of course, plenty of ready money."

"So it's just a scheme after all," I said.

"No, not precisely. It is the action of men who are tired of crime and want to quit — in princely style, of course."

On the following day — Christmas Day — I went with Poggioli to the rectory. There were fourteen applicants for Berelli's sinecure in the study. The choirmaster, a Mr. Asaph Johnson, had picked them out of the schools in the slum districts of Tiamara proper. There were Cubans, Italians, Jews, Negroes, Germans, Irish, and French among the contesting lads.

Mr. Johnson, the choirmaster, re-

duced the field to three — a German, an Italian, and an Irish boy. The German boy proved to have too much money in his family to conform to Berelli's ideal, so he was quickly eliminated. This left Patrick McGantry and Angelo Anguisa as the finalists, and here Poggioli's work came in.

He examined the two candidates carefully. Patrick McGantry came from a family of seven brothers. In Angelo's home there were only two children, Angelo and Angela Anguisa. They were twin brother and sister. Poggioli reasoned in this fashion: Angelo's twin sister would be a profoundly moral and instructive influence in her brother's life. The two were devoted to each other, as is usual among twins. To a boy whose career probably would be ecclesiastical, the influence of an affectionate and guardian sister would mean everything. Thus, while the German boy's material wealth militated against his receiving the appointment, Anguisa's spiritual possessions helped him.

I must say it was quite a moment for the little group in the rector's study when the final decision was made. It seemed incredible that a vast fortune which had been accumulated through crime should, through this boy, be turned to social and religious uses. Angelo himself, when the decision fell on him, was quite lifted out of this world. He was a beautiful boy with a Latin perfection of figure and feature. He put his hand on his heart and murmured,

"Me! This has come to me! Oh, God, make me worthy." He then asked if he might telephone his good news to his sister Angela.

Even I was in an exalted mood when we returned to our apartment. I predicted that when Angelo became the racketeer's adopted son, all Berelli's fabulous fortune would come into the service of religion and humanity. Poggioli thought differently.

"Look here," I said, "yesterday you were arguing there would be no catch in this arrangement. Now, apparently, you have changed your mind."

"Oh, no, not at all. I still anticipate no difficulty *inside* Berelli's organization."

I looked at him oddly. "Then where do you anticipate difficulty?"

"Outside, naturally."

I don't like being cut off short like that. "Couldn't you be a little more specific?" I asked crisply.

"Well, yes, I could. I mean . . . mm . . ." He stroked his chin. "I mean that the constitution of life, in this world, is such that great funds accumulated through evil practices cannot be abruptly turned to high and proper ends."

I was utterly amazed. I said, "Poggioli, what in the world do you mean? What is your reason for saying a thing like that?"

"I have no *reason*," stressed my friend. "A reason is a deeper cause which produces any given result. When you reach the *final* cause — the very foundation of life — you don't have reasons any more: you have mystery."

I was never so amused by Poggioli's theories. This was simple, sheer superstition. I didn't dream Poggioli was capable of it, and it made me feel highly intellectual and sophisticated by comparison.

During the following days Poggioli and I heard from Angelo at intervals — through Dr. May. As a matter of fact, Poggioli became a kind of consultant for Dr. May on any problem that arose concerning the Italian boy. Of course, the reason why Poggioli dropped into the role of consultant was perfectly absurd: he was a criminologist — so he became an authority on training boys who were supplied with money out of criminal funds. It is very silly — but it is also very human.

Dr. May reported that the racketeer was becoming deeply and sincerely attached to the handsome choir boy. The lad was apparently an ideal which Berelli had always had in his mind. I had an idea that the racketeer, at times, had longed to be a saint. This boy was his *alter ego*, becoming a blessed mortal. Berelli was to be the morass out of which would bloom this orchid of the swamp.

The first important question that came up between protector and ward was the matter of allowance. Berelli wanted to give the boy a hundred and fifty dollars a week; Poggioli advised that it be reduced to twenty-five. But if the racketeer's actual cash gifts were restricted, he made up for it by the various presents he gave to his foster son. He bought Angelo a motorcycle, a rifle, and an amateur radio broadcasting set. He presented the whole boys' choir with full football equipment and rigged up the basement of the church as a gymnasium.

Dr. May approved heartily of all this, for it was really the sort of thing the ministry promotes nowadays. Poggioli remained noncommittal. As for myself, I will admit with a certain embarrassment that I was dubious about it. My doubt arose in a very irrational way. I scoffed at Poggioli's feeling of "Fate" connected with the unlawful gains of crime, and yet so great an intellectual authority had my friend gained over me that I really felt as he did. I expected at any moment some interruption, some rupture in this queer and unnatural relationship between a choir boy and America's Public Enemy Number One.

Again at the breakfast table one morning, for that is where we read our paper — Poggioli taking the first, second, third, and fifth pages, which are the crime sheets of American newspapers, and I taking the sporting and the comic pages — I say, again we were at the breakfast table when my friend lowered his paper, looked over it with a strange expression, and exclaimed: "So you were right! The bolt has struck!"

I knew at once what it was and asked, "What has happened to Angelo?"

"Nothing. Nothing to the boy. But his sister is gone."

I had forgotten Angelo's twin sister. I had to reflect to know whom he was

talking about. Then I asked what had happened to her.

For answer, Poggioli read aloud: "Miss Angela Anguisa, a beautiful Italian girl living at 321 Elwood Street, was drowned at a beach party Thursday evening. She is the sister of Angelo Anguisa of the Church of Tiamara Choir. Since Miss Anguisa was an expert swimmer, it is supposed she swam out beyond her strength, and became chilled and exhausted. Her body has not yet been recovered."

A wave of sympathy went over me for Angelo. I knew how attached the boy had been to his sister. Then the words Poggioli had used struck me as odd. "What do you mean — 'the bolt has struck'?" I asked. "The girl simply drowned. It happens here on the beaches twenty times a season."

"They are ordinary casualties — accidents."

"You don't think this was an accident?"

"I'm sure it wasn't."

A little grue tickled my scalp. "Why?"

"The guards haven't found her body."

"I know that, but quite often the guards don't find a body, especially when the drowning occurs in the evening."

"Well, to tell the truth, that really wasn't my reason. I think mathematics are against Angela having drowned."

This seemed to make no sense at all, but I knew somehow it must. I said, "Why do you believe that?"

"Because, as you say, about twenty bathers drown a season, out of hundreds of thousands who bathe. The percentage of drownings is very low. Now the probability that some of the malcontents — some of the dissatisfied of Berelli's gang who don't like having a choir boy protégé in their organization — that some of them did away with the girl to hurt Angelo is a much higher percentage than that she drowned."

"Why, that's the most horrible . . . I don't believe it."

"That's your own theory. I'm merely quoting — you remember I doubted it at first."

"But if they did murder her, how did they do it?"

"I don't know. It's possible some swimming companion went out with her and drowned her and then swam back. It was dark."

I sat thinking over the grisly possibility. Then I said, "Why don't you investigate, Poggioli?"

"Well . . . she's gone now. If I discovered anything criminal, it would involve the church and ruin Angelo's career. It would stop Berelli's attempt to rehabilitate himself in decent society. He could not possibly be the one who killed her."

"No, of course not. I wish I knew what did happen. I hope it was just an accident, as the paper says."

That afternoon Poggioli and I visited the rectory. We found Angelo overwhelmed with grief. Dr. May mentioned the inscrutable will of God. Poggioli found opportunity to ask the rector privately if any of

Berelli's men had ever showed any jealousy of Angelo. I liked the way the psychologist put it — "men" instead of "gang." That way, it did not suggest the church had formed low associations.

Dr. May understood at once. May was a very brilliant man. Any pastor of a hundred-million-dollar congregation has to be a brilliant man, because he has a difficult congregation. So he said, "Oh, no, not the slightest evidence of ill will anywhere." Then he added, "There would be no way to intimidate Angelo. From what I've seen of him with the other boys, he seems the gentlest of creatures; yet he is absolutely tenacious and fearless. If he were only a little less impulsive . . . but he's just a boy yet — that trait in his nature will modify with years."

Poggioli's suspicions affected me in a peculiar way. Angela's death hung over me like a pall. I found myself continually expecting some further clue. The feeling would come over me at the most irrational moments — when our doorbell rang, when our telephone buzzed — that we were about to hear from Angela. I mentioned it to Poggioli and he gave me a sleeping tablet one or two nights. I don't know whether they helped me or not.

But I do know that I was awake at one o'clock Wednesday morning, when I heard our telephone ring. The hour, naturally, stressed my preoccupation with the drowned girl, because she had vanished in the night.

Poggioli answered the call. I listened nervously and I heard him say with a note of surprise, "Is that you, Angelo? . . . Yes, I know you can't sleep, but it is almost as good to lie relaxed . . . You want to know something? . . . Certainly . . . Yes, I was awake anyway . . . The owner of the yacht *Santa Fortuna?* I don't know who the owner is . . . Why do you want to know? . . . Oh, you got the name over your wireless . . . Well, call up Jenkins at the *Times* office. He knows every yacht on this coast, and who owns it." I heard Poggioli hang up.

I called to him, "Was that something about Angela?"

"If you don't go to sleep," he answered, "I'll give you another pill. It seems that everybody is awake tonight."

"Including yourself," I said.

"That's correct — including myself."

A few hours later I was still awake when I heard the newsboy throw in our paper and Poggioli go out on the stoop to get it. Ordinarily, he never rises early. A few minutes later my door eased open and Poggioli put in his head. "Awake?" he asked, in a voice low enough not to awaken me.

"So it was about Angela?" I said.

"The telephone call? No. The paper, yes . . . Berelli's dead."

A grue went over me. "Berelli!" There was a peculiar pathos in this racketeer trying to reform his life. "One of his gang, I suppose, who disagreed about Angelo and the church and all that . . ."

"That's what the editorial in the paper thinks."

"But you don't think so?"

"I don't know. That seems to be the solution — on the face of it. The paper says there has got to be a clean-up — there always has to be a clean-up after a killing. . . . Wonder why they don't do it some time *before* a killing."

"They might if they knew when it was going to be," I said, trying to inject a lighter touch to a grim morning.

"Berelli's death isn't the really extraordinary thing about the news," said Poggioli. "It's his adoption of Angelo — it was made final yesterday. Here's a little notice of it on the fourth page. The boy has inherited everything Berelli owns — or at least, all the court can prove he owns."

This threw a strange light over Berelli's murder.

"Then they killed him after it was too late?"

"*If* they killed him. . . ."

"They were the only ones who had a motive."

"But men in a criminal organization don't usually kill too late. Nor do they usually kill simply for revenge. They murder for a profit."

"Then why did they kill him?"

"I don't know whether they killed him or not. Somehow I can't believe they did."

"Then who . . ."

"I don't know, but if they did kill him after Angelo's adoption was made legal, it will let their organization in for an endless amount of official investigation — bookkeeping, income tax check-ups, and so forth. But the syndicate would have thought of all that in advance." Poggioli withdrew from my room and went to the kitchen to make coffee.

With this uncertainty and suspense nibbling at our nerves, nothing further happened until two o'clock in the afternoon on the following day. The telephone rang and when I hurried to it, a voice asked in my ear if this was Mr. Poggioli's residence. His pronunciation, his use of "Mister" instead of "Doctor" or "Professor," showed that he not only did not read my published accounts of Poggioli's investigations, but that he knew nothing of Poggioli's background. I said, "Yes, this is Professor Poggioli's residence. Who are you?"

"This is Dutch Swein. I'm one of Berelli's men. The cops grabbed me a while ago and I'm out on bail. I want this Poggioli to spring me permanent."

"You mean you're under arrest for Berelli's murder?"

"That's right."

"Well, listen, Mr. Swein. If you killed Berelli, you don't need a criminologist. He would just get you in deeper. You need a lawyer . . ."

"*You* listen, Mister. I know my own business. I know enough to hire a lawyer when I'm guilty and a detective when I ain't. This time I'm hiring a detective."

"O.K., you're hiring a detective," I agreed in exasperation, "but if any of your pals killed Berelli, Poggioli

will still get you. You have to be completely in the clear — not mixed up in it at all."

"I'm hiring a detective, I tell you," repeated Swein, "and I'll see you shortly."

There is no use describing Mr. Swein's arrival at our apartment in his imported Italian car, or his jewelry or his hand-painted tie or his clothes. He had the look of a bigtime racketeer out on a hundred-thousand-dollar bond. It was what he said that interested me.

"Poggioli," he began forthrightly, "I don't know who bumped off Berelli. And when I say I don't know who bumped him off, I mean our whole organization don't know. We wish we did, but it wasn't us."

I interrupted to mention the newspaper theory that Berelli had been murdered because he had legally adopted Angelo and was about to give all his money to the choir boy.

"The hell you say," flung out Swein. "Them was the plans of our whole syndicate — it wasn't just Berelli's. We all talked this choir boy deal over. We thought it would put us in right with the public. We thought if we was going to take so much from the come-ons, it wouldn't do no harm to give back a little to churches and charity and so on — build up good will for us instead of against us. It was bound to help us in jury trials, whenever we might come to jury trials."

Such was Mr. Swein and his statement. Naturally, Poggioli did not take the commission of discovering the real murderer and freeing the Berelli gang of suspicion and legal inconvenience. He explained that he already was morally connected with the prosecuting side of the case, through his association with Dr. May and the church, and while he would never take an active part in the prosecution, neither could he defend the suspects.

If Mr. Swein's visit did nothing else it deepened the mystery of who killed Berelli. I asked Poggioli, not without some touch of irony, if he did not think this was a mystery — in his sense of the word. He said, "It is puzzling, it is outré, it is at present unexplained. But I am sure that it is explicable. Anything that can be explained is not really a mystery."

I let the point drop. There was no use quibbling over a definition when we were so shaken over Berelli's abrupt end.

What made the tragedy so poignant was that the racketeer was trying to reinstate himself in society. According to Swein's version, this effort was insincere — he had merely been trying to protect his own lawless interests by giving them a high moral aspect; but that is the beginning of all human law — the effort of men in power to give oppressive actions a high moral aspect. But somebody had stopped Berelli. Was it someone who perceived that the racketeer's program might lead eventually to gang rule in America, and who stressed his disapproval by this murder?

The only man I knew who had

brains enough to see where Berelli's moral extension might lead was Dr. May . . . Yet the idea was fantastic. I wanted to mention it to Poggioli, but I could not bring myself to.

In all the records of Tiamara journalism there was never a greater ado than was made over the imminent inheritance of the Berelli estate by Angelo Anguisa. Ordinarily, Americans trumpet rags-to-riches stories about boys who worked their own way upwards. But that is a purely national development. The universal fairy tale, prevalent from Nova Zembla to Rhodesia, is the magical translation of the pure, good boy to great riches without any labor other than virtue. It is a charming, popular fable that simple goodness will bring its own great reward, because it apparently places fortune within anybody's reach. Everybody seemed to agree that Angelo deserved his good luck. Poggioli had telephone calls congratulating him as a kind of master-of-ceremonies to the young Italian's good fortune. I myself fell in the way of answering these calls, and saying some conventional and appropriate thing to Angelo's well-wishers.

Then one day a girl's voice spoke in the receiver and asked to see Dr. Poggioli.

"You want to speak to him about Angelo Anguisa?" I asked.

In a tense tone the girl said she did.

"Then may I take a message? He is very busy right now . . ."

The voice in the receiver trembled. "Tell him that we . . . we wish he would come over to the rectory and see Angelo. He refuses to accept his inheritance."

I felt as if the floor swayed under me. "Refuses to accept . . . ! What does he want to do?"

"He . . . he says he is going to the docks to work as a longshoreman, like our father used to do."

"But why?"

"He won't say. He says if Dr. Poggioli will come over he will know."

"He will know what?"

"Dr. Poggioli will know what's the matter with Angelo."

"Who is this I'm talking to?"

"Angelo's sister — Angela Anguisa."

"But no," I said, "Angela was drowned . . ."

"No, I was not drowned. I flew back to Tiamara from Belem."

I asked what she was doing in Belem. She said she was flown to Belem from the yacht *Santa Fortuna.* I asked other questions — I don't know what. I received answers that slipped out of my head the moment I heard them. *Angela was not drowned!*

With this astonishing, mystifying message I hurried to Poggioli and begged him to hasten with me to the rectory to see what was wrong with Angelo Anguisa.

The moment I mentioned the yacht *Santa Fortuna*, Poggioli's confusion seemed to clear up.

"That's the clue!" he exclaimed. "That's the master key — the *Santa Fortuna!*"

"What do you mean? A yacht — the master key?"

"Certainly! Are you blind? Don't you remember, Angelo telephoned us on the night of the Berelli murder to know who was the owner of the yacht *Santa Fortuna*. Now we know that Angela was on the yacht *Santa Fortuna*, and was flown to Belem . . . and Berelli was shot."

"But why was he shot?" I cried.

"There, you have put your finger on the incomprehensible feature of the case. Why was he shot? Angelo's sister was flown back home just as Berelli evidently promised the boy . . ."

I broke into this. I understood nothing of what he was saying. "Poggioli," I begged, "let's get started to the rectory and you can tell me what happened on the way over."

We hurried out to the street. "You see of course why he refuses the inheritance?" said Poggioli.

"I understand nothing about it — nothing. He said you would understand without him having to tell you. That's why he wants you to come over — so you can tell him what to do. But I understand nothing."

We saw a cab coming and ran to meet it. We got in. Poggioli began explaining, as if to a small child.

"If Angela flew from the *Santa Fortuna* to Belem, then she was on the yacht."

"Yes, I know that."

"She was on the yacht against her will. Somebody put her there."

"Yes, I see that, too."

"If Angelo received a message from the *Santa Fortuna*, Angela must somehow have got into the radio room and sent it out herself. She must have known something about broadcasting — she probably learned about it from her brother. Remember, Berelli had given Angelo an amateur broadcasting set. She made contact with Angelo for a few minutes, perhaps seconds, then she was discovered and . . . and stopped."

A terrifying picture formed in my head. "That must have been why Angelo asked who owned the yacht *Santa Fortuna?*"

"Certainly. All he knew was the name — that's all he had time to hear. I turned him over to Jenkins and of course Jenkins knew that Berelli owned the *Santa Fortuna*. I imagine that Jenkins also knew exactly the sort of traffic the *Santa Fortuna* was engaged in. When Angelo learned it was Berelli, he took the rifle and went to his foster-father's home — the rifle Berelli himself had given him . . ."

"And killed him!"

"Certainly — that was the night of the Berelli murder."

"Well I . . . it's unbeliev . . . But why did he kill his adopted father when it was Berelli who got his sister off the ship and back to Tiamara again?"

"That's the puzzling feature. Why did he do it?"

We rode on to the rectory. The astonishing, the unbelievable sequence of events that led to Berelli's murder moved through my imagination with the dreadful authority of a Greek tragedy. They fit into each other like

the pieces of some deadly bomb: Berelli trying to reform . . . Poggioli selecting a sensitive boy . . . the gift of the gun and the radio broadcasting set from foster-father to foster-son . . . the kidnaping and attempted degradation of the sister . . . Angela's rescue by her brother, and even after her rescue the murder of Berelli . . . That was the ground floor of logic. There could be no reasons deeper than those . . .

At the rectory door we met Angela. It was the first time we had ever seen the girl. It flashed through my head that such a creature would have brought Berelli hundreds of thousands of cruzeiros delivered in Rio . . .

Angela thanked Poggioli for coming so soon, and said Angelo was waiting for him in the study.

The psychologist studied the girl intently. "You have no idea what's wrong with him, Angela?"

"No . . . no . . . I don't know what's wrong, Dr. Poggioli . . . I'm back."

"And he hasn't told Dr. May what's wrong?"

"He says he never means to tell anybody anything. He says you will know and you'll tell him what to do."

"All right. I'll go in and see him."

We went together into the study. I am sure Angelo never knew I was in the room. He lay prone on a sofa, his arms under his face. Poggioli sat down on the edge of the couch and put a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Angelo, I'm here."

"Well, you know what I did. I don't have to tell you . . ."

"No, you don't have to tell me, Angelo."

"What must I do . . . kill myself, too?"

"No, don't do that. But tell me: why did you shoot him, Angelo, after he promised to get your sister back? Did he say he knew his men had taken Angela?"

"No, Dr. Poggioli, he said he didn't know it. He said he tried not to know anything at all about that part of the syndicate's business. He said he was getting out of the whole thing as fast as he could. He said that's why his men took *her* — because he had refused to hear any details at all. He said if he had known it was my sister, nothing would have induced him to . . . to send her off."

"And you knew he would radio and get her back to you?"

"Yes, I knew that."

"Then . . . why did you do it?"

"Because I felt that if . . . if he would ship away *anybody's* sister on his yacht like that . . . then God would want him killed."

We once read somewhere — we think it was in one of Harry Hansen's columns — that Clarence Budington Kelland usually lives in a place where he can write hard all morning and play golf equally hard all afternoon. "But it is business, not sport," said Mr. Hansen (if it was he), "which has provided 'Bud' Kelland with material for what has been one of the most enviable popular successes in modern American literature . . . I heard not long ago that every time the magazine in which 'Bud' Kelland is a star attraction has a new editor and a new survey of the subscribers' pets among the authors is made, 'Bud' Kelland tops the list . . . And like the children who want to hear the story of the three little bears over and over, and scream with protests if the tale varies by a breath, devotees of the Kelland stories demand that he give them their pet 'formula' without varying the prescription."

But Clarence Budington Kelland did not always write to formula, slick or otherwise. The story by Mr. Kelland that we now bring to you is altogether different from the kind of story which created the immense Kelland reputation and popularity. Indeed, if we published "The Inconspicuous Man" without an author's name, we doubt if anyone would dream of attributing it to CBK. For one thing, it is a pure detective story, with no concession whatever, either in plot or in characterization, to so-called popular taste; for another thing, it is an almost fantastic blend of idealism and melodrama; and last, but decidedly not least, it is as fascinating and as satisfying an example of the bizarre and the outré in detection as we have read in many years. Perhaps the most amazing thing we can tell you about "The Inconspicuous Man" is that it originally appeared, more than twenty years ago, in a slick woman's-magazine! Women's magazines have always changed enormously from generation to generation: didn't Edgar Allan Poe's most mental, most essayistic detective story, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," appear first as a serial in — of all places! — Snowden's "Ladies' Companion" . . .

THE INCONSPICUOUS MAN

by CLARENCE BUDINGTON KELLAND

"He was a strange man," said Alpin Stone.

"How strange? What had you to do with him?" I asked.

"I had nothing to do with him. I noted him by chance, and when I saw what manner of man he was, I followed him for hours. He did nothing

that was not strange. It has been a delightful afternoon."

"Eccentric?" I asked.

"Strange," repeated Alpin with a queer insistence upon that precise word. "First, he was the most ordinary-looking man I ever saw. You might have selected him as a type to represent the whole of a mediocre race. It was because he was so extraordinarily ordinary that he startled me."

"Yes."

"He was almost invisible in a crowd," said Alpin Stone, "like a white rabbit crouching on the snow. The man had not one outstanding feature, not one noticeable garment, nor movement nor mannerism. He was not an individual."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"Very ordinary things in an extraordinary way. He was the most indirect man I have ever seen."

"Indirect?"

"Secretive. He covered his most ordinary impulse with a protective coloring. I saw him look at his watch. No man ever looked at his watch in such a manner before. It was as if he wished to conceal from himself the fact that he looked at his watch. He began by taking his handkerchief from his hip pocket, but he did not use it. He glanced at it as if in doubt and replaced it. Then he felt both trouser-pockets in turn, like a man looking for some misplaced article. He took out a handful of change and then his jack-knife — peered at them, and replaced them. Then he pretended to search his coat, and at last his vest.

"In the end, as though by accident, his watch came out in his fingers, face downward. He did not turn it over until it was dropping again into his pocket, and then — a mere downward flicker of his eye — he glanced at the dial. One not watching him meticulously would never have known he had informed himself of the hour. Every action was like that. Circuitous! An elaboration of concealment. A constant drawing of a herring across the trail."

"The man was insane," said I.

"Not insane," said Alpin Stone.

"What then?"

"Potential."

"Of what?"

"Evil," said Alpin Stone solemnly; but when I endeavored to question him further I could get nothing out of him except repetitions that the man was strange, that he was mediocrity raised to the *n*th power, and that his extraordinary name was John Smith.

I reflected upon this John Smith after Alpin Stone had taken his departure. He was an absurdity, a paradox. That a man should achieve such mediocrity as to be unique was a fascinating thing upon which to speculate. Why, I asked myself, had this person created such a character for himself, and how had he gone about it? Had he schooled himself until he perfected the commonplace, or had he been endowed by nature in some freakish mood with that superlative inconspicuousness? If the former,

what was John Smith's object? If the latter, what end did nature seek?

These were the questions which I was quite able to ask, but wholly unable to answer. That would require the abnormal qualities of penetration with which Alpin Stone was gifted — just as it required those qualities to *perceive* John Smith at all, and to become aware how the man stood alone, a genius or a freak — in either event, unique. I am not one readily to be moved aside from my habitual goings and comings, but I found myself consumed with curiosity to see this strange man.

My curiosity, however, was destined to remain unappeased, for Alpin Stone entered upon one of those self-centered periods which were characteristic of him, and in which, for weeks at a time, he seemed unaware of the existence of any human being but himself. Time and again he passed me on the street without recognizing me; and day after day he walked up the steps of his house, when I sat on my own piazza, without a word or a nod. It was fully two weeks before he became himself again, and then, without preface or apology, he came to the fence dividing our yards and called to me softly. I arose from the bed of flowers I was weeding and walked to him.

Cautiously he drew a number of newspaper clippings from his pocket and passed them across to me, keeping his eye on his kitchen door apprehensively as he did so. I knew at once that some interesting problem had arisen, for the one thing he sought ever to conceal from Mrs. Stone was a fresh occupation with crime. She had no patience with his avocation, and he feared her tongue.

"Read these," he said, "and I'll drop over after dinner to discuss them."

I carried the clippings into the house. They were five in number, bearing date-lines of as many cities and covering a period of some six weeks. Two had to do with escapes from State penal institutions, and three described acquittals by juries of criminals of whose guilt the press seemed to have little doubt.

In each of the five cases the criminal described was a man of standing in his unlawful profession and had been convicted or was being tried for a major crime involving a large sum of money. The three jury cases made one dubious as to the wisdom of our utter confidence in the integrity of twelve good men and true. They were evident miscarriages of justice. The verdicts seemed to have astounded Judge and spectators alike. I will quote the remarks of the court in the Denver case, though the arraignment of the jury by the courts of Buffalo and Cincinnati was couched almost in identical words.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said the Judge, "your verdict has astounded me. You have impressed me as intelligent men. For three days you have occupied your seats and listened attentively to such evidence as could

leave no shadow of doubt in the mind of any reasoning being as to the guilt of this defendant. By bringing in a verdict of 'Not guilty,' you have cast discredit upon our system of trial by jury. You have stultified your own intelligence, if not your characters for honesty.

"Only two suppositions are open to me: that twelve men have suddenly and collectively lost the power to reason, or that a jury in this court has been reached and tampered with by some subtle, sinister influence. As to your verdict, my hands are tied, and this guilty man must be set at liberty. You I discharge from this panel, and in discharging you I brand you with incompetence, or worse, and order a full investigation of this disgraceful affair."

The newspaper man who reported the trial evidently interviewed other members of the panel, but with little result.

"William Frome, a member of the panel," said the reporter, "admitted that he had been approached by an individual to him unknown on the day preceding the drawing of the jury, who stated his belief in the innocence of the prisoner and that he was being 'jobbed' by the police. Frome states that he declined to discuss the case with the stranger. Jason Whittier admits a similar experience. Being asked to describe the stranger, the jurymen became confused, contradicted each other at essential points, and seemed altogether unable to be of assistance in identifying the individual to whose influence may be due this regrettable fiasco."

The two clippings describing escapes from prison might have been written of the same affair. They told of the disappearance of a prisoner newly confined. In each case the prisoner simply ceased to be present. He disappeared, without violence, without raising an alarm. How he gained his freedom, at what hour, whether over the walls or through the doors, none could hazard a guess. The authorities were completely mystified, and, though every means of recapture had been resorted to, the convicts were still at large.

I could make nothing of the five clippings, and awaited Alpin Stone's arrival. He came shortly after seven o'clock.

"Well, Jenkins?" he said abruptly.

"A rather queer series of events," said I.

"Decidedly," said he. "What do you conclude from them?"

"Nothing," said I.

"They are strangely similar," he said.

"Coincidence," said I.

"There is no coincidence in matters requiring the working of a high intelligence," said he. "The pair of escapes are identical. The jury cases bear the same marks of handicraft. All *five* have one thing in common."

"And that?"

"The prominence of the criminal concerned."

"Admitted," said I.

"In the jury cases we have the fol-

lowing list of common factors," he said, and, taking a pencil, he wrote:

1. Prominence of criminal.
2. Large sum of money involved.
3. Clear proof of guilt.
4. Unanimous jury verdict of innocence.
5. Evidence by members of the panel, not on the jury, that they were approached obliquely by some stranger.

"The first four items," said Alpin Stone, "are strongly indicative; the last, to my mind, proof positive."

"Of what?"

"That the three acquittals were managed by the same agency."

"I'm afraid I cannot agree with you," said I.

Alpin shrugged his shoulders. "We'll wait for further evidence," said he. "If the next batch of clippings coming to me contain other cases with these features, then we may be sure."

"Of what?" I asked.

"That there is some agency working throughout the country, in as widely scattered cities as Denver, Cincinnati, and Buffalo, which is exerting itself to bringing about such miscarriages of justice as these, or, failing that, to aid in the escape of the prisoner after conviction."

"An organization?"

"An organization or a man. Not in the sense you mean, I fancy, of a band of criminals working together like a legitimate corporation, with directors and a president. Such a thing might exist, but I doubt its possibility. Two or three or half a dozen might combine for some definite object, but not a number for the general practise of crime. No. Criminals are too individual. You might as well expect a trust of opera singers."

"What then?" said I.

"You're skeptical. We'll let the thing rest until I am in a position to convince you. Meantime I saw my commonplace man again today."

"He interests me more than your jury cases," said I. "If he has really developed what might be described as protective coloring, what would be its purpose?"

"Concealment," said Alpin.

"From whom? From what?"

"Jenkins, there is one thing only that men hide from — the consequences of evil acts. Nobody was ever called upon to hide himself because of a good action or because of an indifferent action. When you see an individual secreting himself you may make up your mind he either has done or is in the prosecution of a reprehensible deed."

"Then you think your commonplace man is a criminal?"

Alpin shrugged his shoulders. "I took the trouble to keep an eye on him today. In fact, I followed him to his place of business."

"Then he has a business."

Alpin shook his head. "He has an office in the National Building — tiny little hole. There is nothing on the door but his name — John Smith — in small black letters. He has no telephone, and the superintendent of

the building has no idea what his occupation is. In fact, even the elevator-man seems to have lost sight of the individual altogether."

I shrugged my shoulders. "For all we know he may be some exceptionally timid scientific man or a wealthy recluse."

"True," said Alpin, as he gathered up his clippings and took his leave. "In the interests of society at large I hope you are right."

I did not see Alpin Stone again for three days, but on Thursday he mounted my steps with a newspaper in his hand and with an air of manifest satisfaction.

"Now," said he, "we shall have a chance to test my theory."

"What theory?" I asked.

"That there is an agency working in the interests of certain first-class criminals," said he. "Cross-grained Povah has been arrested."

"Charming name," said I.

"Charming man," said Alpin. "His specialty is posing as an irascible millionaire. Never bothers with anything smaller than five figures. Probably," he said with the air of a botanist classifying some rare plant, "he ranks first or second among the world's confidence men."

"A distinction," said I.

"It is something to stand first in any profession," said Alpin. "There are in America possibly twenty-five first-class surgeons, not more than that number of first-rate lawyers. I have heard an editor say that there were not more than twenty-five literary men who might be ranked as first-class — and so on. It seems to be a law of nature, and it governs criminals. There are not more than twenty-five men of the first grade in criminal practise — and by first grade in all professions I mean men whose earnings reach a certain point, and who show the possession of no mean genius."

I could not coincide with his attitude of admiration toward a criminal, and his comparison of such a being to an eminent surgeon or man of letters, but it is useless to argue with Alpin upon such points, and I let the point go by unchallenged.

"If, as I suspect, there is some interest working to keep at large our most eminent criminals," said Alpin, "we shall see it functioning when Cross-grained Povah comes to trial."

"And that will be?"

"Within ten days, the Prosecuting Attorney informs me. I am running down to police headquarters tonight," he said abruptly. "Want to go along?"

"Of course," said I.

After dinner we strolled down to the red-brick building which houses the officials of our police department, as well as the central station in which important prisoners are confined before being transferred to the county jail. In the corridor we encountered our old acquaintance Detective-Sergeant Samuels, who shook hands and offered us dubious cigars.

"Chief in?" asked Alpin.

"No. I'm in charge tonight — Ed Roush and I."

"Um. I'm interested in this man

Povah. Wonder if I could look over the effects found on his person when he was arrested?"

"Guess I could stretch a point and give you a look," said Samuels. "Nothin' int'restin', though. Didn't even carry a gat. Step into the office."

He stepped to a large cabinet and produced a brown package tied up with white cord. "Here you are," he said, "look 'em over."

Alpin opened the package and spread its contents upon the desk. The inventory was brief: pocket-handkerchief, jack-knife, fountain pen, pearl scarf-pin, seventy dollars in bills and change, a gold watch and chain. Alpin examined each of these articles, opening the fountain pen to determine if it contained ink, or, if by chance, something was hidden within. He opened the watch-case and studied its interior, shaking his head with disappointment. He was about to lay it down when his eyes were arrested by a tiny charm in the form of a key. It was not an ornamental key such as young fraternity men affect, but the replica of an ordinary key — a key of the kind which one associates with ungainly locks.

"H'm. Ever see one of these before, Samuels?" he asked.

"Don't remember it."

"Key. H'm. Symbolical, Samuels, eh? Number on it, too, see." He held it closer to the light. "Twenty-four it is. Well, well!" He sat down and whistled monotonously. Then he got up suddenly. "Telegraph blanks, Samuels, please."

The detective procured them, and Alpin wrote five identical messages. "Will you sign these, Samuels? Make it more official. The police departments to which they are addressed will reply at once with the information. Rush 'em, Samuels, and we'll sit and smoke with you till the replies come in."

Within two hours five replies arrived. Alpin read them one by one as they came, and his shock of red hair reared itself higher and higher as his excitement increased. "I knew it. I knew it," he said over and over again. "These two wires are from the State penitentiaries from which those escapes were made. The wardens find among the escaped convict's possessions small keys, one numbered Eight and one Seventeen. The effects of the three men acquitted by suborned juries were taken away with them, of course, but in two cases the property custodian remembers distinctly the possession of small keys. Now, Jenkins, what do you think?"

"B'long to the same lodge?" asked Samuels.

"Call it a benefit society," said Alpin with a smile. "Much obliged, Sergeant. Good night."

"And now?" said I, as we walked down the steps.

"Now to await the developments of the trial of Cross-grained Povah."

On the morning of the trial Alpin Stone and myself were present in inconspicuous seats among the spectators. Before the drawing of the jury

commenced, the Recorder fixed his eye sternly upon the attorney for the defendant and, rising from his chair, he leaned forward and said:

"Gentlemen, evidence has been placed in my hands of a systematic effort to tamper with the panel from which this jury is to be drawn. I therefore declare this panel discharged and direct the officers of this court forthwith to fetch in sufficient talesmen with which to proceed. The entire panel here present will be held in the adjoining courtroom pending a thorough investigation."

I glanced about over the faces of the discredited jurymen. They were not of high order, but were rather of that type of hangers-on about our criminal courts who draw sustenance therefrom for small political services. They seemed, for the most part, to be men to whom the juryman's fee would be decidedly welcome. A number of deputies stepped among them and herded them out of the door, and Alpin directed me to follow. We entered the small office opening off the vacant courtroom, where we found a member of the Prosecutor's staff with a stenographer. Alpin nodded and presented me. Presently the first talesman to be subjected to examination was ushered in. He was an oldish man, rather out at elbows, with shifty eyes.

"Well, Morton, what about this?" said the young Prosecutor.

"Don't know nothin' about it," said the man.

"Morton, if you want to save your own bacon you'll talk. It doesn't matter to me. I'd as soon commit you to wait until the grand jury has a chance at you. Suit yourself."

"I hain't took no money. My hands is clean," said Morton.

"But you had a chance to take money."

"Didn't neither. 'Twa'n't money ——"

"Oo — oh! Not money, eh? Then what?"

Suddenly the fellow weakened. "It was my boy Jim. They told me if I didn't do like I was told, they'd turn Jim over to the police."

"So? Who told you this?"

"Feller I never see before."

"What was his name?"

"He didn't tell no name."

"Describe him."

The man hesitated. "He had on a suit with checks, and a yaller tie," he said. And there the description ended — with a checked suit and a yellow tie!

A second juror and a third and a fourth were brought into the room; two of them had nothing to disclose; a third admitted after pressure that he had been approached by a man "with a tail-coat and braid all around the edges, and funny kind of glasses on." So it went. The only descriptions of the individual or individuals who had sought to tamper with the panel had to do with striking clothes, with extraordinary cravats, or with some conspicuous external easy to lay aside. Alpin and I spent the entire day at the investigation — fruitlessly,

it seemed to me, when it was over.

"The man is a genius," said Alpin.

"Man! A dozen or more men were indicated."

"One man, working alone. Such a genius as we have to deal with would never have associates. There are only two methods known to the police of getting their hands on a first-class criminal. The first is through his pals; the second is by taking advantage of some blunder. They all blunder sooner or later. But this man — I do not look for such a blunder as the police could use."

"Why do you say there is only one?"

"It is apparent upon the face of the matter. He has deliberately created the appearance of a number, and at the same time has guarded against a possible identification of himself. All so simple! He knows the human mind. In one case he wears a cravat of such outrageous color that it becomes dominant. In the second case it was a waistcoat; in yet another an absurd coat with braid about the edges, and so on. I have seen many attempts at disguise, but never one so effective as this."

On the following Tuesday as I was sprinkling my flower beds before breakfast, Alpin Stone leaned over the fence and said with a twinkle in his eye, "Interested in neckwear, Jenkins?"

"Not especially," said I.

"I understand," he said, "there is an exhibition of rather unusual neckwear and haberdashery at a little shop downtown. Might pay you to drop in with me this morning."

"Very well," said I.

"I am responsible for some of the designs myself," he said with the air of an artist who has completed a masterpiece.

The little shop he spoke of was on our main business street, conspicuously located upon a corner. As we approached he nodded at the window. "My own idea," he said.

It was a window well calculated to arrest attention. By some trick of lighting it seemed filled with luminous blackness, while in the center, as if floating in air and defying gravitation, was one cravat. But such a cravat! It would mark its owner. It would single him out in a crowd. It was a tie to dominate even a mass-meeting!

"Heavens!" said I, "who perpetrated that offense?"

"None other," said Alpin, "than myself."

We passed into the shop. Its walls were arranged like some art gallery, and in the lighted frames were cravats and waistcoats and hosiery. It was an exhibition, but an exhibition to give a man who was timid about his externals the sort of nightmare which awakes one in a cold sweat.

"Wait till the papers get hold of this," said Alpin with a chuckle. "Then you'll see things."

"But why? What is the idea?"

"Wait and see. I've a place where we can sit and observe without being

seen. Somehow I fancy we shall see something worth waiting for."

All that day we occupied a cubicle behind a partition, scrutinizing shoppers through a small orifice. It was entertaining but useless, insofar as I was able to judge. That evening's papers fell upon the exhibition with biting humor. The natural result was that the shop was crowded next morning.

Alpin and I occupied our cubicle patiently. It was toward noon when his fingers tightened suddenly on my arm.

"Look!" he said. "Look! There. Next to the young man with the spats."

I looked. Had my attention not been so pointedly called to the individual I should never have seen him. It was not that he was invisible, but he was, if I may use such a barbarous word, unnoticeable. He was there, but he did not form a part of the picture. One had to concentrate to keep one's attention upon him. He might have stood near you in a crowd for hours without your becoming aware of his presence. And as for describing him, that was out of the question. For this individual possessed no outstanding features. He was the ultimate in suppression!

"Your commonplace man!" I exclaimed.

"Exactly," said Alpin. "Exactly. I might have known. The thing was obvious. Watch."

Then commenced a curious performance in indirection. The man strolled about, and I give you my word there were times when I almost lost sight of him entirely. He asked to be shown some black lisle hosiery. This he examined meticulously, edging along the counter as he did so and compelling the clerk to follow him. He allowed his attention to wander from the hosiery to plain white handkerchiefs and then to plain white shirts. Finally, while holding a shirt in one hand, he reached out suddenly, without looking up, and snatched a grotesque tie from a hanger and put it into the bosom of the shirt.

"Take these," he said in a toneless voice.

"Did you see that?" Alpin said joyously. "Now do you wonder those talesmen found nothing to describe but ties! Why, put a red tie on that man and he is completely disguised; change it to yellow and he is still another person. It is perfection; genius. He has no identity outside the clothes he chooses to wear."

"All of which," said I, "may be convincing to us, but not proof for a jury."

"A dangerous man!" said Alpin. "The most dangerous to society!"

"And now what?" I asked.

Alpin shook his head. "I fancy I shall have to take the bull by the horns," he said. "See you this evening, Jenkins."

To the remainder of the adventure I was not an eye-witness, but such was Alpin Stone's gift of narrative that it is difficult for me to believe I did not see what he described to me afterwards. . . .

Alpin left me to proceed to the building in which John Smith, the commonplace man, seemed to have his business headquarters. He ascended to Smith's office, and, listening outside the door, heard faint sounds within. Very softly he turned the knob and quickly stepped inside the room.

John Smith sat at a desk close to the left-hand wall, his face to the room, his back nearly touching the closed door of the adjoining office. Upon the desk were a number of books which, Alpin told me, were for the most part upon sociological subjects, with one or two volumes which might have been found upon the desk of the actuary for some great insurance company. A thing which puzzled and interested Alpin was the fact that the desk was immovable — was screwed to the floor by means of iron straps at each leg. The man held in his hand a small book, like a diary, bound in red morocco leather. Save for the desk, the chair Smith occupied, and another chair facing it, the room was bare.

Smith's expressionless eyes were fixed upon Alpin, with no sign either of alarm of annoyance, and he waited for my friend to speak. Doubtless he held the thought that Alpin had entered the office by mistake. Alpin walked across the room without speaking and, taking a small object from his vest pocket, dropped it on the desk before the commonplace man. It was a key, the exact duplicate of that found among the possessions of Cross-grained Povah.

Smith picked the key up and regarded it curiously, then shook his head.

"What is this?" he asked in a toneless voice.

"I come from *him*," said Alpin. "You see the number on the key — Eleven."

"From whom?"

"He was arrested under the name of Judkins — in Baltimore. Gave me the key and told me to come and give it to you."

"Baltimore. I know of no man named Judkins in Baltimore. Most especially no man liable to arrest."

"That's all one to me. I was told to give the key to you. There it is." Alpin turned as if to take his departure, but the commonplace man stopped him.

"Wait," he said, and, rising, walked to the door, locked it, and placed the key in his pocket. "You and I have matters to talk over," he said. "Sit down."

Alpin obeyed, and the commonplace man seated himself again behind his desk.

"You will be so good," he said, "as to sit perfectly motionless and to make no sound which may be heard outside." As he gave these directions Alpin was aware that an automatic revolver equipped with a silencer was directed against his stomach between two books on the desk-top.

"I wondered who you were," said the commonplace man. "You are not, I take it, connected with the police?" Alpin shrugged his shoulders.

"You see," said the commonplace man, "the owner of key Number Eleven is not in Baltimore. He is in this city. I saw him not three hours ago."

"Ah!" said Alpin. "Luck played me a trick."

"I suppose I have you to thank for the Povah surprise — the discharge of the panel?"

Alpin nodded.

"But how," said the man, "did you happen on *me?*"

"It was apparent someone must be operating this new species of insurance. I looked for you."

"Ah! Insurance? So at last we have a mind which can coordinate widely separated facts, and reason from effect to cause."

"Denver, Buffalo, Cincinnati, here — to say nothing of the pair of jail deliveries. By the way, why not a general line of criminal insurance? Why not a straight money insurance to criminals against imprisonment — a lump sum or monthly installments to care for their families while they are imprisoned? Or do you include that?"

"I'm beginning to admire you. You *have* reasoning faculties. You would be interested to see my classified tables, but I'm afraid I shall have to disappoint you. But they are sound and scientific. In your life insurance, death is always certain to come, sooner or later. In criminal insurance, arrest is not inevitable. Indeed, a fair portion of criminals never feel the hand of the police. I know the precise percentage. I have compiled statistics showing the total number of so-called criminals in America, and the growth of that number from year to year. I have sub-divided these into their specialties. You see, I am speaking frankly. You are a man who deserves to have his curiosity satisfied — even if you cannot be allowed to use the information."

"You have regular schedules of premiums — as in life or fire insurance?"

"Exactly. I can tell you the scientific percentage of chances of arrest of any individual criminal in the country during a given year. Of course I do not insure every Tom, Dick, and Harry."

"And in return for the premiums?"

"In the case of the average run, a lump sum to the wife on the first of every year of imprisonment."

"But in the case of the first twenty-five? It *is* twenty-five, isn't it?"

"Twenty-seven, to be exact. That is a different branch. You might call that my Liberty Guaranty Department. Oh, yes. For a sum commensurate with the value of the guaranty, I assure my clients of being set at large in case of arrest. I have been very successful."

"I'm glad to have my surmises confirmed," said Alpin.

"And I," said the commonplace man, "while I admire your ability, dislike to have my affairs impeded. Why, in time, if you were allowed, you might interfere seriously with me. It is not so much that you have

discovered that the same hand arranged the Denver and Cincinnati and Buffalo affairs, it is that you have found *me*. I have taken some pains to remain invisible."

"You have defied a natural law," said Alpin. "It is the will of God or Nature, or whatever you choose to call the ruling power, that there shall be individuals — that every created thing shall be itself, distinct, recognizable. There was purpose in this law. It was, I fancy, that all individuals should be unlike all others in order that each might be clearly identified and held to account for his own conduct. You have violated this law, erased your personality, made yourself into a composite of the commonplace. It is never safe to violate a natural law."

"Yet it is not I who am in danger at this moment. Of course you realize I cannot let you go away, free to make public the information you have — very cleverly — got together. I am sorry, for I really admire you."

He smiled.

"But I must go on about my business uninterrupted, while you — well, you shall be rendered unable to annoy me."

Alpin Stone was thinking, not of the danger of the situation, but how strange it was that all men craved admiration, criminals as well as poets. Here was John Smith, deprived of human companionship by his vocation, availing himself of an opportunity to boast. Vanity was his weakness. Alpin did not smile. He hoped.

"Let us review," said John Smith. "Grant that you know I am the individual who tampered with your jury and who has tampered with other juries. If I were brought face to face with any one of the jurymen, not one could identify me. There is not a soul in the world, even the bearers of those little keys, who can identify me. You, I believe, are the one man who can do so. And you would have difficulty in presenting proofs. You are an able man. But you did not come here to place me under arrest. No, my friend, you came hunting for evidence against me."

"True," said Alpin.

"And you came alone."

"Alone," said Alpin.

"That was unwise." John Smith motioned with the revolver he held in his hand. "It is faulty criminal practise to kill, and I do not want to kill you. Indeed, I shall not kill you. But I must assure myself of your future inability to identify me. That is an ordinary precaution which you must expect me to take."

"I should do so in your place," said Alpin.

"I have provided against this emergency. One must have forethought." John Smith opened a drawer and produced a small atomizer.

"For the eyes?" said Alpin.

"Exactly. Blind, you would be unable to identify me, and I would not have the consequences of a killing to worry about."

Alpin nodded.

"So," said John Smith, "your curi-

osity now costs you your eyesight."

"Better blind and alive than dead and out of the play altogether," said Alpin. "It was a rather forlorn hope, my coming to see you. I really had little expectation of success, but I felt I must try. Even if I went away at this moment, there is no crime of which my evidence could convict you. I had another thing in my mind."

"Which was?"

"To step outside the law," said Alpin.

"Take justice into your own hands?"

"Not in the sense you mean," said Alpin.

"I'm curious — frankly."

Alpin shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," said John Smith, "we may as well have the thing over with." He arose, revolver in one hand, atomizer in the other, and came around the desk. "It is comparatively painless," he said. "A stinging sensation for an hour or two — nothing more."

He came closer, presenting the revolver to Alpin's stomach with his left hand, while he held the atomizer ready in his right. "You were an able man," he said with something like regret in his voice, "and really able men like you and myself are very rare."

For an instant he stood staring into Alpin's eyes, and Alpin stared up into his. The human will is a strange engine. No human being has fathomed its possibilities. For an instant Alpin held John Smith's eyes, bent the powers of his will to the task of gripping the man's attention, of making him think for the merest fraction of a second of Alpin Stone's fixed gaze, and not of his trigger-finger. Alpin watched to see that momentary setting of expression which denoted his instant had come — for that fixing of the eyes indicating the slightest eyestrain.

It came.

In that fraction of a second Alpin Stone moved — his hands moved, powerful hands and wrists. Sure, obedient to his will, his fingers closed on the wrists of John Smith and thrust the man's hands downward.

Alpin Stone was a powerful man. He was able to hold John Smith immovable, and as he clutched those wrists he increased the power of his grip, burying the tips of his fingers and nails in the man's flesh. John Smith panted, strained, uttered a stifled exclamation as revolver dropped from one paralyzed hand and atomizer from the other. Then Alpin tripped him and laid him on the floor upon his face, forcing his hands behind him, and there he held both wrists with a single hand until he could draw a stout cord from his pocket to bind them. Next he directed his attention to the feet, and, presently, inserted a gag in John Smith's mouth. The man was helpless.

"All extra-legal, as you will observe," said Alpin, and, turning his back, drew a candle from his pocket, which he set upright on the desk. Then he set beside it a curious implement like the little seal with which one impresses his monogram on the

wax dropped on the flap of an envelope, but somewhat larger. This implement he held in the flame of a candle until it glowed red.

"John Smith," he said, "you have so made yourself over as to destroy your individuality. As the commonplace man, you are a menace, a constant danger. As I said, this is all outside the law, but I fancy you will make no complaint to the authorities."

He bent over John Smith and pressed the little instrument to his cheek. A choked cry came from under the gag; the man's body lurched convulsively and relaxed. Alpin bent close to examine his work. On the right cheek of the commonplace man was seared with a hot iron an ineffaceable brand — a letter S of the height of the first joint of a man's finger.

The commonplace man was commonplace no longer. Forever from that moment he would be easily recognized by the least observant eye as the man with the scar.

"Q"

Georges Simenon personally vouches for the authenticity of the following anecdote: A little before the War-to-End-Wars, Claude Farrère (the novelist, member of the French Academy, author of LA BATAILLE, *etc.), who read all the Inspector Maigret stories as they came out, telegraphed from the Spanish border to a friend living in Strasbourg (a city very much watched by the police because it is on the German border) about a Maigret novel which both had been following in serial form and which had been the subject of an exchange of letters between them. The telegram read:* INSPECTOR VANISHED. WE SUSPECT DIRTY WORK. WIRE ME TRUTH IN CIPHER. FARRÈRE.

Immediately the officials got busy, and both Farrère and his friend were almost arrested for counter-espionage.

France has no monopoly on such embarrassing embroilments. It can happen here. Lee Wright personally vouches for the authenticity of the following anecdote: Craig Rice, who was born with printer's ink in her circulatory system and as a result has an infallible publicity touch, once wired S & S these ten words, no more, no less: WONDERFUL CRIME NOW HALF COMPLETED. PLEASE SEND ME SIX MIDGETS. *The FBI promptly investigated, and Craig was almost arrested, although what the precise charge would have been has always baffled us. Of course,* WONDERFUL CRIME *referred to her book then in progress —* HAVING WONDERFUL CRIME; *and the request for six midgets was merely an order for six copies of a previous Craig Rice book,* THE BIG MIDGET MURDERS.

All of which, semi-irrelevantly, ushers in an Inspector Maigret story never before published in the United States. We call your attention, however, to two quotations which you will find wholly relevant: "Giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel" (BIBLE: I Peter, iii, 7) and "Nature has given women so much power that the law very wisely gives her very little" (Dr. Samuel Johnson).

THE STRONGER VESSEL

by GEORGES SIMENON

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

IN THE Maigret household, as in most families, there had arisen certain traditions which had come, in time, to take on much significance.

For instance, after they had been living in the Place des Vosges for years and years, the Inspector had acquired the habit, in summer, of be-

ginning to loosen the knot of his dark tie as he started up the stairway from the court — a process which lasted exactly the length of time it took him to reach the first floor.

The apartment house, like all those on the Place, had once been a sumptuous mansion; the first flight of the staircase rose majestically with wrought-iron railings and imitation marble walls. But the second flight became narrow and steep; and thus Maigret, who was growing rather short of wind, could mount to his own floor with his collar open.

By the time he had gone down a dimly lit corridor and inserted his key in his own door (the third on the left), he would have his coat over his arm. Unfailingly he would call out, "Here I am!" — sniff around, deduce from the aromas what there was for lunch, then enter the dining room, where the large window would be open upon the dazzling spectacle of the Place where four fountains sang.

This June there was a slight addition to the ritual.

The weather was particularly hot. The P.J. — as Maigret's colleagues always shortened their formal title of *Police Judiciaire*, or Judiciary Police — thought of nothing but their vacations. Occasionally gentlemen could be seen in shirt-sleeves on the smartest boulevards; and beer poured in torrents at every sidewalk café.

"Have you seen your admirer?" Maigret would ask his wife as he settled himself by the window and mopped his brow.

No one could have thought, at this moment, that he had just come from hours of work in that anti-criminal laboratory which is the Judiciary Police — hours of poring over the darkest and most disheartening involutions of the human soul. When he was off duty, the least trifle could amuse him, especially when it involved teasing the ever naïve Mme. Maigret. For two weeks now, his standing joke had been to ask her for news of her admirer.

"Has he taken his two little prowls around the Place? Is he still just as mysterious, just as distinguished? When I think that you have a weakness for distinguished men . . . and married me!"

Mme. Maigret would be coming and going from kitchen to table. She had no use for a maid; a cleaning woman for the heavy work was enough. She would play up the game with faint irritation: "I never said he was distinguished!"

"Ah, but you've described him: Pearl-gray hat, little pointed mustaches (probably dyed), cane with a carved ivory head . . ."

"Go on! Laugh! Some day you'll admit I'm right. This isn't just a man like anybody else. There's something serious behind the way he's acting . . ."

From the window one would notice automatically the comings and goings on the Place — somewhat deserted in the morning but filled in the afternoon with the mothers and servants of the neighborhood, sitting on the

benches and watching the children at play.

The square, girded with grillwork, is one of the most typical in Paris. The houses stand about it in precise identity, with their arcades and their steep slate roofs. And the four fountains sing. . . .

At first Mme. Maigret had scarcely noticed the stranger, and that by accident. It was hard not to notice him; both in appearance and in attitude he seemed twenty or thirty years dated — an elderly gallant such as one now sees only in the cartoons of humorous magazines. It was early one morning, when all the windows around the Place were open, and you could watch the servants going about their housework.

"He looks as if he were hunting for something," Mme. Maigret thought to herself.

That afternoon she had gone to visit her sister. The next morning, at precisely the same hour, she rediscovered her stranger. With even stride he strolled around the Place, once, twice, then vanished in the direction of the Boulevard.

"Fellow with a weakness for cute little maids — likes to watch them shake out the rugs," said Maigret, when his wife, relating this and that of the day's events, brought up her elderly gallant.

But that very afternoon she was not a little startled to see him, at three o'clock, sitting on a bench directly facing her house — motionless, both hands clasped on the ivory head of his cane. At four, he was still there. Not until five did he rise and go off down the Rue des Tournelles, without having exchanged a word with anyone, without so much as having glanced at a newspaper.

"Don't you think there's something funny about that, Maigret?" For Mme. Maigret had always called her husband by his family name.

"I told you once: he was happy just watching the pretty little maids around him."

The next day Mme. Maigret brought it up again: "I kept a sharp eye on him; he sat there two hours on the same bench without a move . . ."

"Come now! Maybe it was to watch you! From that bench anybody can see into our apartment, and this gentleman is in love with you and —"

"Don't be silly!"

"Besides, he uses a cane and you've always loved men with canes. I'll bet he wears a monocle . . ."

"And why, pray?"

"You've always had a weakness for men with monocles."

They chaffed each other gently, securely savoring the inner peace of twenty years of marriage.

"But listen! I looked all around him, very carefully. To be sure, there was one maid, sitting right opposite him. She's a girl I'd already noticed at the fruit store, first of all because she's so pretty, then because she seems very distinguished . . ."

"That's it!" Maigret cried triumphantly. "Your distinguished servant sits opposite your distinguished gen-

tleman. You may have noticed that women are apt to sit down without too much heed to the perspectives which they may uncover; so your admirer has spent the afternoon leering at —"

"That's all you ever think of!"

"Since I haven't yet seen your mystery-man —"

"Can I help it if he never shows up when you're home?"

And Maigret, whose life intersected so many tragedies, plunged himself into these simple pleasantries and never forgot to demand the latest news of the individual who had become, in their private language, Mme. Maigret's admirer.

"Go on; laugh if you want to. But just the same there's something about him, I don't know what, but it fascinates me and makes me just a little afraid . . . I don't know how to say it. When once you look at him, you can't take your eyes off him. For hours on end he just sits there and doesn't move a muscle. He doesn't even shift his eyes behind his glasses."

"You can see behind his glasses . . . from here?"

Mme. Maigret almost blushed, as though caught red-handed. "I went over to look at him closer. Especially I wanted to see if you were right about . . . perspectives. Well, the blonde maid always has two children with her and she couldn't be more proper and you can't see a thing."

"She stays there all afternoon too?"

"She comes around three, usually before *he* does. She always has her crocheting with her. They leave at almost the very same moment. For whole hours she works at her crocheting without so much as raising her head excepting to call the children if they wander too far away."

"And you really don't think, darling, that the Paris squares are full of hundreds of maids knitting or crocheting for hours on end while they mind their employers' children?"

"Well, maybe . . ."

"And just as many retired old men who have no interest in life but to warm themselves in the sun while contemplating an agreeable young figure?"

"But this one isn't old!"

"You told me yourself that his mustache was dyed and he must be wearing a wig."

"Yes, but that doesn't make him old."

"About my age, then?"

"Sometimes he acts older and sometimes younger . . ."

And Maigret grumbled, with assumed jealousy, "One of these days I'll have to go over there in person and settle accounts with this admirer of yours!"

Neither of them took any of this seriously. In the same way they had for some time taken a great and playful interest in a loving pair who met every night under the arcades. The Maigrets had followed intently each quarrel, each reconciliation, until the girl, who worked at the creamery, had one night met another young man at precisely the same spot.

"You know, Maigret . . ."

"What?"

"I've been thinking . . . I've been wondering if that man is there to spy on somebody . . ."

The days went by and the sun grew hotter and hotter. Now, in the evening, the Place was filled with an ever denser crowd of working people from the nearby streets who came seeking a little fresh air by the four fountains.

"What looks funny to me is that he never sits down in the mornings. And why does he always walk around the Place twice, as if he were waiting for a signal?"

"What's your pretty blonde doing all this time in the morning?"

"I can't see her then. She works in a house down on the right and from here you can't see what goes on there. I meet her when I'm marketing, but she doesn't talk to a soul except to tell what she wants to buy. She doesn't even argue about the price, so she gets cheated at least twenty per cent. She always looks as though she were thinking about something else . . ."

"Fine! The next time I need a really delicate investigation handled, I'll put you on it instead of my men."

"Make fun of me! Go on! But some day you'll see . . ."

It was eight o'clock. Maigret had finished dinner — amazingly early, since he was usually kept late at the Quai-des-Orfèvres. He was in shirtsleeves, his pipe in his mouth, his elbows resting on the window while he vaguely contemplated the rosy sky, soon to be invaded by darkness, and the Place des Vosges, filled with a crowd exhausted by the precocious summer.

Behind him he heard the noises which meant that Mme. Maigret was finishing the dishes and would soon join him with her sewing.

Evenings like this were rare — evenings with no dirty mess to clear up, no murderer to discover, no thief to shadow, evenings when a man's thoughts could roam at peace. Maigret's pipe had never tasted so good. Then suddenly, without turning, he called out, "Henriette?"

"Do you want something?"

"Come here . . ."

With the stem of his pipe he guided her eye to the bench directly facing them. At one end of the bench a ragged old bum was napping. At the other end . . .

"That's the one!" Mme. Maigret asserted. "Of all things!"

It seemed to her almost indecent that her afternoon admirer should have so violated his schedule as to appear on the bench at such an hour.

"He looks as though he's fallen asleep," Maigret murmured, as he relit his pipe. "If there weren't two flights of stairs to climb, I'd go have a look at your admirer, just to see what he's really like."

Mme. Maigret went back to the kitchen. Maigret followed the argument of three small boys, who wound up rolling in the dust while more boys circled them on roller skates.

Maigret had not moved by the

time his second pipe was finished. Neither had the stranger. The bum had lurched off toward the wharfs of the Seine. Mme. Maigret had taken her place by the window, cloth and scissors and dress pattern in her lap — the housewife incapable of sitting still for an hour with nothing to do.

"Is he still there?"

"Yes."

"Aren't they going to close the gates?"

"In a few minutes. The watchman's beginning to herd people toward the exits."

The watchman seemed not to notice the stranger. The man on the bench still did not move and three of the gates were already locked. The watchman was about to turn the key in the fourth when Maigret, without a word, seized his coat and started downstairs.

From the window Mme. Maigret saw him arguing with the man in green, who took his duties seriously. At last the man admitted the Inspector, who walked straight toward the stranger with the glasses.

Mme. Maigret had risen. She felt that something was happening and she gestured to her husband, a gesture that meant, "Is this it?" She couldn't have said clearly what *it* was, but for days and days she had been apprehensive that *something* was about to happen. Maigret nodded to her, stationed the watchman by the gate, and climbed back to their apartment.

"My collar, my tie . . ."

"He's dead?"

"About as dead as anyone can be. For at least two hours or I'm losing my touch."

"Do you think he had an attack?"

Silence from Maigret. Tying a tie was always something of a problem for him.

"What are you going to do?"

"What should I be doing? Start the investigation going. Notify headquarters, the medical office, the whole works . . ."

A velvet darkness had fallen on the Place. The song of the fountains seemed louder. As always, the fourth one had a tone a trifle sharper than the others.

A few moments later, Maigret entered the tobacco shop in the Rue du Pas-de-la-Mule, made a series of phone calls, and found a policeman to station at the gate instead of the watchman.

Mme. Maigret had no wish to go downstairs. She knew that her husband loathed the thought of her intervening in his cases. She understood, too, that for once he was at ease; no one had noticed the corpse with the glasses, nor the comings and goings of the Inspector.

Besides, the Place was almost deserted. The people from the flower shop downstairs were sitting in front of their door, and the dealer in automobile accessories, in his long gray smock, had come over to chat with them.

They were astonished to see a car stop before the gate and proceed into the square. They drew nearer when they saw a second car with a solemn

gentleman who must belong to Police Headquarters. At last, when the ambulance arrived, the group of curious onlookers had grown to almost fifty people, not one of whom suspected the reason for this strange assembly, since the shrubbery concealed the focal scene.

Mme. Maigret had not lit the lamps; she rarely did when she was alone. She kept looking around the Place, watching the windows open, but she saw no sign of the pretty blonde maid.

The ambulance left first, headed for the Medico-Legal Institute. Then a car with certain people; then Maigret, chatting on the sidewalk with some men before he crossed the street and re-entered his home.

"You aren't lighting up?" he grumbled, trying to see in the dark.

She turned the switch.

"Close the window. It's cooled off."

This was no longer the detached Maigret of a short while ago, but Maigret of the P.J., Maigret whose attacks of bad temper made young inspectors tremble.

"Stop that sewing! You get on my nerves! Can't you sit still a minute without work in your hands?"

She stopped. He paced up and down the little room, his hands behind his back, favoring his wife with an occasional curious glance.

"Why did you tell me he seemed sometimes young, sometimes old?"

"I don't know . . . just an impression. Why? How old is he?"

"He can't be more than thirty."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that this pal of yours isn't remotely what he seemed to be. I'm saying that under his wig there was young blond hair, that his dyed mustache was a phony, that he was wearing a sort of corset which gave him that stiffness of an elderly gallant."

"But —"

"No buts about it. I'm still wondering just what sort of miracle made you sniff out this case."

He seemed to hold her responsible for what had happened, for his ruined evening, for all the hard work ahead.

"You know what's happened? Your admirer's been murdered, there on that bench."

"It isn't possible! Right in front of everybody?"

"In front of everybody, and undoubtedly at the exact moment when there were the most witnesses."

"Do you think that maid —?"

"I've sent the bullet down to an expert. He should phone me any minute."

"But how could anybody fire a revolver in the middle of —"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders and waited for the phone call. It came promptly.

"Hello! . . . Yes, I thought so too. . . . But I needed you to confirm it."

Mme. Maigret was all impatience; but her husband deliberately took his time, grumbling to himself as though it were no concern of hers, "Compressed air rifle . . . special model . . . very rare . . ."

"I don't understand . . ."

"That means the fellow was killed from a distance — by somebody, for instance, ambushed in one of the windows on the Place. He could take his time to aim, but he must have been a first-class shot. He hit the heart exactly; death was instantaneous."

Like that, there in the sunlight, while the crowd . . .

Mme. Maigret suddenly began to cry, from sheer nervous exhaustion. She apologized awkwardly, "I'm sorry. It was too much for me. It does seem to me as though I have something to do with this. I know it's silly, but . . ."

"When you've pulled yourself together, I'll take your deposition as a witness."

"Me? A witness?"

"Hang it, you're the only person so far who can give us any useful information, thanks to the curiosity that drove you to . . ." And Maigret went on, still as if talking to himself, to give her a few of the facts:

"The man hadn't a single paper on him. Pockets practically empty, aside from a few hundred-franc bills, some change, a very small key, and a nail file. We'll try to identify him anyway."

"Only thirty!" Mme. Maigret repeated.

It was astonishing. And now she could understand the almost sinister fascination she had sensed in this youth congealed, like a wax image, into the postures of an old man.

"Are you ready to testify?"

"I'm listening."

"I ask you to note that I am questioning you in my official capacity and that I shall be obliged tomorrow to draw up a formal deposition as a result of this interview."

Mme. Maigret smiled. It was a pale smile; she found this shift to an official relationship oddly impressive.

"Did you notice this man today?"

"I didn't see him this morning; I went marketing at the Halles. In the afternoon he was at his usual place."

"And the blonde maid?"

"She was there too, as usual."

"You never caught them speaking to each other?"

"They'd have had to talk very loud; they were about eight meters apart."

"And they'd sit there, motionless, all afternoon?"

"Except when the woman was crocheting."

"Always crocheting? For a whole two weeks?"

"Yes."

"You didn't notice what type of crochet work she was doing?"

"No. If it had been knitting, that's something I know about, but —"

"When did the woman leave this afternoon?"

"I don't know. I was fixing the custard. Probably around five, as usual."

"Around five . . . which is just when the doctor fixes the time of death. But there's a leeway of minutes one way or the other. Did the woman leave before five or after five, before the murder or after the mur-

der? And why the devil did you have to pick today of all days to make a custard? If you're going to take up spying on people, you should carry it through to the finish!"

"Do you think that woman . . .?"

"I don't think anything! All I know is that I've nothing to base my investigation on but your reports . . . which are something short of detailed. Do you happen to know so much as where your blonde maid works?"

"She always goes home to 17 *bis*."

"And who lives at 17 *bis*?"

"I don't know . . . People with a big American car and a chauffeur who looks like a foreigner."

"That's all you've noticed, is it? You'd make a fine policeman, I must say! A big American car and a chauffeur who —" He was play-acting, as he so often did when an investigation led nowhere; now his anger dissolved into a smile. "You know, old girl, if you hadn't taken an interest in your admirer's carryings-on, I'd be in a beautiful jam right now? I'm not saying that the situation is perfect, or that the investigation will solve itself like *that*; but at least we've got something to start with, however slight . . ."

"The beautiful blonde?"

"The beautiful blonde. And that reminds me —" He hurried to the phone and ordered an inspector stationed in front of 17 *bis* with instructions, if a beautiful blonde emerged, not to lose sight of her at any cost.

"And now to bed. There'll be time enough tomorrow morning."

He was half asleep when the timid voice of his wife ventured, "You don't think maybe it might be a good idea to —"

"No, no, and no!" He half sat up in bed. "Just because you very nearly displayed a minor talent is no reason to start in giving me advice! Besides, it's time to sleep."

And time for the moon to silver the slate roofs of the Place des Vosges, time for the four fountains to continue their recital of chamber music, with the fourth seeming always a little hurried, a little out of tune.

When Maigret, face daubed with shaving soap, suspenders hanging down, cast his first glance out over the Place des Vosges, an impressive group had already gathered about the bench where the corpse had been discovered.

The owner of the flower shop, better informed than the rest since she had been present (even if at a distance) when the police arrived, was giving voluble explanations. Her categorical gestures emphasized the certainty of her opinions.

Everyone in the neighborhood was there. Passersby, who a moment before had been hurrying to be on time at shop or office, had suddenly found leisure to stop at the scene of the crime.

"Do you know that woman over there?" The Inspector used the handle of his razor to indicate a young woman who stood out from those around her. The fresh elegance of her English-cut

costume seemed more suited to a morning stroll on the Bois de Boulogne than to the Place des Vosges.

"I have never seen her. At least I don't think so . . ."

It might mean nothing. The apartments on the first floors of the Place des Vosges may contain the upper middle class and even the lesser levels of the world of Society. Still Maigret stared at the woman irritably; women of her class rarely set out afoot at eight in the morning, unless it's to walk the dog.

"Now, look: this morning you're going to do some extensive marketing. You're to go into every shop. Listen to everything they say, and above all try to find out anything you can about the blonde maid and her employers."

"And for once you can't make fun of me for gossiping!" Mme. Maigret smiled. "When will you be back?"

"Do I know?"

For he knew the investigation had gone ahead while he slept, and he hoped to find at the Quai-des-Orfèvres some solid basis for his own inquiries.

At eleven o'clock the previous evening, for instance, the famous medico-legal expert, Dr. Hébrard, was in full evening dress, attending a first night at the Comédie-Française, when he received a message. He waited until the last act, and then paused at a box to congratulate an actress with whom his relations were non-professional. A quarter of an hour later, at the Medico-Legal Institute (which is the new name for the morgue), one of his assistants handed him his white working smock while an attendant withdrew from one of the endless niches in the wall the frozen corpse of the unknown man from the Place des Vosges.

At the same time, in the Palace of Justice, where the files contain details on all the criminals of France and most of the criminals of the world, two men in gray smocks patiently compared fingerprints.

Not far from them, up a spiral staircase, the specialists of the police laboratory began their meticulous work on certain objects: one dark suit (old-fashioned), two shoes (buttoned), one cane (rattan with carved ivory handle), one wig, one pair of glasses, and one tuft of blond hair cut from the dead man's head.

When Maigret had greeted his colleagues, held a brief talk with his chief, and entered his office (which still smelled of cold pipe smoke despite the open window), three reports were waiting for him, neatly arranged on his desk.

First, Dr. Hébrard's report:

Death almost instantaneous. Bullet fired from distance of at least 20 meters, possibly 100. Weapon of small caliber but great penetrative force.

Probable age: 28.

Complete absence of occupational deformations; probable that man had never worked at manual labor. On the other hand, evidence of extensive pursuit of sports, especially rowing and boxing.

Perfect health. Remarkable physique. Scar on left shoulder indicates bullet wound, probably deflected by shoulder-blade, some three years ago.

Finally, a certain thickening of the ends of the fingers indicates unknown had carried on fairly extensive work on typewriter.

Maigret read slowly, smoking his pipe in little puffs and breaking off now and then to watch the Seine flowing in the morning dazzle of the sun. From time to time he would jot down a word or two, which only he could understand, in the notebook renowned alike for its cheapness and for its accumulation, over the years, of a hieroglyphic mass of notes, written around and even over each other.

The laboratory report was no more sensational:

The clothes had been worn by others before their present owner; everything indicated he had bought them, untraceably, from a pawnshop or second-hand dealer.

Same origin for the cane and the buttoned shoes.

The wig was of reasonably good quality but nondescript — a model available at any wig-maker's.

Examination of the dust in the garments revealed a sizable quantity of very fine flour — not pure, but mixed with traces of bran.

Glasses: unground glass, with no effect on the sight.

From the files, nothing; no trace of the victim's fingerprints on record.

Maigret sat dreamily for a few minutes, his elbows on his desk. The case looked neither good nor bad — perhaps at the moment rather on the bad side, since Chance, usually reasonably cooperative, had contributed not the slightest assistance.

At last he rose, clapped on his hat, and approached the usher stationed in the corridor. "If anybody asks for me, I'll be back in about an hour."

He was too near the Place des Vosges to take a taxi. He strolled back along the Seine. In the fruit shop on the Rue des Tournelles he noticed Mme. Maigret in spirited conversation with three or four of the neighborhood gossips. He turned his head to hide a smile, and continued on his way.

When Maigret first entered the police force, one of his chiefs, absorbed in the then new methods of scientific detection, used to keep telling him, "Look here, young man! Go easy on the imagination. A policeman works with facts, not ideas!" Which had not kept Maigret from using his imagination, and cutting out a nice little career for himself with it.

Just so now, as he reached the Place des Vosges, he was concerned less with the technical details of the morning's reports than with what he would call the *feel* of the crime.

He tried to imagine the victim, not as the corpse he had seen, but as a living boy of twenty-eight — blond, heavy-set, well built, undoubtedly elegant, putting on every morning his elderly-gallant outfit, his costume bought off some flea-ridden pushcart

— and yet always wearing the best linen under it.

Then taking two turns around the Place and going off along the Rue des Tournelles.

Where did he go? What did he do until three in the afternoon? Did he retain his role of the hero of some nineteenth-century comedy by Labiche, or did he have a nearby room where he changed?

How was it possible for him then to sit motionless for three hours on a bench, without opening his mouth, without making a single gesture, staring at one point in space?

How long had this been going on?

And where did he go at night? What was his private life? Whom did he see? Whom did he talk to? To whom did he surrender the secret of his personality? Why the flour and the traces of bran in his clothes? The bran indicated a mill rather than a bakery. What would he be doing in a mill?

Maigret's thoughts carried him past 17 *bis*. He retraced his steps, entered the gate and addressed the concierge.

She showed no reaction to his police badge. "Well? What do you want?"

"I wanted to know which of your tenants employs a maid — rather pretty, blonde, elegant . . ."

"Mlle. Rita?" she interrupted.

"Might well be. Every afternoon she takes two children out in the Place —"

"Her employers' children. Monsieur and Mme. Krofta — they've lived on the first floor for fifteen years and more. They were even here before me. M. Krofta is in the import and export business; I think his office is in the Rue du 4-Septembre . . ."

"Is he at home?"

"He just went out, but I think Madame is upstairs."

"And Rita?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen her this morning; I was busy doing the stairs . . ."

A few moments later, Maigret rang at the first floor apartment. He could hear a noise far off inside, but nobody answered. He rang again. At last the door opened. He saw a fairly young woman, trying to cover her body with a scant dressing gown.

"Yes?"

"I'd like to speak to M. or Mme. Krofta. I'm an Inspector from the Judiciary Police."

She opened the door reluctantly, holding the gown tightly closed in front of her. Maigret entered a magnificent apartment, with vast, high-ceilinged rooms, tasteful furnishings, and expensive ornaments.

"Do forgive me for receiving you like this, but I'm alone with the children. How did you happen to get here so quickly? It can't be fifteen minutes since my husband left."

She was a foreigner, to judge from a light accent and a thoroughly Central European charm. Maigret had already recognized in her the well-tailored woman whom he had noticed that morning, listening to the gossips

in the midst of the Place des Vosges.

"You were expecting me?" he murmured in a tone intended to disguise his astonishment.

"You or somebody. But I hadn't any idea the police would be so quick. I suppose my husband is coming back?"

"I don't know."

"You didn't see him?"

"No."

"But then how . . . ?"

There was quite evidently a misunderstanding, from which Maigret could hardly help learning something useful. He had no intention of clearing it up.

The young woman, possibly to gain a moment to think things over, stammered, "Do you mind for just a minute? The children are in the bathroom and I can't help wondering if they're up to something."

She went off with supple steps. She was truly beautiful, in body as well as face.

He could hear her exchanging whispers with the children in the bathroom. Then she came back, a faint smile of welcome on her lips.

"Please excuse me; I never even asked you to sit down. I do wish my husband were here. He's the one who really knows the value of the jewels; after all he bought them."

Jewels? And why this faint discomfort, this impatience for the husband's return? She seemed almost afraid to speak, anxious to keep the conversation such that she could say nothing compromising.

Maigret had no desire to be helpful. He gazed at her with as neutral an expression as possible, putting on what he called his "fat-and-friendly" face.

"You keep reading in the papers about robberies but, it's funny, you never think it can happen to you. Why even last night I didn't have any idea . . . It was only this morning . . ."

"When did you get home?" Maigret put in.

She gave a start. "How did you know I went out?"

"Because I saw you."

"You were here in the neighborhood already?"

"I'm here all year round. I'm one of your neighbors."

This bothered her. She was obviously wondering what might be hidden behind words that were so simple, yet so mysterious.

"Why, I went out, as I often do, for a breath of air before I settled down to getting the children dressed. That's why you found me in such a state. When I come home, I always slip on something for around the house and . . ." She could not suppress a sigh of relief as she heard footsteps pause outside the door and a key turn in the lock. "My husband . . ." she murmured, and called out, "Boris! Come in here."

Well, well! thought Maigret, so the husband's a looker too. Older than she is, forty-five at a guess, distinguished, well-groomed, Hungarian or Czech.

"The Inspector got here just ahead of you. I was telling him you'd be right back."

Boris Krofta examined Maigret with a polite attention which seemed to mask a trace of defiance. "I beg your pardon," he murmured. No accent here; perfect French, even a trifle too perfect. "But . . . I do not fully understand . . ."

"Inspector Maigret, Judiciary Police."

"How odd. And you wished to speak to *me?*"

"To the employer of one Rita who takes two children out in the Place des Vosges every afternoon."

"Yes . . . But . . . you cannot mean that you have already found her, that you have recovered the jewels? I know that I must seem somewhat peculiar to you; but the coincidence is so curious that I keep trying to explain to myself . . . You must realize that I have just returned from the local police station where I lodged a complaint against this very Rita. I come home, I find you here, and you tell me . . ."

There was a nervous tension in his gestures. His wife, who had obviously no intention of leaving the two men alone, examined the Inspector with curious eyes.

"On what grounds did you lodge a complaint?"

"The jewel robbery. The girl disappeared yesterday, without giving us notice. I thought she had run off with a lover; I intended to insert an advertisement for another maid in the papers this morning. Last night we did not leave the house. This morning, while my wife was out, the idea suddenly struck me of looking in the jewel box. It was then that I understood Rita's abrupt departure; the box was empty."

"What time was it when you made this discovery?"

"Barely nine. I was in my dressing gown. As soon as I could dress, I hurried to the station."

"Meanwhile your wife returned?"

"Yes, while I was dressing . . . What I still do not understand is that you should arrive here this morning —"

"Pure coincidence!" Maigret murmured innocently.

"Nevertheless, I should like a few details. Did you know, this morning, that the jewels had been stolen?"

An evasive gesture from Maigret meant nothing either way, but served to augment Boris's nervousness.

"At least do me the favor of telling me the reason for your visit. I do not believe that it is one of the customs of the French police to invade people's homes, seat themselves comfortably, and —"

"And listen to what people tell them?" Maigret ended his sentence. "You must admit it isn't my fault. Since I got here, you've done nothing but talk about a jewel robbery which doesn't interest me in the least, since I came here because of a far more serious crime —"

"More serious?" the young woman exclaimed.

"You don't know that a crime was committed yesterday in the Place des Vosges?"

He watched her think it over, remember that Maigret had said he was a neighbor, reject the possibility of saying no, and end with a smiling murmur, "I do think I vaguely heard something of the sort in the square this morning. Some of the old ladies were gossiping . . ."

"I fail to see," the husband interrupted, "what concern —"

" — this case is of yours? So far I don't know myself, but I've a notion we'll find out sooner or later. What time did Rita disappear yesterday afternoon?"

"A little after five," Boris Krofta answered without a shadow of hesitation. He turned to his wife. "That's right, isn't it, Olga?"

"Exactly. She brought the children back at five. She went up to her room and I never heard her come down. Around six I went up; I was beginning to wonder why she hadn't started dinner. By then her room was empty."

"Would you please show me to her room?"

"My husband will take you up. I don't like to go out in the halls like this."

Maigret could already have found his way around the house; its plan was almost identical with that of his own. After the second floor, the staircase grew even narrower and darker before it reached the rooms under the roof. Krofta opened the third.

"This is it. I left the key in the lock."

"Your wife just said she was the one who came up here."

"Of course. But afterwards I came up too . . ."

The open door revealed what could have been any maid's room, with its iron bed, wardrobe, and washstand, save for the splendid view of the Place des Vosges from the window set in the roof.

Beside the wardrobe there was a wicker suitcase in the current style. Inside the wardrobe were dresses and underclothes.

"Your maid went off without her baggage?"

"I imagine she may have preferred to take the jewels. Their value is approximately two hundred thousand francs . . ."

Maigret's fat fingers felt of a little green hat, then picked up another trimmed with a yellow ribbon.

"Can you tell me how many hats your maid had?"

"I have no idea. Possibly my wife can tell you, but I doubt it."

"How long was she with you?"

"Six months."

"You found her through an ad?"

"Through an employment agency, which recommended her warmly. And I must say that her work was impeccable."

"You haven't any other servants?"

"My wife insists on looking after the children herself, so that one maid is all we need. Besides, we live on the Côte d'Azur for much of the year; we

have a gardener there and his wife helps with the housework."

Maigret was mopping his brow. His handkerchief fell to the floor and he bent over to pick it up. "That's funny . . ." he muttered as he stood up. He looked Krofta over from head to foot, opened his mouth, then shut it.

"You were about to say . . . ?" Krofta asked politely.

"I wanted to ask you a question. But it's so indiscreet that you might think it was out of place . . ."

"Pray do."

"You insist? I wanted to ask you, just at random you understand, if . . . Well, the maid was very pretty: did you ever happen to have any relations with her other than those of employer and servant? Purely routine question, of course; you don't have to answer it."

Oddly enough, Krofta paused to think, suddenly more concerned than he had been. He took his time about answering, looked about him slowly, and finally sighed, "Will my answer be a matter of record?"

"There's every chance that it'll never come up."

"In that case, I prefer to confess to you that what you suggest did indeed take place."

"In your apartment?"

"No. That would be complicated — the children, you know . . ."

"You had dates outside?"

"Never! I would come up here now and then, and . . ."

"I can take it from there," Maigret smiled. "And I'm greatly satisfied by your answer. You see, I'd noticed that there was a button missing on the sleeve of your coat. Just now I found that button on the floor at the foot of the bed."

He held out the button. Krofta seized it with astonishing eagerness.

"When was the last time that it happened?" Maigret asked.

"Three or four days ago . . . let me think . . . yes, four."

"And Rita was willing?"

"Oh, yes — of course!"

"She was in love with you?"

"She gave that impression."

"You didn't know of any rival?"

"My dear Inspector! The question did not arise. If Rita had had a lover, I should never have considered him a rival. I adore my wife and my children; in fact, I cannot understand how I let myself . . ."

And Maigret went on down the stairs, sighing to himself, "As for you, my fine friend, I wonder if there was one minute when you weren't lying?"

He stopped at the concierge's loge and sat down facing her.

She was shelling peas. "Well, did you see them? They're certainly upset about this jewel business."

"Were you in your loge yesterday at five?"

"Sure I was. And my son was right where you are, doing his homework."

"Did you see Rita bring the children home?"

"Just like I see you this minute."

"And you saw her come down a few minutes later?"

"That's what M. Krofta was asking me just now. I told him I didn't see a thing. He says it isn't possible, I must've left my loge, I wasn't paying attention — after all so many people come and go. Just the same it seems to me I would've noticed her, because it wasn't the right time for her to be going out."

"Have you ever run into M. Krofta on the staircase to the third floor?"

"Go on — what would he be doing up there? Oh, I see . . . You think he'd be sniffing around the maid? You just don't know Mlle. Rita. Now they're saying she's a thief. Well, maybe she is. But when it comes to letting your employer fool around with you . . ."

Maigret resignedly lit his pipe and moved off.

"Well, Inspectoress Maigret?" he joked affectionately as he settled down by the window. His shirt-sleeves were two brilliant splotches in the sun.

"Well, for lunch you're going to have to be satisfied with a chop and an artichoke. I even bought them ready-cooked to save time. The way these gossips go on . . ."

"What are they saying? Come on; let's hear the results of your investigation."

"First of all, Rita *wasn't* a maid!"

"How do you know?"

"All the people in the shops noticed she didn't know how to figure in *sous*, which means she hadn't ever done any marketing before. Then you know how it is, they'll give a servant a rebate of one sou on every franc so she'll bring all the family trade to that store. Well, the first time the butcher offered her that, she just stared at him amazed. She did take it after that, but I'm sure it was just so she wouldn't look unusual."

"Fine! So we have a young girl of good family acting the part of a servant at the Kroftas'."

"I think she was a student. In the stores in this neighborhood you hear them talking all kinds of languages — Italian, Hungarian, Polish. It seems she used to listen as though she understood, and if anybody made a joke she'd smile."

"And how about her admirer in the Place?"

"People had noticed him, but not so much as I did. Oh, yes — one more thing: The Gastambides' maid spends a lot of her afternoons on the Place, and she says that Rita didn't know how to crochet and the only thing you could use that piece she was making for would be a dish-rag."

Maigret's small eyes smiled at his wife's intent efforts to gather her memories and express them methodically.

"And that isn't all. Before her, the Kroftas had a maid from their own country and they dismissed her because she was in the family way."

"By Krofta?"

"Oh, no! He's too much in love with his wife. They say he's so jealous that they hardly have any company at all."

Thus all these bits of gossip, true or false, sincere or malicious, served moment by moment to alter the portraits of the characters — or perhaps to complete them.

"Since you've done such a good job," Maigret murmured, as he lit a fresh pipe, "I'm going to give you a tip: the shot that killed our bewigged and bespectacled unknown was fired from Rita's garret room. It won't be hard to prove when we get around to a reconstruction. I checked the angle of aim from there; it agrees absolutely with the position of the body and the trajectory of the bullet."

"Do you think that she . . . ?"

"I don't know . . ."

He sighed and put on his collar and tie; she helped him with his coat. Half an hour later, he sank into his armchair at headquarters and mopped his face; it was even hotter than the day before, and a storm was brewing.

An hour later, all three of Maigret's pipes were hot, the ashtray was overflowing, and the blotter was covered with words and fragments of phrases crazily intertwined. As for the Inspector, he was yawning, obviously half asleep, trying to fix his eyes on what he had jotted down in the course of his daydream.

If Krofta had caused Rita's disappearance, the jewel theft was a sound device for averting suspicion.

That was attractive, but it proved nothing; the maid might very well have stolen her mistress's jewels.

Krofta had hesitated before saying that he had been his maid's lover.

That could mean that it was true and he was sick of it; it could also mean that it was false, that he had seen Maigret pick up the button or thought the Inspector's question concealed some sort of trap.

According to Krofta, the button had been there for four days; but the floor looked as though it had been recently swept.

And why had Mme. Krofta gone for a walk so early this morning? Why had she hesitated to admit having heard of the crime, since Maigret had seen her stay so long with the gossips?

Why had Krofta asked the concierge if she'd seen Rita go out?

Private investigation on his own? Or wasn't it more likely that the police would ask the question, and hoped to plant a suggestion in the woman's mind?

Suddenly Maigret rose. This whole collection of details and remarks now no longer merely irritated him, but began to oppress him painfully. Wherever he turned, it was impossible not to end with the question: Where is Rita?

In flight, if she had murdered or stolen. But if she had neither murdered nor stolen, then . . .

A moment later he was in the Chief's office, demanding brusquely, "Can you get me a blank search warrant?"

"Things aren't going so well?" the director of the P. J. smiled. Better than anyone else, he knew Maigret's moods. "All right, but you'll be dis-

creet about it, won't you, Maigret?"

While the Chief attended to the warrant, Maigret was called to the phone.

"I just thought of something!" Mme. Maigret's voice was excited and worried. "I don't know if I ought to say it over the phone . . ."

"Tell me anyway."

"Supposing that it isn't the one you thought who fired the shot . . ."

"I understand. Go on."

"Supposing, for example, it was her employer . . . you follow me? . . . I've been wondering if maybe she mightn't be still in the house? Maybe held prisoner? Maybe — dead?"

It was touching to behold Mme. Maigret hot on the trail for the first time in her life. But what the Commissioner did not admit was that she had arrived at very nearly the same point he had reached himself.

"Is that all?" he asked ironically.

"Are you making fun of me? Don't you really think —"

"In short, you think that if we institute a search of 17 *nis* —"

"Just think, supposing she's still alive!"

"We'll see . . . And meanwhile, try to make dinner a little more substantial than lunch!"

Mme. Lécuyer, concierge of 17 *bis*, was assuredly a splendid woman who did her best to bring up her children properly; but she had the serious defect of getting easily rattled.

"You know how it is," she confessed, "with all these people questioning me ever since early morning, I don't know whether I'm coming or going . . ."

"Calm yourself, Mme. Lécuyer." Maigret had installed himself by the window, near the boy who, as on the previous evening, was doing his homework.

"I've never done any harm to anybody and —"

"Nobody's accusing you of doing anybody any harm. All we're asking you is to try to remember . . . How many tenants have you?"

"Twenty-two. I should tell you the second and third floors are split up into little apartments, one and two rooms."

"None of these tenants had any relations with the Kroftas?"

"How would they? The Kroftas are rich people — they have their car and their chauffeur."

"By the way, do you know where they keep their car?"

"Over by the Boulevard Henri IV. The chauffeur hardly ever comes here."

"Did he come yesterday afternoon?"

"I don't know any more . . . I think so."

"With the car?"

"No. The car hasn't been here yesterday or today. Of course the Kroftas haven't really what you'd call gone out . . ."

"Let's see: was the chauffeur in the house yesterday around five?"

"No. He left at four thirty — I remember because my boy had just got home from school."

"That's right," the boy agreed, raising his head from his book.

"Now one more question: Were any big boxes taken out of here after five? For instance, was there a moving van parked around here?"

"No, I'm certain of it."

"Nobody brought out any furniture, or packing-cases, or cumbersome packages?"

"What do you want me to say?" she groaned. "How do I even know how big a package you'd call cumbersome?"

"A package capable of containing, for instance, a human corpse."

"The saints preserve us! Is *that* what you're thinking of? You think somebody's gone and murdered somebody in my house?"

"Go over your memory hour by hour."

"No! I didn't see anything like that."

"No truck, no wagon, not even a handcart came in here?"

"I just told you!"

"There's no empty room in the house? All your vacancies are filled?"

"Every blessed one. There was one single room on the third, but that's been rented for two months."

At this moment the boy raised his head. Without taking his pen-holder from his mouth, he said, "And the piano, mama?"

"What do you think that has to do with it? That wasn't a box going out; that was a box coming in — and having a frightful time with the staircase."

"They delivered a piano?"

"Yesterday at six thirty."

"What company?"

"I don't know. There wasn't any name on the truck. It didn't come in here in the court. It was a big packing-case and three men worked at it for a good hour."

"They took the case away?"

"No. M. Lucien came down with the men to treat them to a drink at the corner bar."

"Who's M. Lucien?"

"The man who rents that little room I was talking about. He's been up there two months — very quiet and well-behaved. They say he composes music."

"He's acquainted with the Krofftas?"

"I don't think he's ever laid eyes on them."

"He was in his room yesterday at five?"

"He came in around four thirty — about when the chauffeur left."

"Did he tell you then that he was expecting a piano?"

"No, he just asked me if there was any mail for him."

"Did he get much?"

"Very little."

"Thank you, Madame Lécuyer. Just stay calm, now."

Maigret went out and gave his instructions to the two inspectors who were patrolling the Place des Vosges. Then he re-entered the building, hastily passing the loge for fear the concierge's berattlement might finally prove contagious.

Maigret did not stop at the first floor, nor at the second. On the third, he leaned over and made out the scratches which the piano had left on the floor. They seemed to end at the fourth door. He knocked, and heard muffled steps, like those of an old lady in bed-slippers, then a cautious murmur of, "Who is it?"

"M. Lucien, please?"

"Next door."

But at the same moment another voice stammered several words. The door opened a crack, and a fat old woman tried to make out Maigret's face in the dim light. "He isn't here right now, M. Lucien isn't. Can I take a message for him?"

Automatically Maigret leaned forward to make out the second person who was in the room.

In the half-light he could catch only a cluttered glimpse of old furniture, old clothes, and frightful ornaments. Through the crack of the door came that odor peculiar to the rooms of old people.

Near the sewing machine a woman sat, stiffly, like a formal caller. Inspector Maigret experienced the greatest surprise of his career as he recognized his own wife!

"I happened to hear that Mlle. Augustine did a little dressmaking," Mme. Maigret hastened to say. "I came to see her about that and we got to talking . . . Do you know, she has the room right next to that maid who stole the jewels!"

Maigret shrugged his shoulders, wondering what his wife was leading up to.

"The funniest thing is that her other neighbor had a piano delivered yesterday — an enormous packing-case. It must be still there . . ."

This time Maigret frowned, furious that his wife had, God knows how, reached the same results that he had. "Since M. Lucien isn't in, I'd better go down," he announced.

He didn't lose a minute. The two inspectors from the Place des Vosges were posted on the staircase, not far from the Kroftas' door. A locksmith was sent for, and likewise the Commissioner from the district station.

In short order, M. Lucien's door was forced. In the room was nothing but a cheap piano, a chair, a bed, a wardrobe, and, against the wall, the packing-case in which the piano had been brought.

"Open that case!" Maigret ordered. The bets were down now, and he was frankly scared. He dared not touch it himself, for fear of finding it empty. He pretended to fill his pipe calmly, and he tried not to tremble when his man called out, "Inspector! A woman!"

"I know."

"She's alive!"

And he repeated, "I know." If there was a woman in the case, it had to be the notorious Rita; and he was morally certain she was alive, and tightly bound and gagged. "Try to bring her to. Call a doctor."

In the hall he passed Mlle. Augustine and his wife. Mme. Maigret's

smile was unique in the annals of their household — a smile to suggest the disquieting possibility that she might exchange the role of docile spouse for that of detective.

As the Inspector reached the first floor, the door of the Kroftas' apartment opened. Krofta himself was there, hyperexcited but still holding himself well in hand.

"Isn't M. Maigret here?" he demanded of the two inspectors.

"Here I am, M. Krofta."

"Somebody wants you on the telephone. From the Ministry of the Interior."

This was not quite correct. It was the Chief of the P. J. "That you, Maigret? I thought I could reach you there. While you've been up to God knows what in that house, the person whose phone you're using has put the wind up at his Embassy, and they've taken it up with the Foreign Office. The Foreign Office!"

"I get it," Maigret groaned.

"Maigret, would you believe it? A *spy* case! The directive is to keep everything quiet, no statements to the press. For a long time Krofta's been his country's official agent in France. He's the *clearing-house* for the reports from secret agents."

Krofta had remained in a corner of the room, pale but smiling. Now as Maigret hung up, he suggested, "May I offer you any refreshment, my dear Inspector?"

"No, thank you."

"It appears that you have found my servant?"

And the Commissioner hammered out each syllable: "I found her in time — yes, M. Krofta! Good day!"

"As for me," Mme. Maigret said as she put the finishing touches to her chocolate crème, "as soon as they told me the maid didn't know how to crochet . . ."

"Inspectoress," her husband nodded approvingly.

"They really could convey important information that way, for hours every day? I don't know if I understand it all, but this girl, this Rita, was really spending all her time spying on her employers?"

Maigret hated to explain a case, but under these circumstances it seemed too cruel to leave Mme. Maigret in the dark. "She was spying on spies," he grunted. He shrugged his shoulders irritatedly. "That's why, just when I can lay my hands on the whole gang, they tell me, 'Not a move! Silence and discretion!' "

"That can't be very nice for you," she sighed, as though this excused all Maigret's previous bad tempers.

"A fine case, just the same — with flashes of genius. Look at the situation: On one side the Kroftas, with all the reports for their government passing through their hands.

"On the other side, a woman and a man — Rita and the 'old' gentleman of the bench, your strange admirer. Who were they working for? That's no concern of mine now. That's up to the Deuxième Bureau; spies are their meat. Probably they were agents of

another power, possibly of a different faction in their own country.

"In any event, they needed the daily centralized reports at Krofta's, and Rita got hold of them without too much trouble. But how to pass them on? Spies are distrustful people. The least suspicious move would ruin her.

"Hence the idea of the old gallant and the bench. And the brilliant idea of the crocheting. Rita's hands were far more skillful than they seemed: *their jerky movements produced, not standard crochet patterns, but whole long messages in Morse code!*

"Across from Rita her accomplice commits the whole business to memory. It's an example of the incredible patience of some secret agents. Whatever he learns, he has to remember word for word for hours until he spends the night typing it out in his rooms at Corbeill, near the mills.

"I wonder how Krofta caught on to their signals — two regular turns around the place, meaning all's well, and so on."

Mme. Maigret listened without daring to express the slightest opinion, she was so afraid that Maigret might stop.

"Now you know as much as I do. The Kroftas had to get rid of the man first, then take care of Rita — but not kill her; they needed to know who she was working for and how much she'd been able to transmit.

"For some time Krofta had kept a bodyguard installed in the house — M. Lucien, a first-rate shot. Krofta telephones. Lucien arrives, loses no time in going to the girl's room and using his compressed air rifle to strike down the indicated target.

"Nobody sees anything, nobody hears anything — excepting Rita. She still has to bring the children back and play out the comedy, or she knows that the distant marksman will bring her down too.

"She knows what will happen to her. They try to force her secrets out of her. She resists . . . so far. They threaten her with death, and order the piano for M. Lucien so that the case can be used to carry out the body. And meanwhile, who'll think of looking for her in the musician's room?

"Krofta's already arranging his defense. He makes his complaint, announces the maid's disappearance, invents the theft of the jewels . . ."

There was silence. Evening was settling over the Place. The sky was turning blue, and the four fountains were tuning their silvery sound to the liquid silver of the moon.

"And then you took over!" Mme. Maigret said, suddenly and admiringly.

He looked at her dubiously. She went on, "It's so annoying, the way they kept you from pushing it through just at the best moment."

Then he burst out in unconvincing rage, "You know what's even more annoying? Finding you there in Mlle. Augustine's room! You, getting ahead of me! Though after all the case meant more to you," he smiled. "He was your admirer."

THE GOLDEN TWENTY

In the issues of EQMM from January 1950 through December 1950 we brought you the twelve best detective short stories ever written — in the combined opinion of a Blue Ribbon Jury which consisted 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 (serving as twelfth talesmen) Ellery Queen. We called this series of stories THE GOLDEN DOZEN, *and so many readers found the tales of such outstanding excellence, so beautifully wrought and so beautifully told, that they wrote in and asked us to reprint other stories from the 83 nominated by our original Board of Experts. So we decided to select eight more which, with the original dozen, make up what might be called* THE GOLDEN TWENTY. *Here is a list of the additional eight favorites, all to appear in EQMM at irregular intervals during the course of the next year or two:*

Back for Christmas . . . . . by John Collier
Two Bottles of Relish . . . . . by Lord Dunsany
Philomel Cottage . . . . . by Agatha Christie
The Perfect Crime . . . . . by Ben Ray Redman
Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage . . by Ernest Bramah
The Red Silk Scarf . . . . . by Maurice Leblanc
The Door Key . . . . . by Frederick Irving Anderson
Faith, Hope and Charity . . . . . by Irvin S. Cobb

It would take a microscopic critical eye to distinguish between the average quality of the additional eight stories and the original twelve. Surely the twenty tales, by twenty different authors, are as close as any Private-I Panel of mere mortals could get to the crème de la *crime, the best detective short stories of all time . . .*

We continue THE GOLDEN DOZEN *with John Collier's "Back for Christmas," one of the top-favorite short stories of many serious critics. Take Clifton Fadiman, for example: "Back for Christmas" is Mr. Fadiman's candidate as the finest crime short story he knows — or, at least, knew of up to 1943. We deduce this fact from the section Mr. Fadiman edited in* THE THREE READERS, *an omnibus of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selected by the Editorial Committee of The Readers Club and published by The Readers Club in 1943 (the other two editors of the committee were Sinclair Lewis and Carl Van Doren). John Collier's "Back for Christmas" was the only crime story which Mr. Fadiman chose as*

"reading that I would like to persuade other people to read." Mr. Fadiman called "Back for Christmas" a "shivery trick of a tale" . . . a "morsel of prose" which "at one time or another aroused my admiration to a pitch of fervency sufficient to turn me into a literary evangelist" . . . "it is a piece of pure, devilishly ingenious manipulation, and I suppose sardonic is the word for its special atmosphere. Mr. Collier has inherited the mantle of Saki, but he adds to that minor master's cynical wit and infernal fancy an extraordinary faculty of invention."

BACK FOR CHRISTMAS

by JOHN COLLIER

"Doctor," said Major Sinclair, "we certainly must have you with us for Christmas." It was afternoon and the Carpenters' living-room was filled with friends who had come to say last-minute farewells to the Doctor and his wife.

"He shall be back," said Mrs. Carpenter. "I promise you."

"It's hardly certain," said Dr. Carpenter. "I'd like nothing better."

"After all," said Mr. Hewitt, "you've contracted to lecture only for three months."

"Anything may happen," said Dr. Carpenter.

"Whatever happens," said Mrs. Carpenter, beaming at them, "he shall be back in England for Christmas. You may all believe me."

They all believed her. The Doctor himself almost believed her. For ten years she had been promising him for dinner parties, garden parties, committees, heaven knows what, and the promises had always been kept.

The farewells began. There was a fluting of compliments on dear Hermione's marvelous arrangements. She and her husband would drive to Southampton that evening. They would embark the following day. No trains, no bustle, no last-minute worries. Certainly the Doctor was marvelously looked after. He would be a great success in America. Especially with Hermione to see to everything. She would have a wonderful time, too. She would see the skyscrapers. Nothing like that in Little Godwearing. But she must be very sure to bring him back. "Yes, I will bring him back. You may rely upon it." He mustn't be persuaded. No extensions. No wonderful post at some super-American hospital. Our infirmary needs him. And he must be back by Christmas. "Yes," Mrs. Carpenter called to the last departing guest, "I shall see to it. He shall be back by Christmas."

The final arrangements for closing the house were very well managed.

The maids soon had the tea things washed up; they came in, said goodbye, and were in time to catch the afternoon bus to Devizes.

Nothing remained but odds and ends, locking doors, seeing that everything was tidy. "Go upstairs," said Hermione, "and change into your brown tweeds. Empty the pockets of that suit before you put it in your bag. I'll see to everything else. All you have to do is not to get in the way."

The Doctor went upstairs and took off the suit he was wearing, but instead of the brown tweeds, he put on an old, dirty bath gown, which he took from the back of his wardrobe. Then, after making one or two little arrangements, he leaned over the head of the stairs and called to his wife, "Hermione! Have you a moment to spare?"

"Of course, dear. I'm just finished."

"Just come up here for a moment. There's something rather extraordinary up here."

Hermione immediately came up. "Good heavens, my dear man!" she said when she saw her husband. "What are you lounging about in that filthy old thing for? I told you to have it burned long ago."

"Who in the world," said the Doctor, "has dropped a gold chain down the bathtub drain?"

"Nobody has, of course," said Hermione. "Nobody wears such a thing."

"Then what is it doing there?" said the Doctor. "Take this flashlight. If you lean right over, you can see it shining, deep down."

"Some Woolworth's bangle off one of the maids," said Hermione. "It can be nothing else." However, she took the flashlight and leaned over, squinting into the drain. The Doctor, raising a short length of lead pipe, struck three times with great force and precision, and tilting the body by the knees, tumbled it into the tub.

He then slipped off the bathrobe and, standing completely naked, unwrapped a towel full of implements and put them into the wash-basin. He spread several sheets of newspaper on the floor and turned once more to his victim.

She was dead, of course — horribly doubled up, like a somersaulter, at one end of the tub. He stood looking at her for a very long time, thinking of absolutely nothing at all. Then he saw how much blood there was and his mind began to move again.

First he pushed and pulled until she lay straight in the bath, then he removed her clothing. In a narrow bathtub this was an extremely clumsy business, but he managed it at last and then turned on the taps. The water rushed into the tub, then dwindled, then died away, and the last of it gurgled down the drain.

"Good God!" he said. "She turned it off at the main."

There was only one thing to do: the Doctor hastily wiped his hands on a towel, opened the bathroom door with a clean corner of the towel, threw it back onto the bath stool, and ran downstairs, barefoot, light as a cat. The cellar door was in a corner of the

entrance hall, under the stairs. He knew just where the cut-off was. He had reason to: he had been pottering about down there for some time past — trying to scrape out a bin for wine, he had told Hermione. He pushed open the cellar door, went down the steep steps, and just before the closing door plunged the cellar into pitch darkness, he put his hand on the tap and turned it on. Then he felt his way back along the grimy wall till he came to the steps. He was about to ascend them when the bell rang.

The Doctor was scarcely aware of the ringing as a sound. It was like a spike of iron pushed slowly up through his stomach. It went on until it reached his brain. Then something broke. He threw himself down in the coal dust on the floor and said, "I'm through. I'm through. . . .

"They've got no right to come. Fools!" he said. Then he heard himself panting. "None of this," he said to himself. "None of this."

He began to revive. He got to his feet, and when the bell rang again the sound passed through him almost painlessly. "Let them go away," he said. Then he heard the front door open. He said, "I don't care." His shoulder came up, like that of a boxer, to shield his face. "I give up," he said.

He heard people calling. "Herbert!" "Hermione!" It was the Wallingfords. "Damn them! They come butting in. People anxious to get off. All naked! And blood and coal dust! I'm done! I'm through! I can't do it."

"Herbert!"

"Hermione!"

"Where the dickens can they be?"

"The car's there."

"Maybe they've popped round to Mrs. Liddell's."

"We must see them."

"Or to the shops, maybe. Something at the last minute."

"Not Hermione. I say, listen! Isn't that someone having a bath? Shall I shout? What about whanging on the door?"

"Sh-h-h! Don't. It might not be tactful."

"No harm in a shout."

"Look, dear. Let's come in on our way back. Hermione said they wouldn't be leaving before seven. They're dining on the way, in Salisbury."

"Think so? All right. Only I want a last drink with old Herbert. He'd be hurt."

"Let's hurry. We can be back by half-past six."

The Doctor heard them walk out and the front door close quietly behind them. He thought, "Half-past six. I can do it."

He crossed the hall, sprang the latch on the front door, went upstairs, and taking his instruments from the wash-basin, finished what he had to do. He came down again, clad in his bath gown, carrying parcel after parcel of toweling or newspaper neatly secured with safety-pins. These he packed carefully into the narrow, deep hole he had made in the corner of the cellar, shoveled in the soil, spread coal dust over all, satisfied him-

self that everything was in order, and went upstairs again. He then thoroughly cleansed the bath, and himself, and the bath again, dressed, and took his wife's clothing and his bath gown to the incinerator.

One or two more little touches and everything was in order. It was only a quarter past six. The Wallingfords were always late; he had only to get into the car and drive off. It was a pity he couldn't wait till after dusk, but he could make a detour to avoid passing through the main street, and even if he was seen driving alone, people would only think Hermione had gone on ahead for some reason and they would forget about it.

Still, he was glad when he had finally got away, entirely unobserved, on the open road, driving into the gathering dusk. He had to drive very carefully; he found himself unable to judge distances; his reactions were abnormally delayed, but that was a detail. When it was quite dark he allowed himself to stop the car on the top of the downs, in order to think.

The stars were superb. He could see the lights of one or two little towns far away on the plain below him. He was exultant. Everything that was to follow was perfectly simple. Marion was waiting in Chicago. She already believed him to be a widower. The lecture people could be put off with a word. He had nothing to do but establish himself in some thriving out-of-the-way town in America and he was safe forever. There were Hermione's clothes, of course, in the suitcases: they could be disposed of through the porthole. Thank heaven she wrote her letters on the typewriter — a little thing like handwriting might have prevented everything. "But there you are," he said. "She was up-to-date, efficient all along the line. Managed everything. Managed herself to death, damn her! . . .

"There's no reason to get excited," he thought. "I'll write a few letters for her, then fewer and fewer. Write myself — always expecting to get back, never quite able to. Keep the house one year, then another, then another; they'll get used to it. Might even come back alone in a year or two and clear it up properly. Nothing easier. But not for Christmas!" He started up the engine and was off.

In New York he felt free at last, really free. He was safe. He could look back with pleasure — at least, after a meal, lighting his cigarette, he could look back with a sort of pleasure — to the minute he had passed in the cellar listening to the bell, the door, and the voices. He could look forward to Marion.

As he strolled through the lobby of his hotel, the clerk, smiling, held up letters for him. It was the first batch from England. Well, what did that matter? It would be fun dashing off the typewritten sheets in Hermione's downright style, signing them with her squiggle, telling everyone what a success his first lecture had been, how thrilled he was with America but how certainly she'd

bring him back for Christmas. Doubts could creep in later.

He glanced over the letters. Most were for Hermione. From the Sinclairs, the Wallingfords, the vicar, and a business letter from Holt & Sons, Builders and Decorators.

He stood in the lounge, people brushing by him. He opened the letters with his thumb, reading here and there, smiling. They all seemed very confident he would be back for Christmas. They relied on Hermione. "That's where they make their big mistake," said the Doctor, who had taken to American phrases. The builder's letter he kept to the last. Some bill, probably. It was:

DEAR MADAM,

We are in receipt of your kind acceptance of estimate as below, and also a key.

We beg to repeat you may have every confidence in same being ready in ample time for Christmas present as stated. We are setting men to work this week.

We are, Madam,

Yours faithfully,

PAUL HOLT & SONS

To excavating, building up, suitably lining one sunken wine bin in cellar as indicated, using best materials, making good, etc.

..... £38/0/0

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946

of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, published monthly at Concord, New Hampshire, for October 1, 1950

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Editor*, Ellery Queen, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, Robert P. Mills, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; *General Manager*, Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. 2. The owners are: Mercury Publications, Inc., 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Lawrence E. Spivak, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y.; Joseph W. Ferman, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. (Signed) Joseph W. Ferman, General Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1950. [Seal] Ethel S. Aldinger, *Notary Public*. (My commission expires March 30, 1952.)

THE CONFESSION

by MAURICE LEVEL

I stood still for a moment before the open door, hesitating, and it was only when the old woman who had been sent to bring me said for the second time, "It is here," that I went in.

At first I could see nothing but the lamp screened by a low-drawn shade; then I distinguished on the wall the motionless shadow of a recumbent body, long and thin, with sharp features. A vague odor of ether floated round me. But for the sound of the rain beating on the slates of the roof and the dull howling of the wind in the empty chimney, the silence was death-like.

"Monsieur," said the old woman gently as she bent over what I now saw was a bed, "Monsieur! . . . the gentleman you asked for is here."

The shadow raised itself, and a faint voice said:

"Very well . . . leave us, Madame . . ."

When she had shut the door after her, the voice went on:

"Come nearer, Monsieur. I am almost blind, I have a buzzing in my ears, and I hear very badly . . . Here, quite close to me, there ought to be a chair . . . Pardon me for having sent for you, but I have something very grave to tell you."

The eyes in the face that craned towards me were wide open in a sort of stare, and he trembled as he faltered:

"But first, are you Monsieur Gernou? Am I speaking to Monsieur Gernou, leader of the bar?"

"Yes."

He sighed as if with relief.

"Then at last I can make my confession. I signed my letter Perier, but that is not my real name. It is possible that if Death, so near me now, had not already changed my face, you might vaguely recognize me. But no matter . . .

"Some years ago, many long years, I was Public Prosecutor for the Republic. I was one of the men of whom people say: 'He has a brilliant future before him,' and I had resolved to have one. I only needed a chance to prove my ability: a case at the assizes gave me that chance. It was in a small town. The crime was one that would not have attracted much attention in Paris, but there it aroused passionate interest, and as I listened to the reading of the accusation I saw there would be a big struggle. The evidence against the prisoner was of the gravest nature, but it lacked the determining factor that will frequently draw a confession from the criminal, or the equivalent of a confession. The man made a desperate defense. A feeling of doubt,

almost of sympathy, ran through the court, and you know how great the power of that feeling is.

"But such influences do not affect a magistrate. I answered all the denials by bringing forward facts that made a strong chain of circumstantial evidence. I turned the life of the man inside out and revealed all his weak points and wrongdoings. I gave the jury a vivid description of the crime, and as a hound leads the hunters to the quarry, I ended by pointing to the accused as the criminal. Counsel for the defense answered my arguments, did his best to fight me, but it was useless. I had asked for the head of the man: I got it.

"Any sympathy I might have felt for the prisoner was quickly stifled by pride in my own eloquence. The condemnation was both the victory of the law and a great personal triumph for me.

"I saw the man again on the morning of the execution. I went to watch them wake him and prepare him for the scaffold, and as I looked at his inscrutable face I was suddenly seized with an anguish of mind. Every detail of that sinister hour is still fresh in my memory. He showed no sign of revolt while they bound his arms and shackled his legs. I dared not look at him, for I felt his eyes were fixed on me with an expression of superhuman calm. As he came out of the prison door and faced the guillotine, he cried twice: 'I am innocent!' and the crowds that had been prepared to hiss him suddenly became silent. Then he turned to me and said: 'Watch me die, it will be well worth your while' . . . He embraced the priest and his lawyer . . . He then placed himself unaided on the plank and never flinched during the eternal moment of waiting for the knife. I stood there with my head uncovered. But I, I did not see, having for the moment lost all consciousness of external things.

"During the days that followed my thoughts were too confused for me to understand clearly why I was full of some trouble that seemed to paralyze me. My mind had become obsessed by the death of this man. My colleagues said to me:

" 'It is like that the first time.'

"I believed them, but gradually I became aware that there was a definite reason for my preoccupation: doubt. From the moment I realized this I had no peace of mind. Think of what a magistrate must feel when, after having caused a man to be beheaded, he begins asking himself:

" 'Suppose after all he were not guilty?'

"I fought with all my strength against this idea, trying to convince myself that it was impossible, absurd. I appealed to all that is balanced and logical in my brain and mind, but my reasonings were always cut short by the question: 'What real proof was there?' Then I would think of the last moments of the criminal, would see his calm eyes, would hear his voice. This vision of the scaffold was in my mind one day when someone said to me:

"'How well he defended himself! It is a wonder he did not get off . . . Upon my word, if I had not heard your address to the Court I should be inclined to think he was innocent.'

"And so the magic of words, the force of my will to succeed, were what had quieted the hesitations of this man as they had probably triumphed over those of the jury. I alone had been the cause of his death, and if he were innocent I alone was responsible for the monstrous crime of his execution.

"A man does not accuse himself in this way without trying to put up some sort of a defense, without doing something to absolve his conscience, and in order to deliver myself from these paralyzing doubts I went over the case again. While I reread my notes and examined my documents, my conviction became the same as before; but they were *my* notes, *my* documents, the work of my probably prejudiced mind, of my will enslaved by my desire, my need to find him guilty. I studied the other point of view, the questions put to the accused and his answers, the evidence of the witnesses. To be quite sure about some points that had never been very clear, I examined carefully the place where the crime had been committed, the plan of the streets near the house. I took in my hands the weapon the murderer had used, I found new witnesses who had been left out or neglected, and by the time I had gone over all these details twenty times I had come to the definite conclusion, now not to be shaken, that the man was innocent . . . And as if to crown my remorse, a brilliant rise in position was offered me!

"I was very cowardly, Monsieur, for I believed I did enough in tendering my resignation without assigning any reason for it. I traveled. Alas! forgetfulness does not lie at the end of long roads . . . To do something to expiate the irreparable wrong I had caused became my only desire in life. But the man was a vagabond, without family, without friends.

"There was one thing I could have done, the only worthy thing: I could have confessed my mistake. I had not the courage to do it. I was afraid of the anger, the scorn of my colleagues. Finally, I decided that I would try to atone by using my fortune to relieve those who were in great trouble, above all, to help those who were guilty. Who had a better right than I to try to prevent men being condemned?

"I turned my back on all the joys of life, renounced all comfort and ease, took no rest. Forgotten by everyone, I have lived in solitude, and aged prematurely. I have reduced the needs of life to a minimum. For months I have lodged in this attic, and it is here I contracted the illness of which I am dying. I shall die here, I wish to die here . . . And now, Monsieur, I have come to what I want to ask you."

His voice became so low I had to watch his trembling lips to help myself to understand his words.

"I do not wish this story to die with me. I want you to make it known as a lesson for those whose duty it is to punish with justice and not because they are there *to punish in any case;* I want it to help bring the Specter of the Irreparable before the Public Prosecutor when it is his duty to ask for a condemnation."

"I will do as you ask," I assured him.

His face was livid, and his hand shook as he gasped:

"But that is not all. I still have some money that I have not yet had time to distribute among those who have been unfortunate. It is there — in that chest of drawers. I want you to give it to them when I am gone — not in my name, but in that of the man who was executed because of my mistake thirty years ago. Give it to them in the name of Ranaille."

I started.

"Ranaille? But it was I who defended him! I was . . ."

He bowed his head.

"I know. That is why I asked you to come. It was to you I owed this confession. I am Deroux, the Public Prosecutor." He tried to lift his arms towards the ceiling, murmuring: "Ranaille . . . Ranaille . . ."

Did I betray a professional secret? Was I guilty of a breach of rules that ought to be binding? The pitiful spectacle of this dying man drew the truth from me in spite of myself.

"Monsieur Deroux! Monsieur Deroux! Ranaille was guilty . . . He confessed it as he went to the scaffold . . . He told me when he bid me goodbye there . . ."

But he had already fallen back on the pillow. I have always tried to believe that he heard me.

NEXT MONTH . . .

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE will bring you an unusual novelette featuring Old Judge Priest as detective —

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE: BARRY PEROWNE

When Barry Perowne was a kid of eight, he frequently used to pass a certain fascinating little shop in the town where he lived. It was the shop of a Phrenologist and Herbalist. It had yellow charts and dusty plaster heads in the window, and also bottles of bilious-looking pickling fluid in which were preserved enormous tapeworms and even more hideous trove from the human interior — all bearing their horrible little histories crudely handprinted on bits of cardboard: "Extracted from the Stomach of a Woman of Senegal," etc. The thought of that Woman from Senegal used to make Barry Perowne's flesh creep as, on many a misty winter evening, he glued his nose to that gaslit, shadowy window, feeling his stomach for intimations of serpents, and peering at the "Professor" inside, with his long white coat and his shuffling about among the foreboding mysteries of his curious craft. It is perhaps fortunate that the terrified tot could never raise the necessary fee to have either his stomach sounded or his head examined.

So, when Barry Perowne sought in his memory-pool for a story-idea, to submit to EQMM's annual contest, he fished out that old Phrenologist and Herbalist, and that wonder shop of his boyhood. Then he got to thinking about Lombroso and the brief acceptance of his criminological theories, and he wondered what the reaction would be nowadays of both the police and a jury if a phrenologist's testimony in a murder case depended on some technicality of his profession. Would they listen to the "Professor," or would they snicker? And out of the elixir of these elements, mixed with molecules of more memories, Barry Perowne compounded the unusual tale of Digby Gripper, 70-year-old phrenologist, who proves that while youth must be served, it is sometimes old age that renders the service . . .

THE HEADPRINT

by BARRY PEROWNE

IT HAD been a musical evening. For a few hours Mr. Gripper had been able to forget his worry about his eighteen-year-old ward, Drusilla. Unlike Drusilla, the three daughters of his host, Stefan Artz, were young women of a docile, dutiful character which Mr. Gripper, now saying his good-nights in the small hall of their eighth-floor apartment, benignly approved.

A well-preserved man of seventy, Mr. Gripper was tall and spare, with a clipped, gray mustache, faded blue eyes, and thin hair brushed straight back from a high forehead. He carried

himself so erect that, especially when making use of his ribboned eyeglasses, he inclined slightly backward.

His double-breasted, black, pin-stripe suit was good, but he felt a bit apologetic about his overcoat as his host helped him on with it. A black coat with a velvet collar, it was twenty-five years old.

"A most enjoyable evening," said Mr. Gripper hastily, to divert attention from the debilitated garment. "Oh, most! I fear I made gross errors in the Mozart, but then I must claim indulgence from a family of such delightful talent."

The three young women, whose father was a teacher of music, chorused reassurance as to Mr. Gripper's accomplishment at the pianoforte.

"Soon you will come again," said Stefan Artz, "and we will more good music make. You have a touch of great sensibility."

Mr. Gripper could not forbear a flattered glance at his hands, which were white, of an elegant shape, fastidiously cared for, and deft from the long practice of his own specialized science. He accepted his wide-brimmed black felt hat from Miss April, while Miss May passed him his black woollen gloves, and Miss June with a refined gesture hooked his umbrella over his arm.

Stefan Artz, a stooped, knotted, sturdy man with a shock of hair like the Abbé Liszt's, opened the door.

"The elevator at this hour running will be not," he said. "I will come down with you, Mr. Gripper."

But Mr. Gripper, observing that his host's feet were relaxed in carpet slippers, wouldn't hear of it.

"Quite unnecessary — oh, quite!"

As he started down the stairs, and heard the door of a happy, united family close above him, he wondered what quality it was in Stefan Artz, a widower, that had enabled him to bring up his daughters to such demure, unexceptionable womanhood. Had the musician some innate strength of character that he, Mr. Gripper, lacked? Or had the fact that Artz had been through the mysteriously educative experience of marriage given him a sound approach to the subtle problem of raising girls?

"H'm," said Mr. Gripper.

Already, his worry about Drusilla had returned. It had reattached itself to him. With a hand on the banister which spiraled down around the fancy ironwork of the elevator shaft, he went on down the stone stairs. They were lit by the cold glare of naked bulbs, and his worry kept pace with him like his long shadow leaning over the bare white wall.

He was oppressed by a feeling that he had failed his ward, Drusilla. Though not in affection, surely? He could remember the alarm with which, as a bachelor already well over fifty, he had received from a grateful client called Douglas Brook, who had nothing else to leave except some commonplace specimens of porcelain, the testamentary gift of a four-year-old female. Yet he could remember, too, how quickly his initial panic had

yielded, first to compunction, then to love — the only love, except love for his ill-requited science, that he ever had known.

He remembered very tenderly the little girl with the sherry-gold hair and hyacinth-blue eyes who had spent so many happy hours enthroned in the clients' massive, carved chair in his tiny consulting room. Fascinated by the yellowed charts and dusty, plaster casts around her, making every minute some astonishing new discovery, she would call, through the curtain of wooden beads between the consulting room and the shadowy little shop:

"Whatever's *this*, Uncle Digby?"

Bless her heart, he thought now, how had he failed her? Financially? Perhaps. Yet, fearing the influence of a succession of hired women all more or less eccentric, he had made great sacrifices to send her to good boarding-schools. And she had grown up so swiftly! Each year he had been bewildered by the change in her. Finally, she had come back to him a different Drusilla — dazzling, unpredictable, breathtaking. And so eager —

"I know just what I'm going to do, Uncle Digby. I'm going to work with dance bands — do the vocals, double all the instruments, learn the whole racket. You've spent too much on me already, my sweet. I'm going to do this my own way — take any and every kind of job till I get *in*. Then we'll be rich, have a huge apartment, and the hugest room of all shall be yours, your library, for all your books and charts and casts, Voltaire and Cicero and Seneca and Napoleon, bless their hoary old heads!"

She had been back over a year now, and he never had ceased to worry about her. Her employments seemed so insecure — first, in a fur shop, then in a picture theater, then with a band, and now as a cigarette girl in some dubious resort of nocturnal diversion. It was not the life for which he had educated her, not what he had hoped for her. He was troubled about her hours, the company she kept. But fewer and fewer clients consulted him; he had become vexatiously poor. She was earning her own living. He scarcely felt qualified to offer advice. He could only worry.

He had had hopes for a while, when a young man called Roy Overton had been much in evidence. He was a wiry, cheerful, steady-eyed fellow — as, indeed, he had need to be, for he was in the construction business and pursued his calling at hazardous altitudes. When Roy took Drusilla out, he brought her back at a civilized hour. Mr. Gripper felt easy in his mind. Often he would make Roy stay for a glass of port — Mr. Gripper's one remaining self-indulgence — and had even given him a free sitting in the clients' chair, with reassuring results.

Unfortunately, during the past few weeks, Roy seemed to have faded out. A much less desirable individual had taken his place. Here was the core of Mr. Gripper's worry. He never had met Basil Randle, but had seen him

at a distance and heard talk of him in the neighborhood. He was more than twice Drusilla's age. He was a balding man of forty or more, very well-dressed, not handsome, but with an almost insolent air of vitality and self-confidence.

He lived in this very building where Mr. Gripper was now thoughtfully descending the stairs. Randle was some kind of an inventor; he had an apartment here and rented the roomy basement for use as a workshop. Stefan Artz had spoken of him to Mr. Gripper as a man with an ugly reputation where women were concerned. And Mr. Gripper had heard another friend — Walter Ellice, who with his redhaired wife ran the *Coiffures Fernand* across the road from Mr. Gripper's place — speak of Randle in a similar vein.

Drusilla never had mentioned him or brought him home; but Mr. Gripper knew she was seeing a lot of the man, and knew that as her guardian he should take some action.

"But what?" he thought unhappily. "What?"

At that moment the staircase lights blinked, flared uncannily bright, and went out — the fuse had blown. The red glow of the filaments faded, then died. . . .

Mr. Gripper waited for the lights to come on again, but they didn't. He felt tentatively with his foot for the next stair down. Clutching the banister with his right hand, his gloves in his left, his umbrella hooked on that arm, he continued cautiously to descend.

The stairs seemed to wind downward interminably around the elevator shaft. Mr. Gripper began to wonder how many more there were. He had lost count of how many flights he had come down, but still they went on. But this was extraordinary, thought Mr. Gripper with a pang. What kind of a telescopic building was this? Surely by now he should have reached the lobby at street level? He paused, in misgiving. The darkness seemed strangely hollow around him. No guiding sound of traffic came from the street. But this was ludicrous. Testily, Mr. Gripper stepped down another stair.

There was no stair there.

It was just level floor. Mr. Gripper went stumbling forward. He stumbled against something which knocked his feet out from under him. He felt his hat fly off. The crook of his umbrella hit him painfully in the eye, starting a brief, mad geometry of colored lights. These vanished. He was on hands and knees on coconut matting. Remarkable! He could remember seeing no coconut matting in the lobby or anywhere on the stairs leading up to the Artz apartment. And suddenly he realized what he had done. He had followed the banister all the way down to the basement. He was in Basil Randle's territory . . .

A fine thing if Drusilla's guardian were caught groveling here on all fours! He groped in panic for his hat, gloves, and umbrella, but his left hand

touched something which violently abolished all thought of them.

His hand touched a human head lying on the floor.

His heart stopped. Inhibition clamped him. Only his fingers continued an exploratory life of their own. They shaped themselves appreshensively to the head, endorsing its actuality. A head, male, bald save over the ears and nape, the pulse distinctly sensible. In short, an unconscious man lying at the foot of the stairs.

Mr. Gripper breathed again. He rose dizzily to his feet. He wished he had matches, but he was a nonsmoker. The man was probably Randle, drunk or ill. Help must be fetched.

Now that he realized he was in the basement, Mr. Gripper knew what to do. Turn around, grope forward; yes, here were the stairs. Feel his way up them. Good. Now, he should be in the lobby. Walk straight forward, hands extended. Sure enough, his hands collided with the street door. In a moment he had it open, and here at last was light. It was only the light of a street lamp shining wanly through thin, cool rain, but it was beautiful to him.

He went down the steps, looking up at the building. The first three floors, which were used as offices, were dark, but in the windows of the apartment floors higher up a few lights showed. Evidently it was just the staircase lights which had blown out. He glanced each way along a street seemingly deserted; but then he saw a street lamp gleam fleetingly on the rain-wet oilskin of a distant, sauntering figure. A policeman —

Mr. Gripper called out, but the policeman already had turned a corner, passed from view. Mr. Gripper hurried to the corner. The policeman was fifty yards away. Mr. Gripper shouted again, hurrying after him. The policeman shone his light dazzlingly on Mr. Gripper, with his thin hair plastered down by rain, the flesh puffing purple about his left eye, blood on his mustache.

He said breathlessly, "Officer, there's an unconscious man lying in a basement back here. If you'd come, please —"

"Fighting at your age?" said the policeman, accompanying Mr. Gripper. "How's that?"

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Gripper testily, and explained his misadventure.

"All right," said the policeman. "This the place? Well, let's take a look at him."

Mr. Gripper followed the policeman across the lobby and down the basement stairs. Near the foot of them the policeman checked. He ran the bright circle from his flashlamp over the concrete floor and walls of the passage, halted it briefly at one of a row of fuse boxes on the left-hand wall, then dropped it again to the coconut-matted floor. The light noosed Mr. Gripper's fallen hat, umbrella and woollen gloves, and a man's figure lying against the wall on the right.

The man was Randle, with a pocket-knife driven in just below the lapel of his wine-red dressing-gown.

But what held Mr. Gripper staring incredulously over the policeman's oilskinned shoulder was Randle's position. Mr. Gripper groped for his rib-boned eyeglasses to verify it. He had stumbled *forward* from these stairs. He had touched a man's bald head with his *left* hand. But Randle lay on the right.

Suddenly Mr. Gripper thrust past the policeman, dropped on one knee, cupped his fingers about Randle's head. It was a brief touch, but it was enough to tell him that Randle was dead, and to tell him other things, before the policeman yanked him up with a roar of rage.

"Hands off! What d'you think you're doing? Stand back! Don't touch a thing! This is murder —"

"No doubt," said Mr. Gripper, and he blinked, dazzled, in the glare of the flashlamp. His heart beat violently. "But then — but then, the man whose head I felt just now must have been the murderer. Lying here unconscious. Officer, the cranial indices of the head I felt in the dark, and those of this man Randle's head, are totally different." Mr. Gripper lifted his left hand, cupping it, looking at it as though he never had seen it before. "I have here in my fingertips," he said wonderingly, "an infallible tactile memory-impression of the murderer's head."

"What are you talking about?" the policeman said harshly.

"Scientific phenomena," said Mr. Gripper, with a gesture of his eyeglasses. "I am a professional phrenologist."

At headquarters the police were brusque with Mr. Gripper. His dishevelled appearance and black eye did him no good; and they soon learned that he was the guardian of a young, indiscreet girl who had been attracted to Randle.

But for the evidence of a woman who chanced to have been working late in one of the rear offices over Randle's basement, Mr. Gripper might have actually been charged with the murder.

Fortunately for him, the woman testified to having heard angry voices from the basement, and sounds which might have been those of a struggle, at just the time when, on the evidence of Stefan Artz and his daughters, Mr. Gripper had been taking his leave of them, eight floors above.

That let Mr. Gripper out.

To Mr. Gripper himself it was radiantly clear what had happened. There had been a struggle in the basement passage. In the course of the struggle a fuse box had been broken, plunging the staircases in darkness. Mr. Gripper had groped his way on down to the basement, where Randle lay dead, and where his assailant, like a pugilist unable to keep his feet long enough for his fallen opponent to be counted out, had collapsed. During Mr. Gripper's protracted pursuit of the policeman the murderer had recovered suffi-

ciently to get up — and escape the scene of his crime.

At the inquest Mr. Gripper did not push his own ideas forward dogmatically. He did not repeat the remark he had been startled into making about the differences in cranial indices. When he had been questioned at headquarters about that remark, he had given his views; and he had seen the tolerant grins they elicited. He always had known the police lacked respect for his science. He knew what they thought now. Because the head he had felt in the dark had been bald, and because Randle was bald, they thought that in his stumble down the stairs Mr. Gripper had got himself turned around. They thought that it had been Randle's own head which he had felt in the dark. They would not grant Mr. Gripper, on craniums, the stature of an expert witness.

Well, let them stew in their ignorance. He had no desire to help them catch Randle's murderer. For Drusilla's sake, he was glad Randle was out of the way. Mr. Gripper had defended his science ever since he had left college. He had given his life to it. He resented the attitude of the police. There had been a time when they had been only too eager to run whining and wringing their hands to Lombroso for advice. Now they thought fit to poohpooh him. No matter. Much good would their current fingerprint fetish do them in this case; for according to the evidence at the inquest, there had been no fingerprints on the knife which had killed Basil Randle . . .

Late one autumn afternoon, about a week after the inquest, Mr. Gripper was sitting in his shop. The dim little window was filled with fly-specked charts and plaster casts of notable heads. The shop itself was shadowy, except for the region of the tiny, obliquely-set counter. Charts covered the walls from floor to ceiling, while pedestals of differing heights, on which stood uncommon craniums, jostled for floor space.

Mr. Gripper was sitting on a leather-padded stool behind the counter. He wore a long white coat and his high, shining brow was inclined over his work. From time to time he extended his hand, palm downward, flexing the fingers. Raising his ribboned eyeglasses, he studied these conjurations appraisingly before stooping again to record his conclusions.

For his own purely professional interest he was composing a phrenological chart of Basil Randle's murderer. As the first accredited murderer's head Mr. Gripper had fingered, it prompted stimulating deductions.

A sudden jangle of the bell over the shop door disturbed his train of thought. He rose hopefully, for this was the first time the bell had rung today. But the newcomer was no client. This wiry, gray-eyed young man with lean, tanned cheeks and cropped blond hair was Roy Overton.

Mr. Gripper was deeply pleased to see him. "You've been quite a stran-

ger, Roy. Drusilla is upstairs. I'll call her." He drew aside the curtain of wooden beads which hung in a doorway, up two steps, behind the counter, and called across the glimmer and gloom of the consulting room, "Roy is here, Drusilla."

"Just coming, Uncle Digby."

Mr. Gripper turned back, beaming, to the counter. "She told me she was going out with you this evening, Roy. I was delighted to hear it."

"I only saw her for a couple of minutes at lunchtime today," said Roy. "I've been away on a job, this last week. I read about — about —"

"A shocking business," said Mr. Gripper. "Oh, quite!"

"Drusilla, sir," Roy said, "how's she been?"

Their eyes met, in understanding. And Mr. Gripper said, "A little subdued, Roy. We've not — talked of the matter." He sighed as he sat down on his stool. "I'm such an old fossil," he said, "and she's so very young. I don't seem able to help her."

"She loves you, sir," said Roy.

Mr. Gripper looked up at him.

"I don't need to tell you how I feel about her," Roy said.

Mr. Gripper drew in his breath slowly. "Thank you, Roy, for both those remarks."

Roy struck a clenched fist into the palm of his other hand. "What beats me, sir, is what women can see in a heel like —"

"A passing glamor, Roy," said Mr. Gripper.

"Anyway, *he's* passed," said Roy grimly, "and it's a good thing, too."

Glimmery pale at the glass of the narrow doorway, a face peered into the shop. Mr. Gripper raised his eyeglasses. There seemed to be two men standing in the recess of the doorway — big men in trench-coats and felt hats. Mr. Gripper had seen them both before, recently, and they weren't clients. He rose with sudden uneasiness, as the bell clanged and they came in.

"Good evening, gentlemen."

They ignored him, and the bigger of the two said, "Roy Overton?" and showed Roy something in the palm of his hand.

"Yes?" said Roy blankly.

"You are under arrest on a charge of the murder of Basil Randle," said the big man. "You'll come with us."

The wooden beads of the curtain behind Mr. Gripper rattled suddenly. He turned his head as the curtain was swept aside. Drusilla paused, standing there, slender in a gray suit, hatless, her sherry-gold hair shining, her blue eyes bewildered, looking from one to another of them.

"Roy, what's happening?"

"We've had our evening, I'm afraid," said Roy. "But don't worry, Drusilla. It's some mistake."

"Mistake?" said Mr. Gripper. "It's fantastic — oh, quite! Officer, you can't arrest this young man. I have already testified that the murderer was *bald*. He —"

The detective turned his back on Mr. Gripper. He steered Roy to the door, and the other detective opened

it, to a shrill clangor from the bell.

Mr. Gripper threw up the flap of the counter, moved after them, brandishing his eyeglasses. "I assure you," he said earnestly, "that there was no disorientation on my part. It was *not* Randle's own head that I felt. The cranial indices were totally different. Can't you understand? It is a matter of science — pure science. I have here a chart in progress —"

The door closed in his face. The bell tossed on its rusty spring. He looked around at Drusilla. She stood with her slim hands pressed to her face.

Mr. Gripper compressed his lips under his clipped mustache. He shot the bolt of the door, pulled down the shade on which the word *CLOSED*, in big letters, showed reversed through the canvas. He went to her, put his hands gently on her shoulders. She was only eighteen. After all, she didn't know so much of the world. She was frightened. He felt her tremble.

"It's my fault, all my fault," she said. "They think he did it because of me — because — But he couldn't — he *couldn't* have done it, Uncle Digby!"

"He's innocent," said Mr. Gripper. "Come, dear."

He made her sit down in the clients' chair in the consulting room — the great, carven chair, all crowded round with charts and plaster casts, where as a little girl she had spent so many happy hours. He felt strong and protective as he looked down at her.

"As I understand it, Roy was away on his job at the time," he said. "However, it would seem he was not so far from town that he couldn't get in and out in a night. And evidently he has no alibi. I, of course, know that he's innocent. The trouble is, the police will not accept my testimony as that of a scientific expert. They crowd their courtrooms full of self-styled professors in all the modern moonshine of fingerprints, ballistics, psychiatry. But an old-established phrenologist? Dear me, no! Him they disregard. Him they dismiss," said Mr. Gripper bitterly, "with the derogatory epithet, *Bumps!* Very well. I should have scorned to intervene in this matter had there not now arisen a possibility of a miscarriage of justice. I shall now take action."

"But what can you do, Uncle Digby?"

"I can identify the murderer," said Mr. Gripper, flexing his fingers. "I can identify him. I can then indicate him to the police. I can then insist that searching inquiries be made into *his* possible motives, *his* possible opportunity."

"But —"

"He is probably a man of the neighborhood," pursued Mr. Gripper, "since Randle's — h'm — interests seem to have been — h'm — close to home. I have to look for a head, bald except over the ears and nape, and technically of a type — fortunately for us — by no means two-a-penny. When I detect a head approximating those general specifications, the brief-

est laying on of my hand will be sufficient for me to be *quite sure!* Oh, quite!" said Mr. Gripper, with a forensic flash of his eyeglasses.

"But, Uncle Digby," Drusilla said doubtfully, "won't it be like looking for a needle in a haystack? Walking the streets, riding in buses, in elevators — at random —"

"Tchah, tchah, my dear," said Mr. Gripper. He was masterful, inspired; there were two bright spots of color in his cheeks. "Setting aside the all too neglected chair of the phrenologist," he said, "where is the male head, in its greatest variety and most abject helplessness, to be studied and stroked at leisure? Come, tell me!"

Taking her hand, he held aside the bead curtain, drew her across the shop to the door. He let up the shade with a clatter.

"There!" said Mr. Gripper.

Above a double-fronted shop across the rainy street a loop of lilac neon-tube pulsed around the legend:

COIFFURES FERNAND
LADIES GENTLEMEN
Walter Ellice, Prop.

Walter Ellice, a thin-faced, brown-haired, melancholy man, listened glumly when Mr. Gripper laid the situation before him.

"Sounds like an awful long shot to me," said Walter. "But, at that, if the man you're after *does* belong to the neighborhood, then he probably uses my shop. All right, Digby, just what do you want to do?"

Mr. Gripper told him. And all next day, with the connivance of the Ellices, he occupied the outermost of the ladies' cubicles.

From this lurking place, closing a bachelor's ears to scandals being reviewed by Beryl Ellice and a customer in the adjoining cubicle, he was able to keep a keen eye on the two chairs in the gentlemen's salon without arousing the curiosity of acquaintances.

Whenever the turn came for a bald or balding man to take a chair, Walter or his assistant did not attend the customer immediately, but glanced toward the curtained cubicle for a signal from Mr. Gripper.

It was a long vigil. Feminine sibilances mingled with the drone of men's voices, the nibble and snip of scissors, the whirr of clippers, the whoosh of talcum-bulbs, the gurgle of lotion bottles, the slapping of jowls, the seethe of stropped razors.

It was nearly five o'clock when Mr. Gripper tensed in sudden excitement. A heavy, blue-jowled, well-dressed man, bald except over the ears and nape, was taking Walter's chair. The man was a stranger to Mr. Gripper, yet his head had a familiar look.

Walter, turning to the hot-towel cabinet, glanced inquiringly toward the slightly parted curtains of the cubicle. Mr. Gripper gave the curtains a little shake — the signal. Then he entered the salon as though he belonged there. From the breast-pocket of the long white coat which he wore in his own business protruded, now, a comb and razor.

Walter, standing by the towel cabinet, took a grip on a heavy metal hair-dryer, watching warily. Mr. Gripper shook out a sheet. His heart was pounding as though it would stifle him. He held the sheet for the customer to insert his arms in the sleeves. Mr. Gripper's fingers shook as he tucked in the sheet. He held his breath. He passed his hand lightly over the customer's head.

He met the man's eyes, his dark scowl, in the mirror.

Mr. Gripper smiled shakily. "Scalp a little tight, sir," he said.

The man grunted. Mr. Gripper glanced at Walter, shook his head slightly. Walter put down the hair-dryer. He went to the customer, and Mr. Gripper, as though he were an odd-job man about the place, returned to his cubicle.

He was glad to sit down there in the warm, scented obscurity. His knees felt weak under him. His heart still labored. He dabbed at his forehead with his handkerchief. He felt the weight of his seventy years, every one of them. He had had no idea that practical detective work was so nervously taxing.

He sat there looking at a vision of days, maybe weeks, of this vigil.

They were closing up the shop by the time Mr. Gripper began to feel more like himself. He emerged from the cubicle, and Walter, closing the door behind the departing assistant, turned and looked at Mr. Gripper.

"That was quite a moment," said Walter.

"It *was* a strain," admitted Mr. Gripper.

"I don't know," said Walter, folding towels for the hot cabinet. "Don't you think maybe you're wasting your time? You might sit there in that cubicle till —"

"Till this boy Overton is tried and sentenced?" said Mr. Gripper.

He moved to the door. Standing tall in his long white coat, he raised his ribboned eyeglasses, looked across the lamplit, rainy street at the poky little shop with the charts and plaster casts in the window, the word *CLOSED* on the shade of the door, under the legend *D. GRIPPER, PHRENOLOGIST.*

There was a light in the window over the shop. Drusilla was home. She was there, waiting for news, trusting in him. She would be sitting alone at the round mahogany table on which stood his precious cut-glass port decanter. It always had stood there. He liked things just so; he never had liked her to change things. He could see her sitting there, see the sheen of her hair under the light, and her clean-cut, young, troubled face. Everything around her was old, old. It was an old man's room, with its gloomy furniture, its piano with yellowed keys, its glass-fronted bookcase with his favorite leisure reading, *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime*, *Henry Esmond*, *Marius The Epicurean*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *John Inglesant*. It had been an old man's room when she first had come to it.

"I've failed her, Walter," he said.

"I couldn't change. I couldn't. It's no place for her. Can I wonder if she was a little restless, a little wild, when she came back from school? What is wonderful, Walter, is that she came back to me at all. I've lived in the shadows, by my own choice. And she came back to me, in the shadows, because she loved me. She wanted to take me away from them, you know. She was going to make her fortune, and have a big house, and the biggest room of all was to be mine — my library."

Mr. Gripper turned from the door.

"No, Walter," he said. "Her place is with that boy. In this one thing, I *must not* fail her, Walter. This is the last thing I can ever do for her. I must find that man, Walter. I must go on here in your shop. I see no better way."

Walter went on thoughtfully folding the towels, looking down at them. "I don't want to discourage you, Digby," he said. "But isn't it just possible that the police could be right about your having got — well, turned around, that night?"

Mr. Gripper looked at his left hand. He felt a slow, foreboding thump in his chest. For a moment it seemed to him that abysses were cracking open around him. He clenched his hands, to hold them together.

"No!" he said. "No! If that were true, then my whole life — everything I believe in —" He looked across the rainy street again, through the glimmering lights, to the dark little shop with the charts in the window. "No," said Mr. Gripper firmly. "I can find him. I had nothing against him. I wanted him to get away. But now this boy has been arrested. The man has not come forward. And the boy's *innocent*."

He turned back to Walter. The thin-faced hairdresser, with his one-sided, melancholy smile, was looking toward the back of the shop. Mr. Gripper saw that Beryl Ellice was standing near the cubicle, watching them. She was a redheaded, high-breasted, flaunting woman of thirty. Mr. Gripper never had really liked her.

He turned back to Walter.

"Yes, there's that — the boy is innocent," Walter said. "There *is* that." And he sighed. "You're lucky to have something to believe in, Digby," he said, and he looked across at his wife. "All *I* believed in is worthless," said Walter Ellice.

Then he put up his hand and peeled off his *toupé*. . . .

$10 in cash to the first reader who correctly identifies an author

Last Christmas your Editors received a message from Mrs. Catherine Rawson, wife of Clayton Rawson, the creator of The Great Merlini. Mrs. Rawson had an old and curious book she wanted us to see . . . The volume bears the title WIDE AWAKE PLEASURE BOOK: Gems of Literature and Art. *It is octavo in size, with old-fashioned color-lithograph covers, showing boys and girls in* fin de siècle *clothes. It is signed "by American Authors and Artists," and was published by D. Lothrop Company of Boston in 1889.*

Yes, it is a curious book. Its unnumbered pages contain stories, poems, articles, plays, and riddles, all profusely illustrated. The names of some of the contributors are utterly unknown to your Editors, but others represented in the book bring back nostalgic memories — Harriet Prescott Spofford, Grant Allen, Sarah O. Jewett, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Clinton Scollard, Mary E. Wilkins, and Celia Thaxter. The inside back cover advertises Imperial Granum, the Safest and Most Reliable Food for Children and Invalids.

There is also in the book "An Entertainment of Mysteries" — the work of a famous detective-story writer. From this contribution we now give you an excerpt titled "The Blue Wash Mystery," and we challenge you, after reading this museum-piece, to identify the author. We have presented all the clues we dare — indeed, too many.

To the reader who first identifies the author of "The Blue Wash Mystery" correctly, we shall award $10 in cash. To be fair to contestants all over the country, we will accept no answers by telephone or telegraph; please make your submission either by letter or postcard, and the earliest postmark will determine the winner — providing you correctly name the author. All readers may compete except the employees of this publishing house and their relatives, all members of the Rawson family and their relatives, and whatever friends of the Rawsons may already be "in the know." It is understood, of course, that the decision of the judges — the editorial staff of EQMM — will be accepted as final.

Now, who wrote "The Blue Wash Mystery"?

S. O. S. — We are enormously grateful to Mrs. Rawson for showing us her copy of WIDE AWAKE PLEASURE BOOK, *and for letting us transcribe the text of "The Blue Wash Mystery." But now we must return the volume*

to her — it was originally a gift to Mrs. Rawson from her Uncle Ellsworth, and so inscribed. That leaves an empty space on one of our shelves — no, we won't even tell you the initial (our books are arranged alphabetically). All attempts on our part to locate another copy of the book have failed — but we want that curious volume in our collection! So, if any reader happens to have a copy of WIDE AWAKE PLEASURE BOOK, *as described above, and is willing to part with it — for another book or for cash — please write to Ellery Queen posthaste.*

THE BLUE WASH MYSTERY

by ?

ONE summer day, several years ago now, a gentleman was walking down Broadway, when he encountered Mr. Hardy of the firm of Hanson, Gregg & Hardy, House Painters and Decorators. Being friends, they both stopped.

"Well met," cried the former. "I am just on my way to spend a couple of weeks with my family at Lake George, and your face reminds me of a pleasant surprise I can give my wife upon our return. Our front parlor needs to be freshly frescoed and painted, or so she has been saying for the last six months. Now if it could be done while I am gone, her wishes would be gratified and I would escape a confounded nuisance. What do you think about it? Can you manage to do it at such short notice?"

"Yes," was the sturdy reply, "if you can let us into the house today. I have two men on hand waiting for orders this morning. If I could make use of them I think there would be no difficulty about the matter."

"But I haven't the key — I gave it to Henry, who is going to sleep in the house while I am gone, and he went to Newark this morning and won't be home till midnight. Won't tomorrow do? Or stay, I have an idea. Our house is a corner one as you know, and my room looks out on G— Street. If your men will put a ladder up on that side of the house, they can get in through the farther window on the second floor. I left it up this morning with injunctions to Henry to close it when he came home tonight. Won't that do? The furniture you can put in the back room, the carpet you can cover up — anything so my wife gets her surprise."

"Well, we'll try."

And the gentlemen parted.

Now to you lady readers, the mystery will be that any man in his sane mind would dare to order his parlor furniture removed and the ceiling torn over a first-class axminster carpet, without warning his wife of the destruction that loomed over her

favorite property. But that is not the mystery of this tale. The mystery of this story is one that a man can comprehend, even a boy, I think. So listen and be patient while I relate a few further facts.

Well, then, Mr. Hardy, who was of a prompt and energetic disposition, went immediately to his store and notified his two men of what he wanted done. Being fully engaged that morning, he could not go with them himself, but he told them expressly where the house was and by what means they were to enter, adding that he would be with them by noon when he hoped they would have the walls scraped and the blue wash on, ready for whatever final coloring he should decide upon employing.

"Remember," said he, "the large double-house on the northeast corner of G— Street and Seventh Avenue. You cannot mistake it as there is but one house of that sort on the block." And conscious of having displayed the efficiency of his character, he left the store to attend to the business more immediately demanding his attention.

The men started. Pushing before them their hand-cart with its long ladder, they proceeded slowly uptown, and arriving at G— Street, turned down towards the Seventh Avenue. Soon they came to a corner on which was a large double-house. Looking up, they saw it was closed, all but the one window on the second floor which they had expected to find open. Stopping, they put up their ladder, entered the house, made their way unmolested to the parlor, carried out the furniture into the back room, tore up the carpet and laid it in a heap in the centre. Then they scraped the walls and having put on the blue wash as had been ordered, went upstairs to look out of the window by which they had entered, in order to see if Mr. Hardy was coming. He was. He was just passing the corner. Without a glance in their direction, he was going quickly by, when one of the men whistled. That made him stop. Astonished, almost aghast, he looked up.

"What are you doing here?" cried he, coming hastily to the foot of the ladder.

"Scraping the walls as you ordered," exclaimed the man, alarmed at the expression on the face that met his gaze from below.

"But this is not the house!" cried Mr. Hardy. "I told you the large double-house on the corner of Seventh Avenue. This is Sixth!"

It was true. The man, misled by the appearance of things, had failed to notice what avenue they were on and had stopped one block short of their real destination.

Shaking the ladder in his wrath, Mr. Hardy cried, "Have you scraped the walls?"

The man nodded.

"Good heavens! And put on the blue wash?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thunder and lightning! — and I don't even know the name of the man who lives here. Is the house empty?"

"Yes, sir, empty, and ready to be swept," said the workman.

"Sweep it then, you idiots, and put things back in their place, while I go and see what can be done."

He went to one of the neighbors, a man he knew, and told him of the mistake his men had made, and asked who lived in the house thus invaded. He was told:

"A Mr. Crippens, sir. The bitterest old curmudgeon and the worst man to irritate you ever saw. Once let him know that anyone has dared to invade his premises and do what you have done, and no amount of apology — no, nor damages either — would ever appease him. He would hound you and hinder you and get into your way all the rest of your life. Nothing is too mean for him to do, nothing too much trouble. You might as well rouse the Evil One himself."

"But what is to be done, then?" exclaimed Mr. Hardy in dismay.

"Nothing. Take off your men, shut up the house, and keep quiet. The neighbors are all away but myself and you may be sure he will learn nothing from me. Let him stamp his feet and howl over the matter if he will. 'Twill ease his mind and do him just as much good as if he spent time and money in ruining the business of a respectable man."

And Mr. Hardy partially followed this advice. He had the carpet put back and the furniture restored to its place, left a suitable sum of money on the mantel, but beyond that did nothing by way of explanation or remedy for the havoc he had caused.

And now what is the mystery? The mystery is this. What did that same old curmudgeon and his family think when they returned to their home and found the walls of their parlor denuded of every particle of paint? What explanation were they ever able to make to themselves of this startling occurrence? And if any of them are living yet, what do they think today when they remember the surprise of that moment and how the long years have passed without offering them any solution to the enigma?

SPECIAL POSTHUMOUS AWARD: FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

Frederick Irving Anderson, that grand old man of letters, died on December 24, 1947, at the age of 70. When his sister discovered an unpublished manuscript among her brother's effects, and sent it to us, we thought it so typical of FIA's unique style that we entered the story in EQMM's annual contest and finally gave it a special posthumous award. Then we asked Charles Honce, the well-known newspaperman, who was FIA's closest friend in the last decade of FIA's life, to write a tribute to the most underrated and neglected storyteller of his generation. Here are some excerpts from Mr. Honce's beautiful "In Memoriam":

"When Frederick Irving Anderson died one of my gods departed.

"He was a god because he created for me a whole new mythology of Manhattan, peopling the everyday town I know with characters of fabulous proportions engaged in incredible enterprises . . .

"What Anderson brought to all his work was a distinctive and occasionally bemusing style of progression. Whether he wrote about detectives or composers or industrial magnates, that style unkinked itself in a slow, circuitous, and oblique manner . . . Once, sitting under the stars at his hillside home near East Jamaica, Vermont, he said to me: 'It has always been my ambition to write one story and to tell an entirely different story between the lines.'

"'What do you mean?' I laughed. 'You do that in everything you write.' . . .

"So you mustn't read his stories fast. You might miss a 'sign post.' And don't look for the usual word if Anderson can find a more alluring and perhaps a more confusing one . . .

"My wife and I visited Anderson at East Jamaica at least a couple of times a year from 1940 on. I always took along my best Scotch and we had grand times talking about books and men . . . If it was winter, the klatsch was in front of the fireplace in the low-ceilinged living-room of his rambling old New England farmhouse; but if the weather was nice, we sat in his sister's herb garden until the stars were faint . . . East Jamaica is near Brattleboro, in the Kipling country of the Naulakha period, and many a grand tour we made of that area . . . Anderson liked his Vermont retreat . . . Perhaps his feeling for the quiet life he was forced to lead is best expressed in these words from a 1942 letter: 'These are grand days, with eighteen inches of new snow, as light as thistledown, and the mercury hitting 20 below now and then o' nights. I sit here eating apples and pop-

corn, and throwing wood on the fire, and reading, and wondering what the poor wretches who live in cities get out of this life.' . . .

"The lovers of Frederick Irving Anderson's work are few these days and I don't suppose all the high heavening in the world will do any good. I wish it were otherwise. But the average reader of today is keyed to a faster pace than may be found in the dreamlike movement of an Anderson short story . . . Perhaps some later-generation critic will come upon his tales, be bowled over by the discovery, and begin whooping it up anew for FIA. That would be fine."

THE MAN FROM THE DEATH HOUSE

by FREDERICK IRVING ANDERSON

A FEW minutes before the hour of four, on the afternoon of the 18th (five hours after Isidore Carmen, the murderer, had his normal expectancy of life restored to him, on a writ of error), there came to a stop in front of an ancient though still elegant apartment house on the south side of the Park, opposite the job in the wall where the cab horses stand all day with drooping heads and one knee akimbo, first one equipage, then two, and immediately, a queue of limousines and taxis and towncars — separated out of the drifting eddies of traffic by that strange fractional distillation of common purpose. They were of the upper distillates, the more volatile fractions, as would have been foretold by a shrewd observer as much as half an hour before. Indeed, as early as three o'clock, in spite of a light snowfall and a chill crosstown wind, loiterers began to gather in little clusters before the house. By three thirty the concentration was sufficiently dense to attract passers-by.

"What's going on?" asked a citizen, noting the large number of loiterers.

The policeman appealed to shook his head. "Rubbernecks," he explained. He went to his call box and put in a call. And a moment later the nerves at Police Headquarters, functioning quietly, gathered ten policemen, playing checkers in a back room, and sent them to the spot, shivering in the damp chill.

But there was nothing to do. These rubbernecks are harmless souls. They attend all de luxe public functions, stand for hours in all weather — for the simple pleasure of staring, zoo fashion, as the great, the near great, and the merely fortunate, pass in and out. Via their grapevine telegraph, which never fails, they had been informed that Cloquet, the young Belgian genius of the pianoforte, was to privately unveil his rumored curve of the *cantabile* here this afternoon, for

the ravishment of the very few — for Art, like Wall Street, has its way of discounting good as well as bad news. In another year or two the young man would garner the abundant meeds of fame; but today he was merely a hushed secret. There was no line in the newspapers. There were whole pages about Isidore Carmen, the man from the death house.

As the first arriving equipage came to a halt, a door-opener (one of those useless industries disallowed during the war but since restored) sprang forward with alacrity. But before he could turn the door handle and release the passenger, a swift almost military transformation occurred on the sidewalk. The loiterers snapped to attention and smartly boxed in a neat path leading from the door of the limousine to the doorway of the apartment house. If the passenger desired to enter, he must run the gauntlet. After a moment's timid inspection the passenger did so. Nothing happened. There was some slight craning of necks, but for the most part he was ignored. He was of the small fry, as early comers are apt to be. The second and third odd lots arrived and were lightered, with thumping doors. The rubbernecks had not long to wait. Almost at once the air was thick with celebrity. The greatest lions of the pianoforte, the fiddle, and the larynx passed in almost a solid stream. The human alleyway writhed, almost pinched itself shut in its delirious ecstasy at beholding so much celebrity on the hoof, as it were. In fact, so thick was the run of big ones this afternoon that after about fifteen minutes of it the more hardened among the rubbernecks began to feel assuaged with mere greatness and to pay homage in more exact change. Many a minor lion and fading star suffered the ignominy of being rated by utter silence.

Some were ignored altogether, as if they passed unseen. Such a one was a diminutive man scarcely five feet in height who seemed so fearful of being devoured as he ran the gauntlet that he held his fat fur collar together in front of his nose to hide his face. But he might have saved himself the trouble, for, as he took down his hand to turn the doorknob — the door-opener at the building line having decided to let him do it for himself — someone more alert caught a glimpse of the visage; and before the door slammed on the tiny figure, this triumphant one yelled raucously:

"That's one you birds muffed! That was Isidore Carmen!"

The name was like a gunshot. Isidore Carmen! Instantly the orderly alleyway formation of the assembled rubbernecks broke up. Actuated by one impulse they surged forward; they clotted in a huge boiling swarm about the entry, the name of Isidore Carmen on every lip. Even the stolid policemen took fire. They turned their faces, stupid with suddenly arrested attention at the sound of the name, and pushed their privileged way to the front of the mass, asking questions. Passers-by who usually

walked around the rubberneck throngs with amused tolerance, now paused, catching the sound of the magic name. People came running from up and down the street; vehicular traffic stopped; the queue which had begun to grow ragged was now lost altogether, in the confusion. One policeman was ringing frantically at his phone for more help. The crowd about the doorway grew, like swarming bees. Isidore Carmen was inside! They settled down to wait for him to come out, with the fierce, tireless patience of wild dogs. Merely to see him — Isidore Carmen, the man from the death house — alive, in the flesh — became an inestimable privilege to be fought for. Such is the glamor when a man in the very straps of the electric chair comes back to life . . .

It was into this scene that Cuyler Braxton, a society lawyer recently an assistant public prosecutor, and his fianceé, Estrelle — Estrelle, Inc. — came driving, innocent as two love birds, in a taxi. Getting down, Estrelle noticed the dejected horses across the street.

"They are fewer and fewer. What becomes of them, Cuyler?" she asked.

Braxton, in his stiff-shirt way, was something of a wag, and couldn't resist the quip then current.

"I believe they are running some of them at Hialeah this winter," he said lightly. Looking about and seeing where he was, he called out: "Oh, I say! I hope you know where you are taking me?"

"Where?" begged the society dressmaker, smiling and taking his arm. She knew his weakness. Since his career in the Criminal Courts he had a most disreputable nodding acquaintance with criminals, and especially with the locale of crime. Set him down in any spot in the city and he would instantly orientate himself by recognizing the scene of some atrocity.

"This is the scene of the second act of the great de Mars murder of twelve years ago," said he. "I say the second act, because they usually find the corpse in the second act."

He pried a hole in the rim of the crowd with a powerful elbow, and went on to say, abstractedly, that there are those who hold that the scene of a great crime should be straightway struck and carted offstage, once the police are done with it, lest it tempt someone else. At this juncture several policemen recognized Braxton and addressed him, proudly, as Mr. District Attorney — for one always holds that brevet with the members of the force, once he acquires it in any degree. They plowed a path for the handsome pair. One of the men whispered in Cuyler's ear.

"Carmen? Carmen! Inside?" Cuyler cried. He communicated the message to Estrelle.

"Here?" she cried. "How ghastly!"

"Why not?" said the lawyer lightly. "The music will lift him nearer heaven."

The privileged pair finally were thrust inside. They waited in a small entry hall of walnut and lincrusta-

walton for the elevator. The door slid open. They stepped in. A little old man in a skull cap looked up dimly, and cried out, with effusive pride:

"Why, it is the Prosecutor, isn't it, sir?"

Braxton looked down at him. He put an arm about the bent shoulders and turned the ancient to Estrelle.

"This, my dear, is Zachariah Smith, not unknown to fame. He was the key witness for the defense in the de Mars murder trial," he said, by way of introduction. He shook his head dolefully. "I had to treat him a little rough, but I think he harbors no ill will."

"Oh, no, sir! It was in the line of duty," cried the old man, pleased.

"Your memory — I trust your memory has returned, Zachariah?" inquired the lawyer solicitously. "I thought so! I have known some marvelous cures to be effected by the successful termination of litigation. The house hasn't changed a bit, has it Zack? It still has the atmosphere!"

"We have the best people, sir!" said the ancient, in an awed whisper.

The elevator went up. They stepped out on a landing, and paused, breathless. The air itself seemed fairly to sway in time to the lacelike phrases of the E minor waltz. Rapt, they nodded to each other. The young man from Belgium had brought his curve with him.

There were three parlors *en suite*, filled with breathless celebrity. There was no applause, by request. In a lull they were seated. Cuyler disposed the skirts of his coat and turned so that he could talk in Estrelle's ear, over his hat and gloves, which he held in his hands clasping the head of his stick.

"I don't see him," muttered Cuyler, over the rim of his hat, as his eyes searched the audience. "Yet somehow I seem to feel him." The three drawing-rooms reflected each other like a hall of mirrors. A shadow passed over her face. "Oh, he's here, you can be sure," muttered Cuyler. "He's musical — I seem to remember he wrote a quartet for strings." He added, after a pause, "This is a queer place. Look around. What's wrong?"

Estrelle's eyes widened a little. She inventoried her surroundings. The proportions were massive, like a Parrish drawing. The rooms were heavily furnished and hung with tapestries, silks, and brocades. She recognized an Inness, a Carlsen, a Murphy, a Homer, a Sargent. But they all had tickets on. Every piece in the place was for sale.

"It's a racket," whispered Braxton, with a sly smile. He asked maliciously, "How do we happen to be here?"

"Hush," she cautioned. "Leocadie sent us her card."

She looked about. All the right people were here. The young man with the curve now struck a noble chord, and ripped off an arpeggio with steel tappets for fingers. With downcast eyes he played the A flat impromptu, nodding to that shadowy region beyond his left hand, cueing in the different voices as if it were a fugue. In the hush that hung on the

echoes of the final cadence, Estrelle breathed:

"Listen to his thumbs!"

"Listen to your grandmother," murmured the barbarian lawyer. "I've remembered where I have seen her."

"Who?"

"The female whose hospitality we are accepting," said he. "The reconstructed dame, in black. She is looking us over. She is wondering about me. Think hard, old girl," he chuckled. "It was downtown. In the musty purlieus of the Criminal Courts. In a tall room with high windows that are never washed. Ah," he said, breaking off, "a newcomer!"

A lean tight-waisted young man, in the most correct of morning clothes, was politely crawling over the knees of an aisle of devotees to an empty chair, under the guardian eye of a footman. It was Morel, the competent young dandy from Headquarters, as much at home in a drawing-room as an English juvenile, and fondly preserved by his chief, Parr the deputy, for just such occasions as this. He parted his coat tails and sat down, staring insolently at his old friend Braxton without a flicker of recognition.

Just then the thunders of the A flat major polonaise burst on the air; and epochs passed. Braxton was wondering if the man had yet been born who would master it, when he felt the pressure of a fingertip on his shoulder. Turning, he found himself confronting the level gaze of the flunkey who had just seated Morel. The man indicated that the lawyer was to extricate himself and come with him to some unknown destination. Braxton scowled his displeasure. The lackey bent one eyebrow, in an all but imperceptible gesture of urgency; and the lawyer carefully broke himself out and arose, ignoring Estrelle's questioning look and the frowns of the others he disturbed.

He followed his guide down the deep-carpeted corridor. There were fourteen rooms here. She didn't have two slick dimes to rub together when they summoned her downtown for interrogation. He was thinking of this and trying to remember who she was and why they wanted her on that occasion, when the footman opened a door for him to pass through, into a luxurious boudoir. It was all period stuff, very correct, and all ticketed. It had the air, like the rest of the house, of being arranged not by a chatelaine but by a dealer, as if it could be bought by the piece or suite. That would account for the rent.

Then in a flash he remembered who she was — a Mrs. Corson, Mrs. deLacey Corson — whose specialty, since her husband disappeared from the deck of a transatlantic liner in midvoyage, was lending her name and undoubted connections to various fashionable "movements" — without asking too many questions. The police had "advised" her, once or twice. She was more or less openly available to occupy lavish suites in the newest hotels that were reaching

for *ton*, where she entertained extensively — on a salary or honorarium. This outfit was undoubtedly put together to move some refractory antiques. She would occupy it nominally for a period, during which the salons would lend themselves naturally to *soirées* of an elité sort, like the affair of this afternoon. Then would come the discreet advertisements in the boudoir publications of the "private disposal of the distinguished personal effects of Mrs. deLacey Corson — admission by card only" — and the gullible would flock to buy. It was one way for an undoubted lady to face the world.

He passed on to a sort of state bedroom beyond the boudoir. The footman ushered him in, and drew the heavy door softly shut behind him. The principal piece was a vast Empire bed on a dais, in the center of the room. But it was not this he saw. He saw only Isidore Carmen, the lawyer, whose sinister talents had saved so many a client from the chair, and who had finally escaped himself by the skin of his teeth this very morning. Carmen sat at a slender, gilt writing desk, his head fallen over the blotter, his long arms sprawling. He was dead. There could be no mistaking the pose, or the misfit of his clothing — a dead man's clothes never fit him. Braxton heard a step behind him. The woman emerged from some shadowy recess and stood at his side, her fingers to her lips, her blank stare not on the dead man but on him.

The ex-assistant prosecutor was not unused to this scene. During his stay in Centre Street he had majored for a period in homicide. He had been on call day or night to view the latest corpus delicti *in situ*, so to speak. It is usually in the first lurid moments following discovery that the murderer reveals himself. Braxton could catch gusts of the battle piece penetrating this room, like the mutter of guns on a distant horizon; and thinking of that grandiose company out there he marveled, had there ever been so reprehensible a corpse! He never doubted for an instant that this was murder. Isidore Carmen was not the one to creep off here to die meekly like a sick animal, at the very moment he was gulping free air again.

He paced a slow circle about the writing desk, pausing to examine the scene from several angles. He looked at his watch. It lacked two minutes of five. They had arrived at four seven, and Carmen had just preceded them. It had all happened within the hour.

Braxton went back to the woman and stood for several seconds in silence, snapping the cover of his watch.

"When was he found?" he asked.

"Just now. One of the servants came in."

"You know who he is," he said.

She slowly shook her head, shrugging — as if it mattered! The lawyer lifted a morning newspaper out of a rack by the desk and opened it for her to see. A four-column story had for a top line, *Carmen Jury Locked Up For The Night.* Under it the pinched cruel face of Isidore Carmen looked out

from beneath shaggy eyebrows. The woman stifled a scream. She gnawed at her knuckles, her stoicism gone.

There was a little commotion outside. The door opened. The footman was interposing himself before an intruder. But only for a brief moment. His face contorted suddenly with pain, he backed into the room, deftly propelled by Morel, who released him and closed the door softly and turned the key in the lock. Then he nicely dusted off his hands. He caught the picture in one swift look, and exchanged an understanding glance with Braxton. He paused by the desk, his practiced eye assembling the properties of murder. Then he went to a window opening on an old-fashioned areaway cut through to the street. He ran up the roller shade and drew aside the hangings. After a moment he made a pass across the pane. A keen observer below might have noticed one of the rusty cab drivers, clad in an ancient green coat of the hansom-cab period, and a battered old plug hat with a rosette, arouse himself from his day dreams and view his surroundings with the startled look of one just come up from sound sleep. It was little Pelts, Morel's sidepartner. Cuyler indulged in a secret smile. There wasn't a more capable team in existence than this cross-matched pair of sleuthhounds — one the elegant, the other always in rags and patches. The place had been under observation from the beginning. Although there wasn't a breath of change to the naked eye, the police had taken over. Every living soul within these walls was suspect. Braxton joined Morel at the window.

"How did he happen to come in here?" asked Morel.

"He didn't need a guide. He knew his way," said Cuyler. Morel looked up quickly.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"This is the room where they put on the second act of the de Mars murder, twelve years ago," said Braxton. "That was before your time, Morel."

"Yes. What about it?"

"Isidore Carmen was counsel for the defense," said the other, slowly. Morel whistled. "Morel," said Braxton, "in the de Mars case we had the corpus delicti, we had the motive, we had the man. But we never were able to prove what killed him. Carmen stood between us and the law."

"Too bad the Chief is away," said Morel. "This would please him." He studied the dead man stolidly. "Who found him?" he asked, turning to the room.

"I did, sir." It was the footman.

"Your name?"

"Herbert — that's my surname, sir."

"Did you see Carmen come in?"

"No, sir."

"How did you happen to come in here?"

"To take a call on the phone, sir."

"But you didn't take it?"

"No, sir, I didn't take it."

The footman looked at Carmen. The phone was within hand's reach of

the dead man. At that moment the phone began to ring.

"Should I take it, sir?" offered the man.

"You seem rather calm for someone who has just walked in on a dead man," said Morel, not heeding. "Dead men don't seem to annoy you."

"No, sir; I've seen a good many in my time."

"Just how did you fill your time so full of dead men?"

"I was chauffeur and orderly for Sir William Prenton, a British surgeon, during the war, sir," said the man. "We worked pretty fast at times."

" 'We'?"

"We. Yes, sir. When there was a rush on, I did a little cutting and — plain sewing, myself, sir. Might I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Later," said Morel, silencing him; he turned to Cuyler. "Take that call, will you?"

Braxton took up the phone saying, "Hello," in his Supreme Court manner. There was a commotion on the other end. An incredulous voice cried:

"That isn't you, Cuyler?"

"It is."

The speaker was young Wainwright, one of the current society assistants in the District Attorney's office; his specialty was keeping the primadonna Justices of the Supreme Court in good humor.

"Is Isidore Carmen there?"

"Yes. At my elbow. Dead," replied Braxton in sepulchral tones. If he expected an explosion he was to be disappointed. Wainwright said crisply:

"Hold the wire, please."

The next voice was that of Colonel Wrentham, the District Attorney himself.

"How do you happen to be taking this call, Braxton?" he asked.

"They called me in from the recital just now, when they found him," the lawyer explained. "Morel saw me leave and followed me in here."

"Where, my boy?"

"Followed me to the room where de Mars was murdered twelve years ago. Recollect?" He paused. "Mrs. Corson is here — and the footman who found him. Did you telephone just now?"

"Yes. Is the concert still in progress?"

"He is playing the Butterfly Etude," said Braxton.

"How was it done?" asked the man who made a career of the study of method.

"Not a mark on him. It's anybody's guess."

"They were thoughtful enough to advise us — by phone," said the District Attorney. Braxton could not repress an exclamation. "Some assiduous accessory-after-the-fact," said the Colonel, "just phoned me anonymously from Brooklyn. The police are there?"

"Morel has taken charge."

"Howling swells?"

Braxton rolled off a few resounding names.

"Well, well! We can't exactly back up a wagon and haul them off to the

House of Detention, can we?" mused the District Attorney. "I'll be along shortly. Will you carry on for me till I arrive?"

Morel here interposed himself, taking the wire, and asking to be put through to Headquarters, via the Centre Street switchboard. He gave instructions rapidly. Police lines were to be drawn at either end of the block. They were to avoid any alarm for the moment. No flying squads, no shrieking sirens. The reserves were to file in on the scene quietly, as if it were a church wedding overburdened with publicity. This thing is happening all the while, sidewalk jams standing siege for a glimpse of a famous or, still more delectable, a notorious person. The experts from the Homicide Bureau with test tubes, microscopes, and cameras, were to be smuggled in through 58th street. Meantime the soirée would be pinched off, without a whisper, and the lords and ladies of the pianoforte, the fiddle, and the larynx, would be permitted to disperse themselves without breaking the spell of the curve of the *cantabile* they had foregathered to appraise. Some few who had come on proxies would be startled to be politely requested to tarry. But this taking out of the goats from the sheep would be distinctly *sotto voce*.

So it happened that about five thirty, in the light of the street lamps on the snow which by that time was beginning to fall steadily, first one, then another, then a whole queue of equipages drew up at the curb in front of the ancient mansion, in a street now bare of people, save for dark, shivering groups behind police lines at either end of the block. And the great, and the near great, and the merely fortunate passed out as they had come, one and all in that exalted mood over the young man with the curve. The traffic was deflected into the Park, and there scattered to its many ways. The queue continuously fed itself as the front rank broke off with thudding doors, and drove away; and then, abruptly, it ceased.

Already the crowds behind the police lines, which had come to see Isidore Carmen, the man from the death house, walk out a free man under his own power, had begun to evidence the stirring of rumor. Whispers ran this way and that. It was impossible to say just how the rumor took form. But when a word of command finally released the police lines, the crowd surged forward with the word on every lip — Carmen was dead! His enemies had lured him here for death! Then from nowhere came newsboys, volleying through the throng, with the first news-flash: *Carmen Reported Slain Five Hours After He Escapes The Chair. Extra! Extra!*

The clock in the main salon was just striking the hour of six as the prosecutor entered. In the profession of law, among its more eminent practitioners, there seems to be two distinct races of men — a race of diminutive men, pigmies, like Isidore Carmen,

who for good or evil are the most brilliant at the bar; and a race of giants, at once august and dominant. The Colonel was of this latter type. He got out of his coat, shaking off the snow, and surveyed the wreckage. The concert chairs still lay around in careless windrows; the litter of the audience still covered the floor; the grand piano, fetched across seas for the unveiling of the curve of the *cantabile*, stood open and undisturbed. Everything was in escrow for the time being — including the chatelaine of this ticketed establishment, the butler, and the three footmen who had been furnished on contract for the soirée together with the flowers and other trimmings; also ancient little Zack, engineer of the elevator; and several of the distinguished guests who had come on cards not their own. They were being interrogated in the dining-room by the police. This would go on for hours — sometimes it lasted for days — fresh relays of interrogators being constantly brought up from the reserves to ask the same questions with maddening repetition.

Morel and Braxton came out.

"Where are the hounds of the press?" asked the Colonel in his deep rumbling bass. He seated himself with slow dignity on a small concert chair. He took out his reading glasses, and in the purblind manner of the bifocal, felt for the bridge of his nose and put them in place.

"The reporters are sniffing at the door crack," said Morel, with a dry smile. "We have rather violated the rights of the privileged gentlemen — but we need elbow room."

"Has none of them been inside?" demanded the prosecutor.

"Not one," Morel said.

"Have you talked to any of them by phone?" Colonel Wrentham's tone had a steely quality.

"No, Colonel. I'll see them shortly."

The prosecutor, he knew, had gubernatorial aspirations, and an eye on the press. Wrentham drew an extra from his pocket, a replate of the Wall Street edition of the *Times-Herald*. He spread it out, and cried:

"Don't trouble yourself. Here is the complete story of the murder! It is already in print and on the street. I bought it at the door, coming in."

Morel and Braxton started forward, with gasps of astonishment.

"It is impossible!" said Morel. "Nothing has been given out. And no one has been admitted."

Nevertheless it was all there. The entire upper half of the first page was occupied by headlines of almost monstrous effrontery, in the calm assurance and specious dignity which the headline carpenter knows so well how to assume. Across the page shrieked the legend:

ISIDORE CARMEN EXECUTED
AT 4:07 P.M.
Private vengeance acts swiftly when machinery of the law fails to function in the case of twice-convicted murderer

The lower half of the page was taken up by two boxes. One gave the

complete list of the celebrities present for the unveiling of a new genius — celebrities who did not suspect that under cover of their ecstatic absorption the "execution" was being carried out in an adjoining room. The other box contained an exact plan of the apartment, including the lethal chamber. *X* marked the spot! The architect's drawing of the rooms had been amplified and elaborated, in the manner of newspaper artists, with dummy figures occupying the vital points. A dotted line showed Carmen's manner of approach to his doom; he had not taken the elevator — he had walked up the stairs, and proceeded directly to the murder chamber. The detail of the telephone on the writing desk was shown. A number of radiating lines issuing from it suggested that the telephone was violently ringing at the dead man's unheeding ear. Another dotted line, of implied electrical activity, led to the office of the District Attorney, and that dignitary was shown at his desk in a futile effort to save the life of the man, a life which he had asked three separate juries to hold forfeit to the law. And leading from the prosecutor's office was another dotted line of electrical communication, carrying to a telephone in Brooklyn whence the first casual alarm had emanated.

Colonel Wrentham turned the page. The second page consisted entirely of a detailed account of the crime. The details could not have been more specific if the murder itself had been personally conducted by the reporter who wrote it. The colonel looked at his watch and took up the telephone on the table. He called for the *Times-Herald's* editorial rooms, and was immediately connected.

"At exactly what hour did you issue your extra on the Isidore Carmen murder?" he demanded.

"We haven't issued an extra!" said the voice. "We have nothing but the rumor."

"Thank you!" grunted the prosecutor, and hung up.

He tested the weight of the paper of the first page between thumb and finger, and compared it with an inner page.

"A dummy first page superimposed on the regular Wall Street edition!" he muttered, with a shrug of grudging admiration.

Morel examined it in detail. He smiled.

"We will be able to trace it," said he. "It doesn't err from the regulation format by a hair. Only a newspaper compositor could have set that type. And only a newspaper press could have printed it."

"I wish you luck," said Wrentham sarcastically. "There are only six thousand newspaper compositors out of work at the present moment. Any of them would be glad of a job."

"But it would be impossible to fake it in the time that has elapsed," protested Braxton. "No printing plant on earth could put that dummy out in one hour — even if they had the facts of the story. And they've got the facts!" he cried, excitedly banging the

paper. "Do you doubt for a moment that this is a true account of the murder of Isidore Carmen? No. It's the absolute truth!"

"How long do you think that story has been in type?" challenged Wrentham.

"Hours!" said Morel glibly.

"Days!" cried Braxton.

"Weeks!" boomed the Colonel, pounding the table. "They have simply bided their time, waited for us to fumble. How long has this list of invited guests for the recital been extant?"

"A month or more," said Braxton. "It was postponed once or twice."

"Is it reasonably correct?"

"With a few last-minute changes, I should say yes."

"Then there is nothing, barring the actual date itself, that couldn't have been set up and printed weeks or even months ago." Wrentham examined the date line of the bogus extra. He laughed dryly. The date was mashed, the type illegible. "Gentlemen," he said, ponderously, "I have been misfeasant, malfeasant, incompetent, incapable, ineffectual, and a moon-eyed dodo in office — so it is said. But if you will fetch me this murderer, I promise that even my latest assistant deputy assistant will have no difficulty in establishing premeditation." He tapped the bogus extra dramatically.

"Braxton, what killed de Mars?" he asked. "My mind is rusty on that old murder."

"We were never able to find out," said the former assistant. "The cause of death was never determined."

"Then it is no longer a mystery," cried the prosecutor; and adjusting his glasses again he read from the account on the bogus newspaper page:

" 'The most astounding feature of the execution lies in the fact that both the apartment used and the manner of dealing out death to the victim is identical with that of the celebrated de Mars mystery of twelve years ago. This fact is especially significant when it is remembered that the de Mars case was the first of a long series of abortive murder trials in which the accused invariably escaped punishment, due to the brilliant chicanery of their counsel, Isidore Carmen, the criminal lawyer who is the victim here. The lethal method in the de Mars case, and in the Isidore Carmen case today, was by spinal analgesia.' "

"What is spinal analgesia?" asked the prosecutor.

"A moment," interposed Morel. He went to the dining-room and stood for a moment looking in. It was a sorry spectacle. The police flowed over everything; all was confusion. The unfortunate *grande dame*, Mrs. Corson, who in her efforts to make a living and still retain the full measure of gentility she thought her due, had been made use of by sharpers and clever opportunists, and now finally by what looked like a murder syndicate, was at that moment under interrogation.

"Terry," called Morel sharply, and a brisk young detective approached.

"We're barking up the wrong tree," said Morel. "Don't overlook anything — but don't put on the screws too hard."

Morel caught the mildly inquiring eye of the competent footman, and summoned him with a gesture.

Closing the door behind him, Morel led the way into the drawing-room. He nodded to Wrentham and Braxton.

"This is the footman who found him," he said. "Now, Herbert, disregard the fact that we have gone over this before. These gentlemen know nothing of it."

As part of the play, Morel disposed himself comfortably on a concert chair, and carelessly lighted a cigarette. The footman's stance was easy, there was no embarrassment in his manner. He waited.

"How did you happen to go in there?" began Morel.

"The telephone was ringing, sir."

"This one?"

"No, sir. The calls were switched in there, so as not to disturb the concert."

"But you could hear it, in here?"

"Just a dull thudding sound, sir."

"You are sure it was the phone?"

"Oh, yes, sir. It was still ringing when I got there."

"And Carmen was dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"What killed him, Herbert?"

All three men looked at him.

"It looked to me like a case of spinal analgesia," said the footman. He paused, looking from face to face, all of them skilled in concealing their thoughts. After a moment he went on: "There is something unmistakable about it — death from spinal analgesia. During the war I saw a great many accidental deaths from it — due mostly to haste, or incompetence, or impure chemicals. You realize we had to operate in emergency stations behind the lines and under the severest conditions."

"We?" queried the prosecutor, looking up from under his shaggy brows. "Do you class yourself as an experienced anesthetist?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you've had them die in your hands?"

"Yes, sir. There is a certain percentage of fatal cases, even under perfect conditions. There is something about a death from this cause — I'm not a medical man, I can't describe it. But I think I can recognize it at a glance. And this case has all the symptoms."

"Analgesia," interposed the prosecutor. "You mean anesthesia, don't you?"

"It is a method of local anesthesia, sir, by injection in the spinal column."

"Cocaine?"

"I believe they use some special derivative, sir."

"What happens?" demanded the prosecutor.

"A momentary paralysis of the areas affected, sir," replied the man. "If the puncture is too high in the spinal column," he added, absently lifting one hand and touching the

back of his neck, "the action of the heart and lungs ceases — and death ensues."

Morel said: "Herbert called my attention to what looked like a pin prick in the back of the neck."

"What does your medical examiner say about all this?" Wrentham asked.

"Plausible," said Morel.

The prosecutor rose and kicked the rumples out of his trouser legs. He paced up and down among the broken aisles of concert chairs, finally stopping in front of the footman.

"Go on," he invited casually.

"That's all, sir. I took the liberty of suggesting it because I thought it might otherwise pass unnoticed in the autopsy."

Wrentham said dryly:

"There seems to be a general inclination in this case to prevent the police from overlooking any of the finesse. They have gone to nonsensical lengths to be impressive — these murderers! If they must execute him, why go to the trouble of fetching him here? Why fill the house with celebrities? Why furnish printed directions with the corpus delicti?" He glared at the bogus extra. He turned to the footman. "Did you see him come in?"

"No, sir. No one seems to have seen him. I think he must have come late and walked up, after the concert started. I stood at the top of the staircase until the program began." Herbert paused and smiled oddly. "Then I was guilty of a bit of imprudence. He — that is, Cloquet — was playing the posthumous waltz —"

"Posthumous?"

"The E minor, sir, yes. I wanted to see his fingering —"

"Oh, you are a virtuoso, too?"

If the flippancy found Herbert, he gave no sign.

"I left my post — there was no one coming — and went to a spot behind the hangings where I could see his hands."

"And during that convenient absence of yours, Carmen entered unseen and went direct to his doom?" Wrentham's tone was casual. But he suddenly barked: "Why did he come in here?"

The footman said innocently: "You mean you want my surmise, sir?"

"Let's have it."

"I should say he was directed by one of the servants," replied the footman. "He follows, quite unsuspicious, thinking he is being taken to the cloak room."

"Ah! And then, without disturbing three hundred sensitive souls who are on a hair-trigger on the other side of the wall, we execute him, eh, by jabbing him in the neck with a needle!"

"Yes, sir," agreed the footman, solemnly. "Have you ever noticed the utter abstraction of an audience under the spell of a great master?"

"Yes," said Wrentham flatly, "they can hear a pin drop!" He fixed his keen eyes on the servant. "Now we are about to anesthetize our victim," he said. "How would you go about it, Herbert?"

"A skillful operator could do it while he was helping him out of his

coat, sir," said the footman. "Let me illustrate how simple it would be." He took up Wrentham's greatcoat and poised it for him. But the colonel shook his head. Directions were a little too specific in this case; he was no lay figure.

"And then what?" he pursued.

"The bogus servant merely puts aside —"

"Oh, he is bogus, is he?"

"Why, yes, sir! He puts aside his slight disguise and joins the guests. He might mingle with the late comers who were waiting at the head of the stairs by that time. He would have been unnoticed. He would be dispersed without interrogation with other celebrities."

"Oh, he is a celebrity, eh?"

"He may be."

"Or a footman?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Except that his privileges for escape would be curtailed, if he were a menial."

"Quite so. But in any event he is someone skilled in the use of the needle?"

"Yes, sir, necessarily. Everything was timed beautifully," replied the footman.

The District Attorney rubbed his chin thoughtfully. He turned on Morel and Braxton, eyeing them wordlessly. Several seconds passed. He studied the servant through another spell of pregnant silence.

"I hope your past is an open book, Herbert," he said finally. "Is it?"

The man hesitated. For the first time since he came into the room he seemed embarrassed. He said, rather awkwardly:

"I've been out of a job for the last ten months, sir."

"That's where you got the lock-step," remarked the prosecutor dryly. "I wondered." He nodded to himself at some thought, then turning to Morel he said, "Your witness," as if he were in court. Morel sent the footman back to the dining-room.

"That's your man!" muttered Colonel Wrentham, looking after the servant. "But you are a long ways from hanging him."

It was two months later that Parr, the deputy, came back from abroad, and in the course of time he called for the dossier of the Isidore Carmen case. All the holes had been carefully caulked up by Morel and his cloud of operatives. It was a matter of deep chagrin to the handsome Morel to have failed so dismally in his first solo flight.

Parr turned the sheets in the high stack of documents. He paused here and there, and Morel watched him.

"I sometimes think," said Parr, apropos of nothing, "that human nature never learns, except by experience. We can be told, we can see others stub their toe; but inevitably we have to actually stub our own toe, in exactly the same way, before we take the lesson to heart. Take the case of Isidore Carmen. He spent his life, with his utterly unscrupulous cunning, in rescuing clients from just punishment for crimes of cupidity,

passion, and violence. Wouldn't you think he would be wise enough to avoid those same fatal pitfalls in his own conduct? Not at all! He makes the same mistake himself. He writes fool letters to a woman. And as if that wasn't enough, he murders her when he fails to get the letters back."

That was ancient history. It was Carmen the murdered man in whom Morel was interested, not Carmen the murderer. Parr, turning many pages, looked up again.

"Have you checked up everything?"

"Yes, sir. I've gone over it time and again."

"Name your possible suspects," commanded the chief. Morel named them, one by one. The list began with Herbert; it might be said it began and ended with Herbert, because the others were insignificant. And there was never enough evidence against the footman to accuse him, formally, of complicity. Parr went over the names, scowling.

"No one else?"

Morel shook his head.

Then Parr asked, slowly: "*Is there no person so obviously innocent that you would immediately dismiss his name, if by chance it occurred to you?*"

Morel gaped.

Parr continued, just as deliberately. "Doesn't it strike you there is too much of the obvious in this case? That fake extra, for instance. It depicts every step in the murder. And correctly. If it is 99 per cent correct, you are apt to accept the remaining one per cent without being too curious. Think. What have you overlooked? What have you taken for granted?"

Morel knitted his brows. He passed the people of the drama mentally. There was no one.

"Suggest something, sir," he said.

Parr drummed on his desk.

"Did you check up on that anonymous telephone call from Brooklyn to the District Attorney's office?"

"Good heavens!" ejaculated the startled Morel. "And why should I?"

"There you are!" said Parr. "Why should you, you ask? You are so positive in advance that it will lead nowhere. Yet he tells you he is informed by an anonymous telephone call from Brooklyn. And you simply take his word for it."

"But — the District Attorney!" protested Morel, staring at Parr.

"For the last twelve years," said Parr, harshly, "Isidore Carmen has made the District Attorney's office the laughing-stock of the state. Wrentham wanted to be governor — they have turned him down; his record of convictions isn't good enough!" He added, in a lower tone, as if he spoke to himself alone: "Thwarted ambition can be a motive."

It was two weeks later that Parr, taking his cane for a walk up Fifth Avenue for his daily quantum of sunshine, managed skillfully to cross the path of the District Attorney, walking solo from his club to his home.

"That's a clever man, that Herbert of yours," said Parr, as they fell into

step. He spoke idly, in the tone he used when he was about to tell a murderer he was under suspicion and would shortly be brought to book.

"Mine?" said the colonel. "Why mine? I have no interest in him."

"Except to get employment for him later, as chauffeur for the Maitlands," said Parr.

"It's true I spoke for him," said the prosecutor. "The poor fellow had been out of work so long."

"That isn't where he picked up the lock-step, though, Colonel," said the deputy, still mild. Wrentham shot a look at him. He said nothing.

"You recognized him, of course?" asked Parr. "When you encountered him in the Carmen murder?"

"Why should I?" asked the other.

"Before you came to New York, Colonel, you were a rising young lawyer in Illinois — before the war, in a tank town below Ottawa. Did you ever hear of a forger named Heberton? A young college man with a fine record. He enlisted in the ambulance corps in 1914. You defended him, didn't you, and got him a curtailed sentence? The fingerprints are the same."

"I may have defended a person of that name," said the colonel. He turned to Parr, and stopped. "I'm leaving you here," he said shortly.

"Not quite yet," said Parr, putting up a friendly yet insistent hand. "Let me tell you something. Despite my best efforts I was never able to trace that telephone call — the anonymous telephone call to you — from Brooklyn. Do you want to know why I think we couldn't trace that call? Because there never was any anonymous call from Brooklyn to the District Attorney's office that day! Do you follow me?"

"I'm afraid not," said Colonel Wrentham. "I bid you good day."

"A moment," said the deputy. "We never learn, Colonel, except by harsh experience, do we? Your entire career has been consecrated to upholding the law — dealing out punishment to those poor weak human beings who break the law or take vengeance into their own hands. There is no wrong without a remedy at law — so you lawyers say. And yet, when the great crisis in your own life hits you, when you realize that your dearest ambition has been thwarted, that this rascally shyster, Isidore Carmen, by his clever chicanery, keeps you from being governor, then you forget there is such a thing as law, a legal remedy; and you become a poor weak human being yourself, and take vengeance in your own hands. Oh, we haven't got you yet," added the deputy, "but we are closing in on you, and your clever confederate."

Parr turned and looked after the colonel some little distance off. He noted, with something like awe, that the distinguished military carriage of the colonel was gone. The massive shoulders had bowed; he felt for his footing with his cane; he looked up and down, with the purblind helplessness of the bifocal, as he stumbled across the street.

One day we were talking shop with the Q. Patricks and the discussion came round to the classic detective-story themes and gambits. The oldest 'tec thesis (although few think of it as that) is the locked room: the conception of the hermetically sealed chamber was born, of course, in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." As time went on, mystery writers developed other fundamental plot-ideas: the series of murders which threatens to wipe out a family, or a neighborhood, or even a city; the impossible crime — like that of the body found on a beach with not a single footprint anywhere in the surrounding sand; the marooned-on-an-island or the isolated-house-in-a-storm; the headless homicide with its question of identity; the time-table technique with its question of alibi; the transportation theme — death on a train, or ship, or airplane; the multiple-solution brainbuster; the domination-of-the-world or Fu-Manchu thriller; and so many other tried-and-true criminological concepts.

And then the Q. Patricks remarked that sooner or later every mystery novelist takes a whack at murder-in-a-hospital — another traditional 'tec springboard. According to the Q. Patricks, the irresistible appeal of killing someone in a hospital is psychological: the contrast between life-saving and life-taking is too dramatic for any mystery writer to resist, and the variations of plot-device are almost so infinite that the basic situation need never grow stale. Then, too, the hospital locale offers an equally irresistible heroine — the beautiful nurse who inevitably finds herself being pursued down midnight corridors, or trapped in a surgical amphitheatre, or in even more hair-raising, goose-fleshing predicaments.

We asked the Q. Patricks if they ever succumbed to the lure of a homicide-haunted hospital, and they replied, why, yes, it so happens we have — and in a novelette which has never appeared in book form. Naturally, we investigated, and we discovered that, as always, the Q. Patricks had put their stamp of fine craftsmanship on a time-honored theme, complete with damsel-in-distress and those fresh touches which the Q. Patricks always add to whatever criminological canvas they apply their 'tec talents.

ANOTHER MAN'S POISON

by Q. PATRICK

TENSION was growing in the large operating theater of the College Hospital. Rona Heath sensed it as a definite, almost palpable presence. It was in the expectant immobility of the medical students waiting in the raised gallery above her; it was in the curiously strained stance of Dr. Oliver

Lord, the young intern, as he stood, shrouded in mask and gown, by the instrument table.

And it was in Rona, too — a tension and a vague feeling that something was wrong.

Everything in the theater was ready, and Dr. Knudsen should be here. It was quite a long time since she had heard the chief surgeon go into his private office beyond the scrubroom, where it was his habit to snatch his frugal lunch before the afternoon work. But now the theater clock showed twenty minutes past two, and he had not even come out to start sterilizing his hands.

Never before, during many months of service as his chosen operating-room nurse, had Rona known Dr. Knudsen late for a case.

Voices and a faint moan sounded from the anesthetizing room to the left of the scrubroom. A grayish, unobtrusive man appeared in the doorway.

"We've just brought the patient up, Dr. Lord." Gregory Venner, Dr. Knudsen's anesthetist of twenty years' standing, looked worried. "He's having considerable pain. Oughtn't I to start putting him under right away?"

"Better wait. There's not a peep out of the Chief yet. Can't imagine what's keeping him." Oliver Lord's blue eyes, turning to Rona, showed unmistakable anxiety. "Go get him, Rona. Say it's rush or — rupture."

Obediently Rona hurried toward the scrubroom door. She had been worried about the Chief all day. Throughout the morning operating session, he had been as impersonal and efficient as usual. But, from the tiny creases around his eyes and his almost hostile taciturnity with Venner and Lord, she had judged that something was wrong.

As she crossed the white tiles of the scrubroom floor toward the door of Dr. Knudsen's private office, a woman's voice sounded from inside the room. That was odd, too. The Chief followed a strict routine, and it was unheard of for him to allow any visitor to interrupt his brief lunch-hour seclusion.

Near the door Rona started at the words she heard: "Of course, it's blackmail, Thegn. . . ."

She recognized that hard, assertive voice. It belonged to Caroline Broderick, the Chief's immensely wealthy sister, who had recently made a second marriage with the director of the hospital and had become its most influential nuisance.

The voice sounded again with almost savage vehemence: "But you wouldn't understand! You, with your cold-blooded ideals, wouldn't realize that I'd far rather be blackmailed than have anything interfere with Linette's happiness!"

Rona had knocked, but there was no reply. Not wishing to eavesdrop, she pushed open the door. But, as she stood on the threshold, no one paid any attention to her. The chief surgeon, lean and ascetic, was sitting behind his desk. Opposite him stood Caroline Broderick, handsome, smart,

and almost too youthfully streamlined.

"It's my problem, not yours, Thegn. You've got to keep out of it."

Dr. Knudsen rose to his feet. "But you have made it my problem now, Caroline," he said, with slow deliberation. "I have made an agreement, and I shall not go back on my word. You must do as you wish about the grant; you know my point of view regarding it. But I shall most certainly see that this entire matter is exposed at the Board Meeting this afternoon and that all moneys are returned to you."

As Rona moved forward, both he and Mrs. Broderick turned sharply.

"Ah, yes, Miss Heath. The operation." The Chief's voice was clipped. "I will be with you as soon as I have sterilized. Tell them they can start anesthesia immediately."

"But, Thegn . . . !"

"I am sorry, my dear. There is nothing more to say." Dr. Knudsen's shrug was final. "As it is, you have made me late for an important operation. You have also made me miss my lunch."

As Rona hurried out of the room, she caught a last glimpse of the chief surgeon. He had picked up the coffee cup from the tray of lunch in front of him and was lifting it to his lips.

Rona had no time to dwell upon the implications of that remarkable scene. She had just delivered the Chief's instructions to Venner and started to resterilize, when Dr. Knudsen came into the scrubroom and took the basin next to hers. Before he began the routine process of washing his hands, she noticed that he was nibbling at a lump of sugar. She had seen him do that on several other occasions, and he had explained that sugar was the best source of quick energy, especially in any emergency which caused one to miss a meal.

That afternoon, as he tossed the remains of the lump into the container for soiled linen and plunged his hands into the soapy water, he made no attempt to talk. He was still silent later when Rona helped him into his sterile gown and tied on his mask. Feeling vaguely uneasy, she preceded him into the operating-room.

The patient had been wheeled in. Dr. Oliver Lord, his red head bent over the prostrate form, was preparing the abdominal field. At the end of the table, Gregory Venner was taking a blood-pressure reading.

As always before an important operation, an expectant silence filled the large theater, stretching up to the cluster of students in the gallery. When Dr. Knudsen appeared, all attention focused on his thin, white-gowned figure.

Only his eyes and forehead were visible above the gauze mask. But, with a twinge of anxiety, Rona noticed that the skin of his temples had turned a grayish white.

The Chief had taken his place by the table and was nodding to her. Immediately she handed him a scalpel. For a second Dr. Knudsen stood in silence, carefully scrutinizing the field

of operation. Then, with a caution that was almost too meticulous, he made the initial incision, cutting through the outer layer of epidermis.

Dr. Lord hovered by the table, ready with the artery clamp. Rona held out a sterile sponge on long forceps. Her eyes, trained to watch every movement of the surgeon's hands, were intent on the knife, which should now be probing deeper into the wound.

But it was not. It had been withdrawn, and hung uncertainly poised in Dr. Knudsen's fingers. Rona's startled gaze traveled upward to the surgeon's face. He was staring fixedly in front of him with a dull look.

"Dr. Knudsen, you're not well."

She took an instinctive step toward him. But, as she did so, the surgeon lurched backward with a little groan. The scalpel fell from his hand.

Gregory Venner moved swiftly from the end of the table, but before the anesthetist reached him, Dr. Knudsen staggered away, one rubber-gloved hand clenched against his heart.

"Lord — you — carry — on."

For a moment he stood motionless, keeping himself steady with an obvious effort. Then, suddenly, he fell, his thin, white-robed figure sprawling at the side of the operating table.

Some of the medical students had started to clatter down from the gallery. Rona felt a moment of blind panic. But Oliver Lord's incisive voice steadied her: "Miss Heath — Venner. Don't touch him. You've got to keep sterile — got to go on with the operation immediately."

Two students had run up to Dr. Knudsen and were lifting him.

Lord rapped, "Take him into his office. Get Dr. Broderick — anyone." The young intern picked up a fresh scalpel. "Miss Heath, another sponge."

Rona obeyed. But, as she did so, she could not keep her eyes from moving to the door of the scrubroom, through which the students were carrying Dr. Knudsen. The chief surgeon's body was sagging and limp.

Rona forced herself to concentrate on her duties as Dr. Oliver Lord continued with the operation. It was an extremely difficult case and one that normally would not have been entrusted to a relatively inexperienced intern. This was going to be an acid test for Oliver Lord.

The long, careful minutes of the operation ticked by. Thirty . . . forty . . . fifty. . . . Rona knew enough to realize that Oliver Lord was doing an extremely dramatic and efficient job. . . . At last the final sutures were in place. The intern gestured, and the patient was wheeled away.

Oliver looked exhausted, but his eyes beneath the thick red hair showed a certain grim satisfaction. "Well, I always wanted a cholecystectomy, but I didn't want it wished on me quite as suddenly as all this." As Rona untied his gauze mask and he peeled off his rubber gloves, he grunted, "Hope nothing's badly wrong with the Chief."

The two of them moved toward the scrubroom, but Gregory Venner pushed ahead of them, his face creased with concern. They saw him disappear into the Chief's office, and then come hurrying back.

"He — he isn't there, Dr. Lord!" he faltered. "They've taken him away. It must be serious."

Gregory Venner, Rona knew, centered his entire life around his devotion to the Chief and made the ideal stooge for the aloof, arrogant Knudsen, who gave intimacy to no one and who accepted the anesthetist's unquestioning loyalty as his right. For twenty years the two bachelors had spent their vacations together, mountain-climbing in various parts of the States, and the anesthetist's chief pride lay in the fact that it was Knudsen and not himself who had won a reputation as one of the country's most expert climbers. Venner, himself, had always modestly avoided the limelight, even on the much publicized occasion five years before when the iron man, Knudsen, had collapsed high up the flank of a remote peak and the little anesthetist had trekked miles to procure the medical aid which had arrived just in time to save the Chief's life.

"What can have happened?"

Venner broke off as the heavy double doors of the theater swung open and Dr. Broderick came in, accompanied by Dr. Hugh Ellsworth, the young head of the Neurological Clinic, where Rona had worked before she had switched to the surgical side. With a quickening of concern she watched the two men move toward them. Hugh Ellsworth looked very grave; Dr. Broderick's handsome, rather florid face wore the expression of someone bringing serious news.

The Director did not speak, however, until a gesture of his hand had banished the few remaining medical students from the spectators' gallery. When the door above had flapped shut for the last time, his portentous gaze moved from Rona to Gregory Venner, resting finally on Oliver Lord.

"I'm afraid I have a very tragic announcement to make," he said. "Dr. Knudsen is dead."

"Dead!" The word came bleakly from Gregory Venner. "Dr. Knudsen dead! It's — it's not possible."

It did not seem possible to Rona, either. The Chief had taken an almost fanatical pride in his iron constitution.

And now he was dead.

The Director was saying, "He died in his office almost before I reached him. Ellsworth and I had just arrived at the hospital from lunch and were able to go to him almost immediately. But there was nothing we could do."

"But what was it?" Oliver Lord's voice was incredulous.

Dr. Broderick hesitated. Then, giving each word careful emphasis, he said, "It is too early yet to be certain, but both Ellsworth and I are of the opinion that my brother-in-law died from acute poisoning through an overdose of some drug such as atropine, or more probably hyoscine. It must

have been ingested very shortly before his collapse."

"Hyoscine! But why the hell should he have been taking hyoscine?" Oliver stared blankly. "He wasn't ill, was he, sir?"

"Not that I know of, Dr. Lord. My brother-in-law was very — ah — uncommunicative. Especially so on personal matters. As for drugs" — Dr. Broderick shrugged — "you know his reputation. He hardly ever prescribed internal medication and was most unlikely to use it himself."

"In any case, he'd never have taken an overdose of a dangerous drug like hyoscine by mistake. It's absurd." Oliver's lips had gone very pale. "You're not implying he committed suicide?"

The Director shot him a rather pained glance. "There was no conceivable reason for his wishing to kill himself. Even if there had been, he would not have taken poison while faced with the responsibility of performing a major operation."

"It wasn't an accident! It wasn't suicide!" Gregory Venner's voice trembled. "You don't — you can't be trying to tell us that someone poisoned Knudsen?"

Dr. Broderick replied heavily, "Under the circumstances it seems extremely probable that Dr. Knudsen has been deliberately murdered."

"Murdered!"

Oliver Lord and Venner were watching the Director in stunned silence. Rona felt as if the whole world had suddenly gone mad. A great surgeon murdered in a great life-saving institution. Things like that just did not happen.

And yet Dr. Broderick was discussing it as an established fact. He was saying, "A terrible thing for us all, for my poor wife, and for the hospital. Newspaper publicity . . . questions . . . the police."

The police! Rona could think more clearly now, and her thoughts turned instantly to her brother on the police force. Jim Heath, as lieutenant in the Homicide Division, was known and respected around the hospital. She said, "Dr. Broderick, Lieutenant Heath of the Homicide Bureau is my brother. If you could get him to investigate this, I know he'd be as considerate as possible."

"A brother on the force, you say?" The Director's smooth face registered interest and relief. "That may prove most fortunate." He whispered a few words to Ellsworth, and then said, "Miss Heath, will you be so kind as to ask your brother to come around?"

Feeling rather dazed, Rona went to the telephone and called Headquarters. Jim's voice over the wire sounded strangely unfamiliar, clipped and official. He would be around at once, he said.

The prospect of the police's imminent arrival seemed to spur the Director into flustered activity. "The — ah — poison was probably administered in Knudsen's office. You, Ellsworth, and you, Miss Heath, I can rely on you to see that the room is locked up immediately." He turned

to Oliver Lord. "Dr. Lord, were any other operations scheduled for today?"

"No, sir. Dr. Knudsen had put off all except emergency cases until tomorrow. He told me there was a very important directors' meeting this afternoon."

"Ah, yes. The meeting. It will have to be postponed, of course." Dr. Broderick turned to Gregory Venner: "Venner, go and tell my secretary to make the necessary arrangements and explanations. . . . Dr. Lord, you had better come with me, to be there when the lieutenant arrives."

In a few seconds Rona and Hugh Ellsworth were left alone in the operating theater. For Rona there was a certain embarrassment about being alone with Dr. Ellsworth in those first confused moments. The year before, when she had worked for him in the Neurological Clinic, she had developed a strong admiration for this dark, attractive young man, with his uncanny insight into the human mind and his fierce absorption in his work. Her association with him had been exciting — too exciting, in fact.

That had been one of the main reasons why she had applied for a transfer to surgery and the secure dullness of Dr. Knudsen. She was far too level-headed a girl to let herself do anything so futureless as fall in love with a young man for whom women were either problems in psychiatry or impersonal automatons to promote the efficiency of the clinic.

"This isn't so good, is it, Rona?" Hugh Ellsworth's dark eyes met hers with grave sympathy.

"It's incredible. Do you really think it was murder?"

"Hard to see any alternative."

"But Dr. Knudsen, of all people! He was so conscientious, so unself-seeking. It's fantastic to think he had any enemies."

"Sometimes you can be too conscientious and too unself-seeking for your own safety." Ellsworth's voice was thoughtful. "Knudsen was a fighter for his ideals. He would willingly have sacrificed himself for them. He wouldn't have hesitated to sacrifice anyone else, either." His lips had gone rather tight. "It's not hard for me to see how he might have had enemies."

He was right, of course. Dr. Knudsen's stubborn code of ethics had often antagonized Dr. Broderick and the other more practical members of the staff.

Suddenly, for the first time since Dr. Knudsen's collapse, there came flooding back to Rona memories of the extraordinary conversation she had overheard in the Chief's office. While she was trying to make up her mind whether she should tell Hugh Ellsworth about it, his quiet voice broke through her thoughts:

"Well, Rona, we're supposed to see that the doctor's office is locked up."

Together they moved through the scrubroom into Dr. Knudsen's private office. It was sparsely furnished with the desk, a glass-fronted drug cabinet, a closet where the Chief had kept the

white coats which he wore when making his hospital rounds. At the far end a second door led to the main corridor.

"That door was always locked on the outside," Rona explained. "Dr. Knudsen was the only person who had a key."

"So no one except Knudsen could get in here without coming through the anesthetizing room or the scrubroom first?"

Rona nodded. "And the key to the door from the scrubroom's on a shelf of the drug cabinet. Dr. Knudsen kept it there where I could get it to lock up after work in the theater finished for the day. The cabinet's always locked. But I keep a key."

They crossed to the small drug cabinet and Rona unlocked it. As Ellsworth picked up the door key which lay on the bottom shelf, Rona glanced swiftly through the drugs, wondering if there might be some sign of the poison which had killed the Chief. But the supplies all ranged neatly in order told her nothing. Dr. Knudsen had kept there only drugs that might be needed in an emergency during operations. On the shelves in their customary places were the rolls of adhesive, bandages, three hypodermic syringes, a stethoscope, iodine, adrenalin, morphine tablets, a package of insulin ampules, alcohol, and digitalis.

Rona locked the cabinet and they both turned to the desk. The tray of lunch still lay there in front of Dr. Knudsen's empty chair.

"Looks as if he didn't eat anything," said Ellsworth quietly. "But he must have drunk some coffee."

With sudden vividness Rona remembered the last glimpse she had caught of Dr. Knudsen in his office, standing with the coffee cup raised to his lips. "Yes, he did." Shakily she added, "You don't suppose the coffee could have been pois — ?"

"That's something for your brother to find out." Hugh Ellsworth's mouth was grim. "I'll see he gets it down to Peters for analysis right away."

For a moment they stood there in silence, staring at the half-empty coffee cup. Then they moved out into the scrubroom, Hugh Ellsworth locking the door after them.

"Your brother's probably here by now," he said. "I should get down to Broderick's office. Are you coming?"

"I think I'd better wait till I'm called for. It's one of my jobs to keep the operating-room ready for any emergency case that may come in. You never know when it'll be needed." Rona gave a little shiver. "It's pretty awful having to work in there, now the Chief's dead. But I guess hospital routine must go on."

Hugh Ellsworth watched her for a second with faintly amused admiration. Impulsively he took her hand and squeezed it. "That's the kid. You're not going to let this get you down, are you?"

In spite of herself Rona was very conscious of the warm strength of his fingers. It was rather frightening to find that she could still feel the old excitement at being with him. She

said awkwardly, "I can bear up, all right. It's no worse for me than the rest of you."

The young doctor's smile came and went suddenly. "I always thought you were the spunkiest as well as the prettiest nurse in the hospital, Rona. Now I'm sure of it."

Before she could speak, he left her.

It was cold and cheerless in the empty operating theater. The daylight was fading quickly. Rona switched on the heavy arc light above the table, drew up a high stool, and mechanically started her work, cleaning the instruments and slipping them into the sterilizer.

Her mind, clear again now, reverted to the half-overheard quarrel she had interrupted between the Chief and Caroline Broderick. She struggled to remember the exact words that the Chief's sister had used:

. . . *Of course, it's blackmail . . . but I'd rather be blackmailed than have anything interfere with Linette's happiness.* . . . And later Dr. Knudsen had said: *You've made it my problem now.* . . . *I shall see that the whole matter is exposed and that all moneys are returned to you.* . . .

Could that be the explanation? Could someone actually have been extorting money from Mrs. Broderick? And, if so, had that person found out that Dr. Knudsen was planning to expose him at the Board Meeting that afternoon? Found out and murdered him?

Mrs. Broderick, who had inherited a huge fortune from her first husband's patent-medicine business, was, of course, a lucrative subject for any kind of extortion. But to Rona the Chief's sister, with her social ambitions and her hardboiled determination to obtain a blue-blooded husband for her daughter, had always seemed far too close-fisted to allow herself to be victimized.

And yet . . . *Linette's happiness.* . . .

If there was one weak spot in Caroline Broderick's hard, social armor it was her devotion to the beautiful and talented daughter of her first marriage, Linette Clint. Rona had learned that only a short time ago, when she had acted as nurse for Linette after the girl had undergone a minor operation. During Linette's convalescence in the hospital, Caroline Broderick had been an institutional menace, with her almost hourly visits and her constant complaints that her daughter was not getting the attention she rated.

Yes, if Linette's happiness were at stake it was perfectly credible that Mrs. Broderick would go to any length to try and save it.

But blackmail . . . Linette . . . how were they tied up with the other thing Dr. Knudsen had mentioned — that he would *express his point of view* to the directors about Mrs. Broderick's *grant?*

She was trying to piece it all together as, her fingers working with efficiency, she sat in the operating theater, alone.

Suddenly the double doors were thrown open, and Oliver Lord strode across the threshold. His face was dead-white under the fiery red mat of his hair. "I thought surgeons, anesthetists, and nurses were supposed to be angels of mercy," he said bitterly. "Apparently one of us three is an angel of death."

Ever since she had first known him as a redheaded kid of an intern who had tried in a rather clumsy way to rush her, Oliver Lord had overdramatized everything. But Rona had never before seen him look so shaken.

"What are you talking about, Oliver? Which three of us?"

"All three of us. You and Venner and me, of course. They've traced Knudsen's lunch tray and that darn coffee cup from the diet kitchen. It was sent up on the dumb-waiter direct to Knudsen's office, and it arrived just before he went back there after his morning rounds. The outside door was locked. The only way anyone could have got at it was through the theater or the anesthetizing room; and the only people who would have done that were you and me and, I guess, Venner."

"Then the coffee on the lunch tray *was* poisoned?"

"Poisoned!" He snorted. "Peters, in the analytical department, gave a couple of drops to a rat and it died within two minutes. Typical atropine-hyoscine reactions."

Oliver Lord swung himself onto a stool, running agitated fingers through his hair. "Knudsen must have drunk the coffee just before he went in to scrub. Couldn't have taken it earlier, or he'd have died before he'd got through sterilizing." He twisted around to face Rona. "That policeman brother of yours is damn' polite and cagey, but I could tell all the time he half suspected me. Suspected me! As if I would have killed the Chief!" He got up and started pacing back and forth across the tiles of the floor. "You know how I felt about Knudsen, Rona. He was swell to me, picked me out of a dozen of us to be his assistant, gave me every break. It's hellish funny I've got to be the one suspected of murdering him."

Trying to keep calm, Rona said, "I don't suppose you're suspected any more than Venner or I, are you?"

"You!" he echoed. "Lieutenant Heath's hardly going to suspect his own kid sister. And, as for Venner, everyone knows he's just a dried-up old dodo who's worshiped Knudsen for twenty-odd years. Venner, with his anesthesia and his fussy little side job of filing the records — no one in his sane mind's going to suspect him."

He stopped in front of Rona, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets. "That leaves just one honest-to-goodness murderer, sweetheart, and that's me. Of course, I didn't go into the Chief's office before he got there; but there is no one to prove I didn't."

"You're crazy to pretend you're the only suspect," Rona said. "Even if you do count Venner and me out, there's Mrs. Broderick. She was in the

Chief's office before the operation."

"Caroline!" Oliver's mouth dropped open. "What was she doing here?"

"I don't know. But they were having a pretty violent argument."

The young intern stared at her. "You're not implying that Caroline poisoned her own brother?"

Rona was cynical enough to know what lay behind the indignant incredulity in his tone. A few months ago Oliver would never have leaped to the defense of Mrs. Broderick. But it was very different now that the Director's wife had taken him up socially as one of the attractive young men whom she used to swell Linette's stag lines.

In the past Rona had thought a great deal of this aggressive, hard-headed boy from a hick town who had worked his way through medical school and who had spent every minute of his spare time on his thyroid research. They had been good friends, indulging themselves occasionally in a supper and a movie. All that and some of Rona's respect for him had vanished before the new, social Oliver Lord, who danced attendance on Linette Clint and her mother.

He was repeating, "You really think Caroline murdered the Chief?"

"I'm only pointing out," Rona snapped, "that she had as much of an opportunity as the rest of us."

"But it's crazy. She was his sister; she — was fond of him."

"I never noticed it. I never knew Caroline Broderick cared about anything except her own money and the chances of pulling a husband for Linette out of the *Social Register*. But of course you would stand up for a woman who pours champagne into you by the quart."

Oliver gazed at her, his face blank. Then he gripped her arms roughly. "It's about time we had this out. Why the hell shouldn't I go to Linette's parties? She's a swell girl."

"I'm glad you like her."

"I like Caroline Broderick a lot, too. She shows an intelligent interest in my thyroid research."

"So that's the idea, is it? You're hoping she'll come across with a big, fat grant. Well, you're wasting your time. Mrs. Broderick may be rich and she may throw thousand-dollar parties, but she's as tough and as tight as they come when it's a question of giving money away to impecunious young men." She added wildly, "And if you're figuring on marrying Linette Clint . . ."

She broke off, and they stood staring at each other.

Finally, with savage sarcasm, Oliver said, "Thank you for your invaluable warning, Nurse Heath. But I haven't the slightest intention of trying to marry Linette Clint. Even if I had, there wouldn't be the remotest chance for me, because she happens to be very much in love and almost engaged to Governor Drayton's son."

"So you go to her parties purely for the love of research," flared Rona.

"I go to her parties because I decided it was about time I started to have some fun. I'm through with

mooning around after a girl who's too stuck on herself to realize I exist."

"Just what do you mean by that?"

"Figure it out for yourself. Or do I have to scribble sonnets to you all over the hospital walls?"

"To me?" echoed Rona.

"That's what I said. Have you been too dumb to guess the way I've always felt about you?"

His face, with its firm mouth and intensely blue eyes, was very close to hers. For one crazy moment Rona thought he was going to kiss her. She tugged herself away. "I haven't the slightest idea how you've always felt about me," she said. "But I'm beginning to see how you feel about me now that you're in a spot and you know I've got a brother on the police force."

Oliver's lips parted, showing strong white teeth. "That's a pretty filthy thing to say."

"Is it?"

"It is. Just because you've always been crazy for the high-souled Ellsworth you're about as conscious of the way other people happen to feel as a patient under ether." He gave a harsh laugh. "You say I'm wasting my time on Linette Clint. Well, I can tell you you're wasting a hell of a lot more time on Ellsworth. If ever he falls for a girl it'll be one with a pile of dough to sink in neurology. Shouldn't be surprised if he hadn't tried for the Clint millions already and . . ."

"That's a lie," cut in Rona heatedly. "Hugh Ellsworth's never been interested in Linette. He's — he's just her doctor and . . ."

She broke off sharply as the doors rolled open and Gregory Venner appeared on the threshold. The anesthetist looked so broken, so pathetic, that she forgot her indignation at Oliver and moved toward him.

"I'm terribly sorry for you, Mr. Venner. Dr. Knudsen was your friend."

"Thank you, thank you, Miss Heath." Gregory Venner shook his head dazedly. "Yes. I can hardly believe it. I shall miss him. He was very good to me. I was at his apartment for dinner last night, you know. He seemed so well and happy. We were making plans to go to Switzerland this spring. It's been the dream of my life to climb the Jungfrau, and now, when everything was almost arranged at last . . ." He broke off.

Oliver Lord relaxed the stiff line of his shoulders and said with unconvincing casualness, "At least, I hope you haven't been all but accused of murdering him the way I was."

"I do not feel anyone would accuse me of murdering Dr. Knudsen." The anesthetist looked up at him with sudden dignity. "Lieutenant Heath did question me about my movements, but he says it is not possible for me to have figured in the case anyway. He says the poison must have been put in the coffee. At the time when the tray was sent up to Knudsen's room I was out to lunch with Peters, and when finally I came up here Dr. Knudsen was already in the office with Mrs. Broderick."

"So you knew Mrs. Broderick was there, too?" said Rona.

"Why, yes. She has a very penetrating voice. Both the orderly and I heard it through the wall of the anesthetizing room." Gregory Venner fingered his watch chain. "Although it was most embarrassing to have to mention it in the presence of Dr. Broderick, I could not very well have kept the fact back from the lieutenant."

Rona was relieved that the anesthetist should have taken on his shoulders the responsibility of telling Jim about Caroline Broderick's visit. And yet she felt sorry for him. Gregory Venner's almost idolatrous respect for the Chief was equaled only by his fear of Dr. Broderick. She realized what an ordeal it must have been for him to have to tell Dr. Broderick that his wife at least had an opportunity to commit the crime.

She realized too that, now Dr. Knudsen was dead, Gregory Venner was completely at the mercy of Dr. Broderick's reshufflement plans. In his ruthless drive for hundred per cent efficiency in all departments, the Director had decided some time ago that Venner was inadequate to act the dual role of Dr. Knudsen's anesthetist and keeper of the hospital records. On several occasions the Director had tried to ease him out, and would have succeeded if it had not been for Dr. Knudsen's stanch support of the man who had once saved his life. Now it looked as if this day might well deprive Gregory Venner not only of his old friend, but also of his position in the hospital.

The anesthetist had been looking at her in what seemed like nervous hesitation. At length, he said, "Miss Heath, I — I have a very awkward question to ask you. There is something I thought I overheard Mrs. Broderick say. I did not tell the lieutenant, because I was not entirely sure and — and it is not the sort of thing one should mention unless one is completely certain of the facts."

"What was it?"

"You must have heard something of the conversation that was going on in Dr. Knudsen's office when you went in to tell him we were ready for him to operate. Did" — he coughed — "did you by any chance hear Mrs. Broderick mention the word *blackmail?*"

For a moment Rona hesitated. Then, impulsively, she passed on to them exactly what she had overheard in the Chief's office.

"So — so I was right," murmured the anesthetist at length. "Your brother told me that he wanted to see you in Dr. Broderick's office right away. You must tell him all this, Miss Heath. We cannot hold it back."

"Of course we can't," agreed Rona.

"But this gives the murder motive!" Oliver had swung round to her. "Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I was going to — but we got sidetracked being — rude to each other." All Rona's indignation had faded.

"This is swell for me, isn't it?" he exclaimed in a hard, grating voice.

"Your brother's alibied Venner out of the picture. Mrs. Broderick would hardly have been extorting money from herself. That leaves me as the only person who could have put the poison in that coffee and who could have had a motive. Everyone knows I've been doing my darn'dest to get her to finance my research." He gave a sharp laugh. "When you see your brother, Rona, why don't you tell him to arrest me straight away?"

Lieutenant James Heath, of the Homicide Division, was in the Director's office when Rona entered a moment later. She had never seen her brother at work on a case before. Somehow it did not seem real for him to be sitting there so very solemn.

Dr. Broderick drew up a chair for her and gave her an uneasy, rather forced smile. "We are grateful to your brother for promising to do his best to keep this terrible thing as quiet as possible, Miss Heath," he said. "He is also prepared to let all of you who are involved continue with your regular duties."

Jim was looking at Rona across the desk, his square hands playing with a pencil. Concisely he checked with her on the lunch-time movements of the operating team and on the events immediately preceding Dr. Knudsen's death. He concluded: "We've got the physical set-up fairly straight. What we want is a motive. You were close to Knudsen. Have you anything to suggest?"

Very conscious of the effect her words produced, she told them exactly what she and Venner had heard pass between the Chief and Mrs. Broderick.

In the long silence that followed, her brother stared at her without speaking. Finally he shifted his steady gaze to the Director. "Would you be able to throw any light on this, Dr. Broderick?"

"I don't understand it at all — not at all. All I know is that my wife came to the hospital this afternoon for a sinus treatment. She is still here. I think it far better for you to take the matter up with her."

He rang for his secretary and told her to ask Mrs. Broderick to come there as soon as possible.

Jim was still watching him, slightly skeptical. "It really means nothing to you, Dr. Broderick — not even Dr. Knudsen's reference to expressing his point of view toward some grant at the Directors' Meeting?"

"Oh, ah, the grant! Yes. I am conversant with Knudsen's point of view toward the grant. We had discussed it several times. But I cannot see how it could have the slightest bearing upon what has happened." Dr. Broderick passed a smoothing hand across his hair. "You see, my wife is a very rich woman in her own right. Last week she generously offered to donate a quarter of a million dollars to the hospital to be divided among certain — ah — specified departments."

"The matter was going in front of the Board this afternoon?"

"That is correct."

"And Knudsen was planning to oppose it?"

"Why, yes." The Director had picked up a pencil and was tapping with it on the desk. "My brother-in-law was an unusual man in many ways. He had a — well, a very strict code of ethics, Lieutenant. And I'm afraid his exacting conscience sometimes conflicted with what I consider the practical interests of the institution.

"My wife's money is inherited from her first husband, who made a large fortune as manufacturer of the Clint Home Remedies. While these products are harmless in themselves, they cannot be said to conform to the highest standards of medicine. Although he was Caroline's brother, Knudsen was opposed to our accepting the grant, because he felt that, by doing so, we would seem to be endorsing remedies that militate against the ethics of our profession by advocating self-medication in disease."

"You feel he was being too squeamish?"

"I — ah —" Dr. Broderick coughed pompously. "Of course, a great hospital like this cannot afford to be associated with the Clint Remedy Company. But we are sorely in need of funds, and I see no cause to refuse a grant which comes from my wife as a private individual and under the name of the Broderick Foundation."

The lieutenant's eyes were very alert as he asked, "If the grant is accepted, how is it to be divided?"

"The larger part is to go to — ah — my own special department of gynecology and to Dr. Ellsworth's Neurological Clinic. There is also a third endowment in my brother-in-law's own department. It was to establish a fellowship to assist young Lord in thyroid research."

Rona stiffened in her chair. So Oliver *had* got what he had tried to get out of Mrs. Broderick.

Jim Heath asked, "If the grant was not accepted it would be a very big disappointment to you people who stood to benefit by it — you, Ellsworth, and that young man Lord, wouldn't it?"

"Naturally. And to many others, also." Dr. Broderick was rather injured. "But it is not my wife's intention to distribute money to us for our own personal use. It is purely for the general good of the hospital."

"But Knudsen was going to oppose it." In a voice which concealed the challenge implied in his words, Jim added: "In a way he was standing between certain people and a lot of money, wasn't he? Lord, for example — there he was in Knudsen's own department, knowing that Knudsen was going to do his best to keep him from getting a fellowship. That wouldn't have made him feel any too friendly, would it?"

Rona's fingers were digging into her palms as she waited for Dr. Broderick's reply.

"I think Knudsen's attitude would have alienated Lord just as much as it alienated the rest of us," the Director was saying frigidly. "But I might tell

you that our directors are already familiar with my brother-in-law's overscrupulousness on financial matters. As a single member of the Board he could never have brought the other eleven around to his point of view."

"Then you mean Knudsen couldn't have stopped the grant being accepted?"

"Not possibly."

"Not even," asked Lieutenant Heath softly, "if he could have shown that it had been extorted from your wife by blackmail?"

Dr. Broderick opened his mouth to speak, but closed it again as the door was thrown suddenly open and Caroline Broderick came into the room.

Dr. Knudsen's sister was deathly pale; her face was completely without expression. She crossed to her husband's side.

"Hugh Ellsworth's just — just been telling me about Thegn," she said. "It's terrible — it's fantastic, completely incredible. But before we do anything we've got to see the news doesn't come out in the papers. While Linette's staying at Drayton's house, with her engagement hanging in the balance, it will be appalling if all the headlines blaze the fact that her uncle has been murdered."

She swung round fiercely to Jim. "You're the policeman, the lieutenant in charge or whatever you call it, aren't you? Please, please see that this is kept quiet."

Lieutenant Heath was looking at her with calm steadiness. "I'm afraid I'm rather more interested in finding out who murdered your brother than in worrying about your daughter's convenience or inconvenience at the moment, Mrs. Broderick. Perhaps you'd take a chair. I have a few questions to ask."

This unexpected counter-attack had a deflating effect upon Mrs. Broderick. Without another word she dropped into a chair.

He said, "You were in your brother's office this afternoon just before the operation, weren't you?"

"I was."

"When you went into the room with your brother, did you notice his lunch tray?"

"Why, yes. It was on the dumbwaiter, and Thegn took it over to his desk. He was planning to eat it, but — why do you want to know?"

Without replying, Jim continued, "You were with your brother up to the time he went into the scrubroom?"

"Yes. I — I stayed on. Then I went out through the anesthetizing room."

"And all that time no one came in?"

"No one at all. We were entirely alone. That is, until Miss Heath came to tell Thegn the patient was ready."

Caroline Broderick looked at him rather wildly, and then, as if light had dawned precipitously, she flashed a glance at Rona. "I see what you've been trying to prove. Miss Heath told you Thegn and I were quarreling. You're — you're suspecting me of killing him, my own brother. That's absurd."

The steely note still in his voice,

Lieutenant Heath asked, "What were you quarreling with your brother about, Mrs. Broderick?"

There was a fraction of a second before Caroline Broderick answered. Rona thought she saw a flicker of fear in her eyes, and when the woman spoke it was with incoherent swiftness: "We were just arguing about the grant I am offering the hospital. My husband must have told you about it and about my brother's objections."

"You're sure that was all you talked about, Mrs. Broderick? I think it's only fair to tell you that two different people overheard you use the word *blackmail*."

"Blackmail!" Caroline Broderick's tongue came out to moisten scarlet lips. "Maybe I did use that word. I don't remember." She added hurriedly, "It is blackmail in a way, in any case — doctors getting money out of a rich woman for their wretched hospital! They know you can't very well refuse and have everyone think you're not — not performing your civic duty. They do hold you up at the point of a gun. Yes." She nodded vigorously as if she felt she had a good point. "That's what I mean."

"And that's what you said to your brother?"

"Yes, yes."

"And his only objection to having the directors accept the grant was the fact that your money came from the Clint Home Remedies?"

"That's right."

Jim took a shot in the dark: "Mrs. Broderick, listen to me carefully. I understand that your daughter was here in the hospital recently for an operation. A great deal about a person is liable to come out when she's in a hospital. I've been thinking about it, and there's a possibility that someone threatened to expose something damaging about your daughter if you didn't give the hospital a quarter-million dollars. Isn't that what you meant by blackmail, and isn't that the real reason why Dr. Knudsen was going to see that the grant was refused and that all moneys were returned to you?"

While she listened with staring eyes, Caroline Broderick's cheeks had turned from white to a dull, ashen gray. "That's not true. It's ridiculous. I haven't given the hospital any money yet — how could it return any moneys to me?"

Unsteadily she rose to her feet, and once again she turned distractedly to her husband. "George, tell him it's all a lie. Tell him . . . I won't answer any more preposterous questions. The shock of the news — and the pain of my sinus treatment . . . I'm not myself . . . I think I'm going to faint."

Her voice faded. With a little sigh she crumpled sideways to the floor.

While the Director hovered ineffectually, Jim sprang forward and, picking Caroline Broderick up, carried her to a couch. "Quick, Rona. Water."

Rona brought some from the cooler.

Dr. Broderick seemed completely nonplused by this sudden collapse of

anyone as strong-willed as his wife. He stood absolutely still, staring, while Jim tilted the water to Mrs. Broderick's lips and Rona sent the secretary running for Dr. Ellsworth, who was the Brodericks' family physician.

The moments of waiting were tense. Rona's mind was keyed up, oddly undecided. Had this faint been genuine? Or had Mrs. Broderick used it as a device to forestall any further questioning?

Soon Hugh Ellsworth arrived, was told what had happened, and made a swift, expert examination.

"Nothing serious," he said at length. "Just a faint. But all this must have been a big shock to her." He turned to Dr. Broderick: "I think it would be better if we put her to bed here in the hospital for a while."

"Yes, yes," assented the Director. "Miss Heath, tell my secretary to have a room prepared for Mrs. Broderick in the Ives Wing."

Within a few minutes they had taken Mrs. Broderick away. Ellsworth and Dr. Broderick followed, leaving Rona alone with Jim.

Lieutenant Heath said, "Well, Ro, you certainly gave me a break overhearing that conversation."

"You really think she was blackmailed into giving that grant?"

"Either into giving the grant or into giving cash to someone."

"And Dr. Knudsen got killed because he was planning to expose the blackmail?"

"Seems that way." Jim tapped on the desk. "Doesn't look as if we've got many suspects to pick from, either. Mrs. Broderick's obviously keeping back a whole raft of evidence; but I don't see how the motive could be twisted around to her. I've checked up on the rest of them. Venner's alibied up to the last minute. Broderick and that guy Ellsworth were both out of the hospital when the operation was being performed. We've got to believe Knudsen was killed by that poisoned coffee." He paused. "And there isn't anyone who had the physical chance of doing it except Lord — and you."

Surprised by her own indignation, Rona said, "You can't seriously think it's Oliver Lord. It's absolutely fantastic!"

"Fantastic for him to kill a man who, if we're right, was going to expose the fact that he'd extorted money out of Mrs. Broderick?"

"That's what I mean. Oliver couldn't have blackmailed Mrs. Broderick. I'm not a fool. You know that. And I tell you it's just not in his character." She added: "Anyway, you suggested just now that Mrs. Broderick had been victimized by someone who'd found out something about Linette when she was here in the hospital. Well, Oliver had nothing to do with that case. I was the nurse in charge and I know."

Jim's eyes showed interest. "What was the girl operated on for?"

"It was just a small brain operation to correct an injury she'd received some time ago. It wasn't serious."

"I see. And who had anything to do with that operation?"

"Hugh Ellsworth diagnosed the case and recommended the operation, of course. But it was performed by a brain surgeon with his own team — people quite different. I was working in Ellsworth's Neurological Clinic then. That's why I nursed Linette afterward." Rona added stubbornly, "Oliver Lord knew nothing about it."

Jim was watching her with a faint smile. "You don't happen to be stuck on this guy Lord, do you?"

"Me? Don't be ridiculous!" Rona felt the color flooding her cheeks. "He's a perfectly nice person but he — he makes me madder than anyone I ever knew. I just can't have you suspecting him, when he couldn't possibly have killed anyone."

"Redheaded young surgeons can kill people just as well as the next guy, probably a great deal better." The smile was still in Jim's eyes, but it was a smile without humor. "You say Lord had nothing to do with Miss Clint's operation. But he knew her and Mrs. Broderick, didn't he?"

"He went to several parties at their house."

"Was he chasing money for his research or chasing Miss Clint?" Jim asked suddenly. "I hear she's an attractive girl. I also hear she's going around a lot with Governor Drayton's son. Suppose Lord hoped for an heiress, felt mad when he lost out, and figured the least he could do was to get a little gravy out of the mother and . . ."

He stopped as the door opened and Hugh Ellsworth reappeared.

"Mrs. Broderick's come round all right, Lieutenant. But she's still pretty shaky and we've decided to keep her in the hospital until tomorrow. Wouldn't advise you to try and get any more out of her until she's quieted down a bit."

"Okay," said Jim. "I guess I can leave her a while until she's got her story straight."

Ellsworth smiled. "I'll go and tell . . ."

He had moved to the door, but Jim's quiet voice called him back: "While you're here, Dr. Ellsworth, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions. Do you know anything about this grant Mrs. Broderick was planning to give the hospital?"

"Do I know anything about it?" Ellsworth crossed back to the desk. "I ought to. We're hopelessly in the red here, you know, and we've all been doing everything short of murder to get Mrs. Broderick to crash through with that quarter-million."

"And which of you was finally successful in persuading her?"

"I don't want to boast, but I think I take most of the credit. Broderick did his part. Young Lord even went so far as to dress up in evening clothes and dance, when he wanted to stay at home with his thyroid researches. But I think I probably worked the hardest."

"I see." Jim's tone was very alert. Suddenly changing his tack, he asked, "Mrs. Broderick is fond of her daughter, isn't she?"

"Psychopathically so."

Lieutenant Heath looked down at the polished surface of the desk. "You said the bunch of you around here did everything short of murder to get that grant. I'm interested in that remark, interested to know how far you'd have gone. If, for example, one of you knew something damaging about Linette Clint, would you have used that for a lever on Mrs. Broderick?"

Hugh Ellsworth's smile faded. "You don't seem to have a very high opinion of the medical profession, do you?"

"I can't afford to have a high opinion of anyone."

"Well, maybe you're right. But if you're wondering whether I personally blackmailed Mrs. Broderick into giving us that grant, I think I can put your mind at rest.

"Perhaps you don't know a great deal about the work we neurologists do. By the time we're through with a patient, we know absolutely everything about him and his friends and relations, and often what we know isn't any too savory. Right now, for example, I have under treatment a dozen, twenty, fifty people who come from the wealthiest and most respectable families in town. Some of them are drunks, some of them are moral wrecks, some of them — I needn't run through the more intricate features of mental unbalance. But, if I went in for blackmailing my patients and my ex-patients, I'd never have to waste my time worming a paltry quarter-million dollars out of Caroline Broderick."

Jim said, "Thank you for making your point so clear, Dr. Ellsworth."

"On the contrary, thank you."

Jim rose. "Well, since Mrs. Broderick has gone into retirement, my next job is looking through Knudsen's papers. Come on, Rona. I guess you're the best person to show me the ropes."

Rona moved to follow him, but surprisingly Ellsworth stepped in front of her. He said to Jim, "Rona may be your sister, but she's paid by the hospital, not by the police force. And, since I'm planning to try to get her back into my clinic, I take a paternal interest in her well-being." He smiled. "Rona's had a very tough day and it's long past dinner time. She's coming out to eat with me."

Lieutenant Heath hesitated by the door, watching both of them. Then, the grim line of his mouth relaxing, he said, "Okay. Give her some food. I'll take Knudsen's papers back to Headquarters with me." He left.

Hugh Ellsworth, watching Rona, looked suddenly serious. "Tell me, does he really think someone's been extorting money out of Caroline and that she's holding back on him?"

Rona nodded.

"I see." There was a curious curve to his lips. Then he patted her arm and said, "Go get yourself out of that starched prison uniform into something gay. We'll find a place downtown for dinner and forget all this business for an hour or so."

And, when finally they were settled

in a little French restaurant, Rona found that she could almost forget that the real reason for her sitting there with Hugh Ellsworth was that Dr. Knudsen had been murdered.

Ellsworth talked with infectious enthusiasm about the clinic and his plans for its future. For Rona it was as if the clock had been turned back to the exhilarating days when he had been her boss.

They were sipping their coffee, when he broke off with an odd expression, half mocking, half affectionate, on his face. "Well, Rona, I meant it just now when I told your brother I was planning to get you back into the clinic." He hesitated, and added suddenly, "But I want you to tell me something. Why did you walk out on me last year?"

"It's all very simple. You see, I have no illusions about my fatal fascination. I started getting too — too interested in you as a person, and I had enough sense to see it was a stupid thing to do. I quit while the quitting was painless."

"You were a smart girl, my dear."

"To realize I was wasting my time?"

"On the contrary. If you'd stayed any longer, I would probably have asked you to marry me and you might even have accepted."

"And would that have been so terrible?"

"Frightful!" He grinned. "Frightful for you, that is. A psychiatrist may make a passable boss, but he makes the worst husband in the world. He's seen far too much of what goes on in the human mind. To him love's just a compulsion neurosis that marriage aggravates, and a wife's just someone who'll bring a whole new raft of complexes into the family." He leaned across the table and patted her hand. "You ought to be eternally grateful you didn't wait around in the clinic for that marriage proposal."

"Oliver said you'd never marry," Rona told him. "At least, he said you never would unless you found a girl with a lot of money to sink in research — a girl like Linette Clint."

"So that's Lord's analysis of me, is it?" Hugh Ellsworth's smile was still amused. "Nice, healthy reaction, too. He's the sort of person a smart girl should marry, Rona — a young man with a lot of muscle and a lot of masculine contempt for human textbooks like me." He added, glancing up at her, "As for Linette Clint, she's another smart girl. And she's going to make a good wife for that boy of hers."

While he spoke, a newsboy came into the restaurant with a sheaf of late night papers. Ellsworth signaled him and bought a copy.

As he unfolded it and looked at the front page, he said, "I guess the time has come when the world's to be let in on the little secret I've been sharing with Linette. Yes, here it is."

DRUG HEIRESS IN RUNAWAY MATCH WITH GOVERNOR'S SON

Linette Clint, heiress to the Clint Home Remedy fortune, and Charles

Gormley Drayton, III, Governor Drayton's son, slipped across the state line and were privately married last night. The young couple eloped from the Governor's mansion itself, where Linette Clint had been staying as a house guest. As yet neither the bride's nor the groom's families have made a statement but . . .

When she put the paper down Ellsworth was watching her as if he were intensely interested in her reaction.

"Your brother thinks Caroline's holding back on him," he said slowly. "If he's right, I have a very good hunch this news will make Mrs. Broderick reshuffle her plans."

"You mean she doesn't know anything about the elopement?"

Ellsworth shook his head. "Nothing. It's just a little something worked out by Linette, Charlie Drayton, and myself."

As he paid the check and they went out of the restaurant, he added enigmatically, "I wish to hell all my patients' problems were as easy to solve as Linette Clint's."

Ellsworth left Rona at the main entrance of the hospital and went to take the news of her daughter's elopement to Caroline Broderick. Rona hurried to her room in the nurses' quarters and changed into uniform.

When she returned to the main building, the loud-speakers in the corridors were calling, "Miss Heath wanted in Dr. Ellsworth's office."

When she reached the neurologist's room, Hugh Ellsworth was waiting for her. He said, "I had the right idea about Caroline. I never saw a patient respond to treatment the way she responded to that account of Linette's marriage. In two seconds she switched from the bereaved sister to the delighted mother — and she's eager to unburden her soul about something."

"To the police?"

"No. She says she wants to see you."

"All right."

As Rona hurried along the corridor, she passed the open door of the record room. A voice called her name, and Gregory Venner bustled out. "Miss Heath, may I speak to you a minute?"

Rona stepped with him into the small room whose walls were lined with the filing cabinets where Venner kept the hospital case histories in meticulous order.

"I've been so worried, Miss Heath," he said. "I can't concentrate on my work, can't do anything, thinking about what has happened to Dr. Knudsen. Tell me, has — has Mrs. Broderick been able to help the police? Were we right about what we thought we heard?"

Rona told him how Mrs. Broderick had denied that there was any kind of blackmail. "But Jim believes she's lying," she concluded. "And she's just sent for me to tell me something important. So maybe we'll hear the truth now."

The anesthetist's face lightened. "I hope so, indeed. It's about the only thing left for me — to try to find out who killed Thegn." He threw out his hands in a rather forlorn gesture.

"You see, already Dr. Broderick has sent for me and told me I won't be needed any longer to administer anesthesia." He hesitated. "I always hoped that I had done my work satisfactorily. But you know how Broderick is — all for young people."

Rona thought it typical of Dr. Broderick — typical and entirely inhuman. Venner, who had worked for the hospital so long and who had devoted his life so completely to Dr. Knudsen — it was tragic to think of him thrown out into the world with nowhere to go just because the Director had this fanatical passion for super-efficiency.

Gregory Venner seemed to read her thoughts, for he gave a pale smile and said, "Please don't worry about it, Miss Heath. I have a little money saved. I'll be all right."

Impulsively Rona squeezed his hand. "We'll always remember you here," she said. "And if I find out anything about — about Dr. Knudsen, I'll let you know. Now I'd better get to Mrs. Broderick."

Hurrying down the passage, Rona took the elevator to the second floor and made her way to the Ives Wing, where Mrs. Broderick had been settled. As she moved down the long central passage, the door of one of the private rooms opened and Oliver Lord came out, followed by a nurse.

Oliver gave the nurse some rapid instructions and she hurried away. As soon as she was out of sight, he gripped Rona's arm and drew her roughly into one of the vacant private rooms. "I've got to talk to you," he said, his blue eyes very steady.

"What do you want to say?"

"I want to say a hell of a lot but I'll try and keep my language adequately censored." He moved closer, his strong hands crushing the white cotton of her sleeves. "You made some pretty raw cracks at me in the operating room this afternoon. In fact, you're a rude, ornery little piece, but I've got to know where I stand with you."

Rona tried to pull her arms away, but his grip was too tight. She said, "For heaven's sake, stop mauling me about, Oliver. I'm supposed to go to Mrs. Broderick."

"I'll stop mauling you about when I'm good and ready." He was looking at her with a kind of angry intensity. "And Caroline Broderick's as good a place to start as any other. I did go to a couple of her parties. I went to them purely and simply because I wanted her to crash through with the grant. That doesn't make me a gigolo, does it?"

"I haven't any idea what it makes you."

"Well, whatever it makes me, it tars your high-minded boy-friend, Ellsworth, with the same brush. The hospital had to have money, and Mrs. Broderick was our one hope. He worked on her as much as I did."

"Why bother to explain to me?"

"I don't know. I haven't the slightest idea why I bother about you at all." His jaw was thrust out aggressively. "I think you're badly stuck on

yourself; I think a lot of things. But for some godforsaken reason I'm stuck on you, too. I told you that this afternoon, and you paid about as much attention to it as one of my experimental frogs. But I've been that way for a long, long time, and I don't give a hoot whether you do any reciprocating or not. I just want you to believe me when I say that for better or worse I think you're swell."

Rona could not help smiling. "Oliver, you're being utterly ridiculous."

He was not smiling. Suddenly his arms slipped around her. He pulled her toward him, and his lips met hers in a long, rough kiss. In spite of her indignation the touch of his mouth on hers was warm — exciting.

"That's better," he said at length. He pushed her away and gazed at her from blue eyes that were still very belligerent. "Now run and tell your brother I'm trying to make up to you because I murdered Knudsen and want a good police connection."

"I'm sorry I said that to you this afternoon," said Rona sincerely.

"So you take it back, do you? That's grand. It'll give me something pleasant to think about when I'm behind bars waiting trial for Knudsen's murder."

"Trial? Oliver, what on earth are you talking about?"

"What are you looking wide-eyed about? You know perfectly well that brother of yours is all set to arrest me any minute. You talked to him, didn't you? So far as I can tell, he's built up the perfect case against me. Peters did a Vitali test on the coffee. He's proved the poison was there — hyoscine, and enough to kill twenty goats." He added savagely, "And, according to your brother, I'm the guy who put it there." For a moment he stood in silence, looking at her fixedly. "Rona, tell me something," he said. "Do you think I murdered the Chief?"

"Of course I don't."

A grim smile spread over his lips. But his eyes showed a queer sort of excitement. "Okay, Rona. If you're back of me it's worth taking a fighting chance. Things are going to be tough as hell. If Knudsen was poisoned by that coffee I don't see that I have a hope. But" — he paused, adding quickly — "it sounds crazy, Rona, but I'm going to try and prove that he wasn't poisoned by the coffee at all."

"But, Oliver, you've just said Peters proved the coffee was full of hyoscine."

"That's one of my points, exactly. I think the coffee was a lot *too* full of hyoscine. Rona, tell me, the Chief didn't take sugar in his coffee, did he?"

"He never took sugar in anything."

Oliver's excitement was increasing. "Then explain this. I've just thought of it. It's not easy to tell how hyoscine's administered, you know — even with an autopsy. It gets into the bloodstream almost immediately. But there's one very definite thing about it. It has an extremely bitter, unpleasant taste. If Knudsen had noth-

ing to sweeten that coffee, how the hell could he have gulped down more than half of a cup without realizing something was wrong?"

"Oliver, you've got something there."

"You think so?"

"Yes. He surely would have noticed something was the matter if . . ." She broke off, adding lamely, "But the coffee was poisoned, and I, myself, saw him lift the cup to his lips. How can you explain that?"

Oliver looked suddenly tired and crestfallen. "I guess that's something I can't explain. I guess the whole idea was just one of those things. Forget it."

"Forget it! I certainly won't forget it so long as you're in a jam and there may be some way of getting you out of it."

"You really mean that?" Oliver's eyebrows tilted upward. "You're actually being nice to me? I can't believe it." He leaned forward and kissed her again on the lips.

Feeling exhilarated against all reason, Rona hurried to Mrs. Broderick's room, which was just a few doors down the passage. She found the Director's wife sitting up in bed, looking very handsome. "I'm so glad you've come, Miss Heath."

Rona sat down on the chair by the bedside, watching her expectantly.

"Well, my dear" — Mrs. Broderick's smile was affable — "I'm going to confess I lied this afternoon to your brother. That is, I held back some of the truth. You mustn't blame me, because I was in the most embarrassing position."

She leaned forward. "I am confiding in you, my dear, because you are Lieutenant Heath's sister and because you were very kind to Linette when you nursed her. . . . I knew absolutely nothing about her elopement until Hugh Ellsworth brought me the news. If I'd known about it earlier I would have acted very differently with the police."

Rona asked, "You mean it all somehow centered around Linette and her marriage?"

"Yes, my dear. Linette and her health." Caroline Broderick lowered her voice to an intimate softness. "It began some years ago when she was still a subdebutante. She suddenly started having fainting spells — rather like fits. You can imagine how I felt! I took her to a very famous neurologist in Chicago. After he'd studied the case he told me that Linette suffered from — epilepsy!

"He took a very gloomy view and was doubtful whether she should ever get married. I was desperate. A short time later, however, when I came East, I took her to Hugh Ellsworth for a second opinion. A fine doctor, a wonderful man! He sent for the entire case history, kept Linette under observation for a long time, and — it was the happiest day of my life — he told me he was almost sure the diagnosis was wrong. He believed that the whole trouble came from an accident Linette had had as a child — that there was something pressing on the

brain and that it could be corrected by a minor operation."

Mrs. Broderick leaned back against the pillows. "You know the rest. They did operate. And there've been no attacks since. Although Hugh Ellsworth says it's too early yet to state officially that the Chicago doctor was wrong, he's sure there was never any question of epilepsy at all."

Rona was beginning to understand now. "So you — you were being blackmailed. Someone was holding the epilepsy rumor over you to . . ."

"Yes, yes. But you can see why I was terrified of mentioning it even to the police. The Draytons were naturally ambitious for their only son." Mrs. Broderick said frankly, "I'm not much socially, and certainly money means nothing to them. I knew that if ever they had even a suspicion that something was wrong with the stock, they'd prevent Charlie from marrying Linette."

She nodded emphatically. "But now the dear young things have taken the matter into their own hands. Hugh's just told me. Linette went to him as her doctor and asked him if he really thought it was all right for her to marry. He assured her it was, and said that just so long as Charlie knew everything there was no need for the Governor to be told. Charlie had known all along, of course, and it made no difference. So they eloped."

Mrs. Broderick, still in a confidential mood, went on, "I can explain now the conversation you overheard between me and my brother. About two weeks ago I received an anonymous letter. Whoever wrote it stated that he knew everything about Linette and would pass it on to the Draytons unless I deposited $25,000 in a certain place here in the hospital."

Rona broke in, "So it wasn't the grant that was blackmailed out of you!"

"The grant?" Mrs. Broderick looked indignant. "Of course not. I offered that money to the hospital entirely of my own free will in gratitude for what Hugh Ellsworth had done for Linette. This was something entirely different — a disgraceful piece of private extortion." She picked up the flimsy sleeve of her négligée and dropped it again. "I was horrified when I read that letter. Although I, myself, was sure the epilepsy diagnosis was wrong, I realized it could do almost as much damage with the Draytons as if it had been true."

She shrugged. "I deposited the money at the hospital in a suitcase, and hoped against hope it would keep the person quiet."

"But it didn't?"

"No. A second note came, and that time it asked for even more. By then I felt I had to confide in someone. I didn't want it to be my husband, because we haven't been married very long and I never discussed Linette with him. But Thegn, my brother, he knew, and I thought I could trust him. Last week I told him everything and pleaded with him to find out who was responsible."

"And he did?"

"He promised to. I didn't hear from him again until last night. He told me then that he had found out who had been doing it."

"And he told you the person's name?" asked Rona urgently.

"No." Mrs. Broderick shook her head. "You know how Thegn was. Whatever he did, he was always scrupulously fair. It seems that he had forced a confession out of this man and had made a bargain with him. If every penny of my twenty-five thousand was returned to me by today, he said he would take no action. If the money wasn't returned, he was going to expose the whole thing at the Board Meeting this afternoon."

"And the money wasn't returned?"

"It wasn't. That's why I came to the hospital this afternoon. I was simply desperate. I thought the whole idea was stupid from the start, and the very last thing I wanted was for Thegn to bring everything out into the open just when, as I thought, Linette's chances of marrying Charlie Drayton were hanging by a thread. I pleaded with him to let the whole thing drop. You heard me. But he was as obstinate as ever. The man had been given a chance to redeem himself and had failed, he said. Whatever embarrassment it caused, he was going to see that the whole thing came out and that the man was handed over to the police."

"But even then he didn't tell you the man's name?"

"Not even then. It's tragic that he didn't, of course. But it was absolutely typical. The Board Meeting wasn't until five thirty, and there was just a flimsy chance that the money would still be returned. He was going to keep his side of the bargain right up until the last minute."

She added firmly, "You see now why I've told you all this. You've got to promise to let your brother know everything. I would rather not speak to him myself until I've had some rest."

"Of course I'll tell Jim. And I'm sure he'll consider it absolutely confidential." Rona added, "You're sure you haven't any idea who this person could have been?"

"None." Mrs. Broderick returned her stare with a steady gaze. "That's something for your brother to find out. But certain people can be eliminated, can't they? Hugh Ellsworth told me they thought something on Thegn's lunch tray was poisoned. Who could have got at that tray?"

Rona said awkwardly, "No one but — but you and me and Oliver Lord."

"Oliver Lord!" echoed Caroline Broderick. For a moment she did not speak. Then, very softly, she said, "You don't think it would be Oliver Lord, do you? I hate to suggest it; he's always seemed such a nice boy. But then he is in need of money."

Rona said stubbornly, "I know Oliver didn't poison that coffee."

"The coffee! What do you mean?"

"Didn't you know it was the coffee on the lunch tray that poisoned Dr. Knudsen?"

"The coffee on the lunch tray." Mrs. Broderick was staring at her

now, the pupils of her eyes very wide. "No one ever told me that. There — there must be some mistake."

"But how could there be? Dr. Knudsen drank some of it, didn't he?"

"Yes. Not much, but he did sip some of it." Mrs. Broderick was still staring in amazement. "But he couldn't have been poisoned by it. You see, after he left, I was still very upset and angry. I wanted something to steady my nerves before going for my sinus treatment." She paused. "Thegn had left practically all the coffee in the cup. It was quite cold but — I drank it."

Rona stared at Mrs. Broderick, her thoughts swirling. "But Peters analyzed what was left in the cup and found enough hyoscine still there to kill several people!"

"Well, I'm not dead," said Mrs. Broderick reasonably. "And I drank from the same cup that Thegn did."

The truth suddenly screamed itself to Rona. Of course, there was only one explanation. Mrs. Broderick had drunk some of the coffee after Dr. Knudsen and had suffered no ill effects. Obviously, the coffee could not have been poisoned at that time. The hyoscine must have been slipped into the dregs later. In other words, the coffee must have been poisoned *after* the murder! Dr. Knudsen must have been killed by hyoscine administered in something else.

As soon as she realized that, the whole plan and its purpose took logical shape in her mind. The murderer had wanted to make it look as if only the three on the operating team could have had an opportunity to commit the crime. Some time after Dr. Knudsen's death he must have slipped into the office, seen the half-drunk coffee, taken it for granted that Dr. Knudsen himself had drunk it, and planted the hyoscine in the cup.

Mrs. Broderick's sharp voice cut into her thoughts: "Miss Heath, can you make any sense of this coffee business?"

"Yes, yes. I see it now. Dr. Knudsen was killed in some other way."

"What way?"

What way . . . ? Dr. Knudsen had eaten nothing from the lunch tray. That was certain. And yet hyoscine was a quick-acting drug; the Chief could not possibly have stayed alive as long as he did if the poison had been administered before he came up to the operating-room floor.

In a vivid flash of memory there came to her a picture of Dr. Knudsen as she had seen him just before the operation that afternoon, when he had joined her in the scrubroom. He had been nibbling a lump of sugar!

Until that moment the incident had completely slipped her memory. Yet now it showed itself by far the most significant fact in the entire case. On several occasions Dr. Knudsen had told her of his habit of nibbling sugar to supply sufficient energy for any emergency task which involved missing a meal. If she knew of that practice of his, surely the murderer could have known of it, too. It would have been easy for him to substitute a

poisoned lump of sugar for the one the Chief must have carried.

If that was really the way it had happened, if Dr. Knudsen actually had been killed by that lump of sugar, Oliver need be suspected no more than anyone else. The murderer might easily have been miles away from the hospital at the time the Chief died.

Excitedly she said, "Of course, we were all wrong, Mrs. Broderick. I understand now. Dr. Knudsen must have been poisoned by a piece of sugar. I — I saw him eating it just before he started to scrub."

The Director's wife looked at her rather skeptically. "Have you told Lieutenant Heath about this?"

"No, no. I'd forgotten. I never thought of it until just this moment."

"Then I think you'd have difficulty in getting the police to believe you," said Mrs. Broderick sagely. "That brother of yours is smart. He'll think that you're just making up a story to throw suspicion off Oliver."

Rona's heart sank. That was true, of course. Coming so belatedly, anything she said about the sugar would sound pitifully unconvincing — particularly since Jim had made up his mind that she was rooting for Oliver against all comers. But again memory came to her aid.

"If I could produce some of the sugar and prove it was poisoned, Jim would have to believe me then."

"If you could do that."

"But I think I can. You see, Dr. Knudsen threw part of it into the linen basket. It — it might still be there. I could get it. I'll go get a flashlight from my room."

Mrs. Broderick called, "Don't be in such a hurry, child. If you really think you know something, you had better tell your brother."

"No. Jim's not here now. I've got to try to get it right away before — before anything can happen to it."

Mrs. Broderick protested again, but Rona paid no attention. Her mind definitely made up, she hurried out into the passage.

As she hesitated on the threshold she had the queer impression that the door of one of the empty rooms opposite was moving — closing infinitesimally, as if someone had just that moment slipped through it. She felt her pulses tingling slightly. Was it possible that someone had been listening to their conversation? And had then darted behind the door opposite, so that he should not be seen? The idea seemed altogether too fantastic. Dismissing it, she hurried down the passage toward the stairs.

The operating room, she knew, would most certainly be locked at this time of night. But, as Dr. Knudsen's special nurse, she had an extra key to the door which led through the anesthetizing room.

Hurrying to her room in the nurses' building, she found the key and a flashlight, and then sped back to the hospital. Tense with excitement, she climbed the long stairs to the top floor. In the dim corridor-light the great double doors of the theater reared in front of her. She slipped

past them to the small door which led into the anesthetizing room. At night this was the most deserted part of the hospital. Everything was still as death as she slid the key into the lock and opened the door onto pitch-darkness.

Closing the door carefully behind her, she switched on her flashlight. Vaguely wishing she had not come, she forced herself to penetrate into the scrubroom, where the gleaming white wash-basins reflected her light. One . . . two . . . three . . . Dr. Knudsen had used the third basin from the door.

She reached it and, with a sudden stab of excitement, saw that the towel basket had not been emptied. She bent over it and groped swiftly among the soiled towels. Almost at once her fingers touched something small and hard. She picked it up, holding it in the beam from her torch. Yes, it was a half-lump of sugar, with one end jagged and uneven where Dr. Knudsen had bitten it.

Then, suddenly, she stiffened and plunged the piece of sugar into the pocket of her uniform. What was that sound coming from the direction of the anesthetizing room? Had it been her imagination? Or was it a footstep?

She killed her flashlight. In the thick darkness she stood there straining her ears, every nerve in her body alive. The sound came again. She knew then that she had been right. There were footsteps in the adjoining room. Someone was moving, slowly, furtively, toward her.

For one paralyzed moment she stood motionless, pressed against the cold porcelain of the washbasin. Every instinct warned her then that the invisible presence beyond her in the thick darkness was the murderer of Dr. Knudsen. She had been right. He must have been listening to her conversation with Mrs. Broderick, must have slipped into the room opposite, waited while she went to the nurses' home, and then deliberately followed her here — followed her to stop her from getting that lump of sugar.

It was only then that she began to realize just how important it would be for the murderer to see that the true method of death were never brought to light. If this were really he, he would be desperate; he . . .

She cut her train of thought. She must not lose her head. She had to work out a plan. Should she switch on her flashlight? No. That would only give her position away. The safest chance was to stay perfectly still, to hope against reason that this person would not be able to trace her in the darkness.

The next moments were agony. The footsteps grew steadily nearer, but slow, shuffling, and uncertain. Then they stopped.

Gradually, as she became more accustomed to the obscurity, she found herself able to distinguish a form, a misty outline, poised on the threshold of the door which led from the anesthetizing room. It was impossible to distinguish height or features. But the complete immobility of that figure was terrifying. There was some-

thing about it that reminded her of an animal of the night, watching, trying to gauge the exact position of its prey before it sprang. Then slowly it started forward again, veering toward her in her pathetically vulnerable position against the gleaming white of the washbasins.

Rona held her breath, struggling to check the convulsive trembling that had invaded her limbs. His progress toward her was so steady, so deliberate. He had seen her.

Suddenly she could bear it no longer, the suspense, the stifling darkness, the relentlessly moving presence. She cried, "Who is it? What do you want?"

Absolute silence followed, far more horrible than any reply could have been.

"Tell me. Who is it? Why don't you speak? Why . . . ?" Her voice broke into a little strangled cry. The figure was almost on top of her now.

And, hanging poised in the darkness in front of her, catching illumination from some unknown source, she could make out a faint gleam of steel. She knew what it was. Even then, in the confused panic of that terrible moment, she recognized the cruel blade of a surgical knife.

There was only one thing to do. Mustering all her strength, Rona plunged forward straight at the amorphous figure which grasped the knife. She felt hot breath on her face. A hand grabbed at her sleeve. But with a desperate effort she wrenched herself free, swirled round, and ran blindly out into the operating theater.

Something loomed in front of her — the sterilizer. Instinctively she slipped behind it, crouching in its shadow. For a while she could do nothing but try to silence the spasmodic sobs that shook her. She was free for the moment but — she realized it at once — she had only run into a trap. The operating theater was a dead end. The heavy double doors of the main entrance were locked on the outside. The door upstairs in the gallery was locked, too. There was no exit except the door to the scrubroom through which she had just come. And now, as she peered through the gloom, she saw the figure of her unknown assailant, blurred and indistinct, standing there on the threshold.

Wildly Rona looked around her. It was slightly lighter here in the operating theater than it had been in the scrubroom. She could make out the white tiles stretching away on all sides, and, beyond, the little staircase that led to the spectators' gallery.

The spectators' gallery. . . . Suddenly, as all hope seemed gone, she remembered a window in the gallery. It was seldom used. But — yes, she was sure — it gave onto a fire escape.

To reach the stairs leading to it she would have to run across half the operating room, have to expose her whereabouts to that dim, motionless figure standing by the door. If she were not quick enough, if she stumbled, if, when she reached the gallery, she could not open the window, then she would be caught, hopelessly

cut off from all chance of escape. But it was her one slender hope.

Stealthily she slipped forward, easing herself around the wall to the stairs. For a moment the figure by the door stood immobile. Then it swung toward her. He had seen her. That knowledge sent all caution spinning. Crazily, making no effort to conceal herself, she dashed across the theater toward the small stairway.

Somehow she reached it. She was running upward. She was in the gallery, speeding down its narrow length to the window at the far end. Her pulses were drumming in her ears. There was the window, its pane shining faintly. It was shut. Her fingers felt for the catch; turned it, and tried to push up the sash. It did not move.

There was a creak on the stairs, and then footsteps on the wooden floor of the gallery coming toward her.

With the strength of despair she gave a last tug at the window. It opened, and the cool night air rushed in. Vaguely she could make out the spidery rails of the fire escape. She was through the window. Her feet were on the iron steps. She was running downward, downward. . . .

Not once did she look back; nor did she pause until she caught sight of a heavy door, half open, with the light streaming through. She pushed it full open, to find herself in one of the main corridors. There were bright lights . . . people . . . safety. Shutting the door behind her, she swiftly shot the bolt.

Her mind was clear enough to realize that she should get in touch with Jim at once. Without giving a thought to her disheveled appearance she hurried to the nearest telephone. When at last she got through to her brother, at Headquarters, she poured out a broken account of her talk with Mrs. Broderick, her theory of the coffee, and everything that had happened subsequently. "I've got the piece of sugar, Jim," she concluded. "But the murderer knows I've got it. What am I to do?"

"Exactly as I say." Lieutenant Heath's tone was very stern. "Take the sugar to that fellow Peters for analysis right away."

"All right. But — but you're coming over, aren't you?"

"Of course. I'm coming immediately. And it looks as if you've got something really important, Ro. Nice work." His voice was edged with anxiety as he added, "But for God's sake take care of yourself. Don't wander around the hospital alone. I'm not going to have my sister murdered to amuse anyone." He rang off.

The laboratory was in the farthest wing of the building. Rona hurried down the almost deserted corridors toward it, still feeling the vague dread of being pursued.

It was with relief that, as she went through the high archway which led to the wing, she saw ahead of her the tall, redheaded figure of Oliver Lord. She called, "Oliver!"

He spun round and hurried toward her. "What on earth's the matter, Rona? You look as if someone had

been trying to murder you, too."

"They have." Rona said excitedly, "But I've done it, Oliver! I've proved that Dr. Knudsen wasn't killed by the coffee!"

"You — what?"

"I can't explain now. I've got to go to Peters in the analytical lab. Come with me."

They found Dr. Peters busily watching a beaker where a violet liquid was turning to brown above the flame of a Bunsen burner. Rona gave him the sugar, with her brother's instructions.

When they were out in the passage again Oliver gripped her arm. "You're not crazy, by any chance . . . talking about sugar and analyses and . . . ?"

"No, I'm not crazy." Breathlessly she told him everything. "So you see, Oliver," she concluded, "if we can prove it was the sugar that killed the Chief, anyone could have slipped it into his pocket at any time — anyone could have committed the crime."

"The little detective gal!" There was grim admiration in his eyes. "And you almost got yourself murdered trying to save me from the shadow of the death chair! That's the second very nice thing you've done for me today." His smile faded. "But something's crazy, Rona. If the murderer chased you to the operating room, how the hell did he know you were going there, or what you were planning to do?"

"He must have been listening when I talked to Mrs. Broderick." She told him how the door of the room across the passage had moved.

But Oliver was not paying much attention. Suddenly he said, "You told Mrs. Broderick everything, didn't you?"

Rona nodded.

"Then she knows as much as you do. And she's the only witness to the fact that she drank some of the coffee. If the murderer was listening he must have realized that even if he had succeeded in killing you, he'd never have kept the truth from coming out unless —" His jaw very set, Oliver grabbed her arm. "Come on. We've got to get to her right away."

To Rona there was something unreal and dreamlike about that swift journey through corridors and up winding stairways to the Ives Wing. Neither she nor Oliver spoke. And yet she knew exactly what was in his mind, because she was thinking the same thing herself. She had left Mrs. Broderick alone in her room — Mrs. Broderick, who had it in her power not only to give the police a complete account of the murderer's blackmailing activities, but also to explode the cunning trick of the coffee.

She, Rona Heath, had almost been murdered, and she was only half as much of a menace to the murderer as the Director's wife. There was real danger for Caroline Broderick.

When at last they reached the Ives Wing they almost collided with Dr. Broderick coming down the passage from the direction of his wife's room.

Oliver asked sharply, "Have you

been to see your wife? Is she all right?"

"All right?" A furrow of perplexity creased the Director's smooth forehead. "What do you mean? Yes, I — ah — did just put my head around the door. But the lights were out. I called her name, but she seemed to be asleep. I did not disturb her."

While the Director stared in astonished silence, Rona hurried the short distance to Mrs. Broderick's room. She entered it. As Dr. Broderick had said, the room was in darkness. She could only just make out the dim figure on the bed. "Mrs. Broderick!" she whispered.

There was no reply.

Rona moved nearer the bed. A sudden, uncontrollable shiver passing through her, she turned to the bedside table, felt blindly for the light, and switched it on.

For one terrible moment she stared at the figure on the bed. Beneath the crumpled sheets, Caroline Broderick's body was sprawled limp and grotesque as a sawdust puppet. Her face was buried under a mound of pillows.

Rona stared at it, stared at its long white fingers, with their scarlet-nailed tips, tightly clenched. Then she screamed.

The next few minutes were a wild, fantastic kaleidoscope. The door behind her was thrown open. Someone was gripping her arm, steadying her — Oliver. Vaguely she was conscious of another figure, Dr. Broderick, hurrying to the bed, bending over it, lifting the pillows. She caught a glimpse of his face.

There was no need to look farther. The truth cried out from the ashen whiteness of his cheeks and the horror in his eyes. Then, dimly, his voice came through to her: "Caroline! Good God! She's dead. She's — she's been smothered under her own pillows. . . ."

For Rona the period that followed was merged into a blurred, timeless nightmare.

The figures of Dr. Broderick and Oliver seemed to loom at her side through a mist. There was a vague memory of her brother striding into that small, constricted room, instantly taking over control, hustling them all out into the passage. Policemen seemed suddenly to be everywhere.

Somehow she was giving replies to clipped, official questions. Then Jim's voice: "I'll want you again later, Rona. Go to the Director's office and wait for me."

For hours, it seemed, she was alone in that cold, impersonal room.

When at last the door swung open, it was not Lieutenant Heath but Oliver Lord who came in. The young surgeon crossed to where she stood by the window, taking both her cold hands in his. "Rona, this is ghastly. And to think that — that it almost happened to you, too!"

Rona asked, "You've been talking to Jim?"

"Yes. He's interviewed everyone — Ellsworth, me, Venner, even poor old Broderick." He gave a harsh laugh.

"At least the field of suspicion has widened. No one has any sort of alibi for the time it happened. Any of us could have slipped into that room without being seen by the night nurse."

"And she was — was smothered?"

He nodded. "Easy to see how it happened. He managed to overhear your talk with Mrs. Broderick and went in as soon as you left the room. Mrs. Broderick wouldn't have been alarmed because, as she told you, she had no idea who the murderer of her brother was. It wouldn't have been difficult to smother her before she had a chance to suspect anything."

Rona gave a little shiver. "And — and as soon as he had killed her he went to the theater after me!"

"Sure." Oliver's lips tightened. "You were as dangerous to him as Caroline, because she'd told you everything she knew. If he'd been able to kill you, too, I guess it might never have come out about the blackmail or about the poisoned coffee being a plant or . . ."

"Or about the sugar!" put in Rona. "If only I hadn't had that crazy idea of going to get the sugar myself; if only I'd stayed there with Mrs. Broderick, this would never have happened."

"You mustn't feel that way. You couldn't tell there was danger then." Oliver's hands slid to her arms, holding them tightly. "You went up to the operating room because — well, because you thought it would pull me out of a jam, didn't you?"

"I suppose I did." Rona smiled wanly; then her eyes clouded. "But you do think it will help, don't you? Now he knows the poisoned coffee was a frame-up, Jim can't suspect you any more. The hyoscine must have been in the sugar. That must have been the way Dr. Knudsen was killed, mustn't it?"

As she spoke, the door opened, and Lieutenant Heath swung into the room. His face was very grim. "You were talking about that half-lump of sugar," he said tersely. "Maybe you'll be interested to hear that Peters' analysis report has just come in."

Rona said, "It — it was poisoned?"

Lieutenant Heath gave a little shrug. "On the contrary. Peters says he found no trace of hyoscine."

"It wasn't poisoned? Then why . . . ?"

"Don't expect me to answer any questions." Lieutenant Heath dropped into a chair and slung his leg over the arm. "I've put in a swell day. I had everything pinned on Lord, then I find out that was exactly what the murderer wanted me to do. Although I had the entire motive handed me on a silver platter, I haven't been able to pin the blackmail on anyone. I let Mrs. Broderick get killed right under my nose. I let my own sister come within an ace of being murdered. I haven't even figured out yet how Knudsen was killed!"

He glanced at Oliver with a slightly sardonic smile. "Maybe, as a smart young doctor, you can tell me a couple of things. First thing: Why should

the murderer have tried to kill Rona just because she went searching for a perfectly ordinary lump of sugar? Second thing: How the hell was Knudsen killed by hyoscine when neither the coffee he drank nor the sugar he ate had any hyoscine in it?"

While the lieutenant had been speaking, a furrow of concentration had puckered Oliver's forehead. Now he looked up, his eyes suddenly bright. "I may be cuckoo, but I think I can give you a very good answer to both those questions."

"Are you being funny?"

"This is hardly the time for light comedy." There was a strange excitement in the intern's voice. "I'd never dreamed of it until this instant, but at last I see something that looks like daylight. It's that half-lump of sugar. You say it wasn't poisoned; but the murderer tried to keep Rona from getting it. There can be only one explanation for that. And it makes the sugar vitally, horribly important."

Oliver swung round to Rona: "Don't you see what I mean? No, I guess you don't. But" — he turned back to the lieutenant — "with any luck I could prove I'm right if you'd let us go up to Knudsen's office."

Jim rose to his feet. "Okay," he said. "I'll bite. Let's go."

Oliver did not speak on the long, eerie trek to the operating-room floor. He waited impatiently as Jim produced the key to the outside door of Knudsen's office and let them into the room. Once inside, however, the young surgeon became very brisk and businesslike. He nodded at the clothes closet in the corner. "That's where Knudsen kept the white coats he used on his hospital rounds, isn't it, Rona? Maybe your brother would let you search through the pockets and see what you can find."

Jim grunted, "Anything goes."

Bewildered but obedient, Rona went to the closet. She found a lump of sugar in each of the four white coats.

Oliver was smiling with grim satisfaction as she handed him the four pieces of sugar. "Excellent. We'll keep these as exhibits." He tossed them onto the desk and moved to the drug cabinet, asking Jim to unlock it. As he tugged open the door, Rona saw that everything inside was just as it had been that afternoon when she had inspected it with Hugh Ellsworth — the rolls of adhesive, bandages, three hypodermic syringes, the stethoscope, iodine, adrenalin, morphine tablets, insulin ampules, alcohol, and digitalis.

"Now, if I'm right, I remember . . ." Oliver was scrutinizing the ranks of bottles and packages carefully. "Yes, there it is."

His fingers moved next to the hypodermic syringes lying on the bottom shelf. He picked one up, held it to the light, put it down, and took up another. Rona, watching at his elbow, saw that there were some remnants of colorless liquid inside. He placed it back in the cabinet and swung round to Jim.

"You said you thought the method used to poison Knudsen was the most important point in the case. You're right. It strikes me we're up against the most ingenious ruse I ever heard of in my life. And it's something not one in a thousand policemen could be expected to stumble on, because it rests entirely upon a little problem in medicine."

His frank, attractive face under the mop of red hair wore an expression of grim self-assurance. He said, "I'm only a surgeon, Lieutenant, but I'm still fresh enough out of medical school to remember quite a bit of my medicine. I think if I give you a little lecture on 'Drugs and Their Uses,' you'll see what I'm driving at." His blue eyes glanced at Rona. "While I'm lecturing, there're a couple of things I'd like Rona to do for me. I'd prefer not to have her murdered doing them, so perhaps you've a nice, husky policeman you could send along with her, Lieutenant?"

Jim had been listening to him in uncommunicative silence. Still without commenting, he moved to the phone and gave rapid instructions. In a short time, a uniformed officer appeared.

"Okay. Now, here are the chores, Rona." Oliver took from the cabinet the hypodermic syringe which contained the dregs of liquid, and handed it to her. "Take this to Peters for analysis right away. Tell him to call me here the instant he starts getting an angle on the nature of its contents. Then rout out Venner, Ellsworth, and Dr. Broderick and tell them the lieutenant wants to talk to them up here — in a quarter of an hour."

Ten minutes later, her tasks fulfilled, Rona hurried back to Dr. Knudsen's office. Oliver and Jim were standing by the desk, staring down at the four lumps of sugar. The young surgeon still looked excited and rather flushed. But there was a marked change in Jim. All traces of baffled indecision had left him. "Well, Rona," he said, "your boyfriend here is pretty smart, after all. Did you get his message to those three people?"

Rona nodded.

"Fine. I'm going to try a little experiment. And I've got a couple of chores for you before they get here." He nodded to Oliver, who took one of the remaining two hypodermic syringes from the closet and handed it to him. He, in his turn, passed it to Rona. "Go into the scrubroom and put a little water in this thing."

"Just about one c.c.," added Oliver.

Rona obeyed. When she brought the syringe back, Jim replaced it in its former position on the shelf of the cabinet, the door of which he left open.

"They should be here any minute now," he said. "All the doors to the theater are locked except the one leading through this office, Rona. I want you to wait outside in the passage and, when you see each person coming, tell him I want to talk to him in the theater. It doesn't matter who comes first, but it's your job to make sure each of them is alone when

he goes through this office. Can you do that?"

"Of course, but why . . . ?"

"You'll know soon enough." Jim glanced once again at Oliver. "Everything's set, isn't it?"

"Sure." Oliver grinned. "The trap and the cheese."

"Okay. Then come on."

The two men moved to the door leading through the scrubroom to the theater and disappeared. Rona, completely at sea, slipped out into the passage and moved to the head of the stairs by which the others would have to arrive.

In a very short time Hugh Ellsworth appeared, ascending the stairs.

She gave him the message and he strolled down the passage, disappearing through the door of Dr. Knudsen's office.

Gregory Venner came next, looking small and rather flustered. Rona sent him to the theater by the same route.

Finally Dr. Broderick himself appeared. The Director's face was still ashen-gray; he seemed to move in a daze. He acknowledged Rona's instructions by the slightest nod of his head and passed down the corridor.

After a brief interval Rona followed him. She found Dr. Knudsen's office empty and heard the sound of voices coming from the theater. She moved to join the others, but, as she did so, they all came trooping back into the office, led by Jim.

"I guess it's better to be in here," he said. "Gentlemen, please be seated."

Lieutenant Heath's alert gray eyes moved from Venner to Ellsworth, resting finally on Dr. Broderick. "I've asked you all to come here because I want you to know exactly where we stand. I'm sorry, Dr. Broderick, to have to include you at a time like this but . . ."

The Director waved the apology away. Very quietly he said, "You know there is nothing — nothing I would not do to have this terrible matter cleared up."

"I'm glad, Dr. Broderick, because I think it'll be cleared up very soon." Jim's lips were tight. "The whole setup of the two crimes is plain now, and a pretty dirty racket it's turned out to be. Someone here at the hospital had been extorting money out of Mrs. Broderick, using certain information about her daughter as a lever. Mrs. Broderick, herself, never knew that person's identity, but she confided in her brother, and Dr. Knudsen unearthed the blackmailer and threatened to expose him. He was murdered before he had a chance to do so."

He paused. "The murderer staked everything on the fact that the method he used for poisoning Dr. Knudsen would never come out. After the crime he put hyoscine in the remains of Knudsen's coffee, hoping to throw us off the right track and restrict suspicion to the people who had access to the lunch tray. That not only gave him a perfect alibi, it might easily have kept the truth from ever coming out. Even at autopsy, Lord

says, it would have been almost impossible to tell that the hyoscine had not been administered in the coffee Knudsen drank.

"Later in the evening," continued the lieutenant, "the murderer contrived to overhear a conversation between Rona and Mrs. Broderick. He learned that Mrs. Broderick had drunk some of the coffee. Since she had not been poisoned, both she and Rona were in a position to expose his poisoned-coffee ruse. He also learned that Rona had stumbled on the idea of the sugar which, although it wasn't poisoned, was a damning piece of evidence. For those two reasons, he had to kill Mrs. Broderick, and he tried to kill Rona."

Jim glanced at Oliver. "I'm going to admit that I expected the half-lump of sugar to be poisoned, and, when we discovered it wasn't, the method of death had me completely stopped. Lord here, however, got a theory. I want you medical men to hear it."

Oliver lit a cigarette. His strong hand, shielding the match, was very steady. "First of all," he said, "I want to ask a question. We were all pretty close to Knudsen. Did any of you either know or suspect that he had anything the matter with him — a definite illness, I mean, that would require medication?"

Dr. Broderick looked up, his eyes showing surprise. Hugh Ellsworth, watching Oliver curiously, shook his head. It was Gregory Venner who spoke.

Emphatically he said, "But that's nonsense. Everyone knows that Knudsen was proud of the fact that he'd never had a day's illness in his life."

"I know he was proud of it," continued Oliver. "And it's logical to suppose that if ever he did have anything the matter with him, his pride would have made him terribly careful to keep anyone — even his closest associates — from guessing that he was ill. That, I believe, is exactly what happened. At the time of his death, and almost certainly for a considerable period before that, Dr. Knudsen was ill. And none of us ever so much as suspected it." He paused, adding very softly, "None of us, that is, except the man who murdered him."

A shade of Dr. Broderick's normal pompous manner returned as he leaned forward in his chair. "You appear to forget, Dr. Lord, that an autopsy has been performed. If Knudsen had been suffering, as you suggest, from some pathological condition, surely that would be revealed by the post-mortem findings."

"Not necessarily, sir. The condition I refer to, if properly treated, need show no visible signs either during life or at autopsy. And there seems no question that Dr. Knudsen, in spite of his contempt for internal medication, had been using a standard specific to control his disease."

The moment of unrelieved silence that followed was charged with tensity.

Oliver continued suddenly, "It was that half-lump of sugar which gave me the clue. It put sugar 'way up front as an issue that was important to the murderer."

He stubbed his cigarette. "Rona happened to see Knudsen nibbling that sugar just a short time before the operation this afternoon. On several occasions in the past, too, she had seen him nibbling sugar. He had explained to her that he did it to get quick energy. That didn't sound particularly convincing to me. Knudsen always had plenty of energy of his own, and, even if he had needed an extra fillip, he would surely not have nibbled the sugar; he would have eaten the whole lump. The more I thought about it, the more certain it seemed that there was only one sound reason why Knudsen carried sugar around with him."

He leaned across the desk, pushing forward the four lumps of sugar which Rona had taken from the dead surgeon's coats. "I was sure I had the right idea when we found one of these in each of Knudsen's coats."

He glanced at Dr. Broderick. "It's not so long since I studied Diagnosis right here at the hospital. This problem turned out to be a lot easier than the ones we got in our year-end quiz. Dr. Knudsen was by no means overweight, but he confined himself to a diet that was low in carbohydrates; he took no sugar with his meals; and yet, apparently, he always carried with him a lump of sugar which he occasionally nibbled."

He broke off and, getting up, moved to the drug cabinet. He took a small box from the top shelf and laid it down on the desk. Sliding open the lid, he revealed two rubber-stoppered ampules. "Here, I think, is the clinching evidence. This particular drug is practically never used in surgery. I can remember no occasion upon which we've needed it in the past six months. And yet there is always a package of it in this cabinet, and this particular one has been more than half used. There's only one possible conclusion to draw. Dr. Knudsen must have been using it on himself."

Dr. Broderick had been staring at the little glass vials with growing astonishment. "Insulin!" he exclaimed.

"Exactly. The rest is elementary. A patient who eliminated all sugar from his diet; a patient who took insulin; a patient who always carried a lump of sugar around with him." Oliver turned his keen gaze to Ellsworth. "Even a neurologist can figure out the answer to that one, can't he?"

Hugh Ellsworth was looking at him from impervious dark eyes. "I would say you've proved your point very ingeniously, Lord. You're implying, of course, that Knudsen was a diabetic?"

"Sure. That's the secret he tried so hard to conceal and which he succeeded in keeping from everyone — except the man who murdered him. Dr. Knudsen had diabetes!"

Oliver Lord, very sure of himself now, had risen and was standing, tall and broad-shouldered, behind the

desk. His gaze fixed Lieutenant Heath.

"I didn't have much time just now to give you the low-down on diabetes," he said. "In the first place, it's essential for all diabetics to take at least one injection of insulin a day. This keeps their blood sugar at the right level and prevents the danger of diabetic coma. But there is another danger, even after the insulin requirements of the individual have been thoroughly established. There is always the possibility of taking an overdose, which results in what is known as insulin shock. That's why every sensible diabetic carries a lump of sugar or its equivalent with him at all times. If he ever gets an abnormal reaction to his injection, it is the routine thing for him to nibble at the sugar — which modifies the effect of the insulin."

He ran a hand through his thick red hair. "The whole set-up straightens itself out now, doesn't it? The man who had been extorting money from Mrs. Broderick knew Knudsen had diabetes." He turned to Ellsworth. "I don't know much about it, but I believe hyoscine is used almost exclusively in neurology, isn't it? Even so, it wouldn't have been difficult for any of us to get hold of some around the hospital, and a solution of hyoscine would be as colorless as insulin and just as easy to inject.

"And it wouldn't be difficult to take the rubber tops off some ampules and substitute a solution of hyoscine in place of the insulin. Once that was done, all the potential murderer had to do was to slip a poisoned ampule into Knudsen's current insulin supply."

He picked up the box. "As you see, this particular package has a slide top which opens only in one direction. That means that the patient would be more likely to use the ampules in the order they are in the box. Calculating on one ampule being used a day, it would have been possible for the murderer to plan ahead of time almost the exact moment when death would take place."

He shrugged. "Rona saw the Chief nibbling that lump of sugar before the operation. Obviously he'd just taken what he thought was his regular shot of insulin. He'd felt something was wrong, suspected an overdose, and, like all other diabetics, immediately took sugar. It was a most diabolically ingenious way to commit murder. Dr. Knudsen was tricked into poisoning himself while his murderer, if he'd wanted to, could have been in Timbuktu at the time when the crime was supposed to have been committed."

"Thank you, Dr. Lord." Jim's voice broke in, instantly deflecting all attention away from the intern. The lieutenant's gray eyes were gauging the various expressions of the men in front of him. "You've heard Dr. Lord's theory. In a very short time I hope to have evidence to prove it's the correct one." He paused, adding very quietly, "It may also interest you to know that I already have evidence to prove that the murderer of Dr.

Knudsen and Mrs. Broderick is sitting in this room at this very moment."

Hugh Ellsworth propped his elbow on the back of the chair and stared straight ahead of him with slightly narrowed pupils; Gregory Venner clucked and threw a deprecatory glance at Dr. Broderick, who was gazing down at the polished black toes of his shoes.

"The murderer," continued Heath levelly, "has two very definite attributes. In the first place, he was familiar with Linette Clint's medical history, which had been kept a closely guarded secret. Ellsworth, as the doctor who treated her, obviously had all the facts in his possession. But he is not the only one who could have known about the false epilepsy diagnosis. Mr. Venner, as the official record keeper, would have had the chance to see all the case reports on Miss Clint, and Dr. Broderick, as the girl's stepfather, might easily have heard about it from his wife. Theoretically, at least, any one of those three people had the necessary knowledge to blackmail Mrs. Broderick."

He picked up a pencil and tapped with it on the top of the desk. "The second attribute, however, applies to the murderer and the murderer alone. Only one of you people knew Dr. Knudsen had diabetes. That made it possible for the murderer to commit the crime. It has also, however, made it possible for us to solve it."

Beneath the short blond hair the detective's face was very hard and uncompromising. "It's easy to figure out what the murderer did this afternoon when he managed to slip into the office alone after Dr. Knudsen had died. He realized, of course, that his remote-control murder had been successful. His one remaining job was to conceal the true method of death. He had in his possession some extra hyoscine. He saw the half-drunk coffee on the lunch tray and realized that by putting the hyoscine in it, he could provide the perfect smoke screen."

He went on: "Next, probably, he searched through the scrapbasket and got hold of the empty ampule which had contained the hyoscine dose. There was only one more thing for him to remove to make himself completely safe. The box of insulin ampules itself was no serious menace, but there was something else that was crucially important — the hypodermic syringe that Knudsen had used to give himself the poisoned injection.

"The murderer must have realized that Knudsen took the injection in a hurry before an important operation and probably would not have had the time to wash out the syringe. Almost certainly there would still be a residue in it — something which, if analyzed and proved to be hyoscine, would give the whole thing away. He had to remove it at all costs. But" — he shrugged — "there was the snag. Dr. Knudsen had put it back in its regular place in the drug cabinet, and the drug cabinet was locked. No one but

Knudsen himself and Rona had a key. Knudsen's key was in his pocket — utterly inaccessible. Rona couldn't possibly be asked for hers without arousing suspicion. An elementary mischance like a locked cabinet had thrown a monkey-wrench into the perfect murder set-up.

"Not to have provided against that beforehand was the murderer's first big mistake. But it was nowhere near as fatal as his second mistake." He paused and added softly, "And I might add that this second mistake has been made within the last few minutes."

He let the pencil drop. "I can imagine how all through the past hours the thought of that hypodermic syringe must have been preying on his mind. A combination of panic and a guilty conscience had forced him into killing Mrs. Broderick and trying to kill Rona in a desperate attempt to save the 'perfect murder.' But what good did that do him, when all the time the syringe with its vital evidence was here in the drug cabinet? Some time this evening, we know, he was up here on this floor when he followed Rona. But at that time all the doors to this office were locked; there was a double barrier between him and the syringe."

Rona stiffened in her chair. She saw now exactly what her brother's little experiment had been.

"Just now," continued Lieutenant Heath, "each of you three men came through this office alone on your way to join me in the theater. The drug cabinet was open; the syringe was lying there for anyone to see. It seemed to the murderer like a heaven-sent opportunity at last to destroy the one really clinching piece of evidence. He went to the closet . . . *and took the syringe!* Look!"

He rose and crossed to the drug cabinet, pointing at the lower shelf. All the others were staring fixedly. Rona looked, too, although she had realized exactly what she would see. The hypodermic syringe which Jim had made her partly fill with water was no longer there.

"You can see now," Lieutenant Heath said, "just what a fatal mistake that was. The murderer didn't realize that things were playing into his hands a little too easily; he didn't realize he had fallen into a very simple trap. He did exactly what I hoped he would do. At this moment he has that syringe in his pocket, and he might as well have a pair of handcuffs on his wrists too."

Oliver had risen now. He and Jim stood there by the cabinet, gazing fixedly at the three men in front of them. Hugh Ellsworth was still smiling his remote, faintly ironical smile. Dr. Broderick, very shaken and white, was playing abstractedly with his watch chain. Gregory Venner, his face a muddy gray, gave a little sniff and, thrusting his hand in his trouser pocket, pulled out a rolled-up handkerchief. With a swift, desperate movement he jabbed the handkerchief against his wrist.

"I wouldn't bother to try any tricky business with that syringe, Mr.

Venner." Jim's voice came sharp as a whiplash. "I'm afraid there's nothing in it but water. The original syringe Knudsen used is down in the analytical laboratory being tested for hyoscine. It'll be the State's Exhibit A against you."

Gregory Venner stared back at him from eyes that showed naked panic. There was a hard clatter as the handkerchief dropped from his fingers. Slipping out from its folds, a hypodermic syringe rolled across the floor.

Like a flash Lieutenant Heath had sprung to pick it up.

"This was almost too easy, wasn't it?" he said. "The fact that you took that syringe from the cabinet just now is damning enough on its own. But there are plenty of other things, too. You were very careful to establish an alibi for the time before Dr. Knudsen's death, but both Dr. Lord and my sister saw you go into the office as soon as the operation was over. You had just about time to pour the hyoscine in the coffee and remove the empty ampule. Rona met you on her way to Mrs. Broderick's room and told you Mrs. Broderick was going to give her some important information. I guess you were wondering just how much she did know. So you followed to the Ives Wing and did a bit of eavesdropping. You heard Rona talking about the sugar, which you knew might easily put us onto the track of the diabetes."

He continued relentlessly: "It was the diabetes that you really wanted to keep dark, wasn't it? Knudsen was your friend." His voice was edged with sarcasm. "You knew he'd never told his associates about it, but you had enough sense to realize that, if it did come out, suspicion would immediately point to you as the man who had gone mountain-climbing with him. Around the hospital Knudsen was successful in concealing the fact that he took insulin, but it's inconceivable that he could have spent days and nights camping out with you and still have kept the secret of his daily injections from you."

He paused. "Lord has just told me about that time when Knudsen collapsed and you trekked so gallantly down the mountain to get him medical aid. It's a thousand-to-one shot that Knudsen collapsed from diabetic coma because his insulin either ran out or was lost, and that the medical aid you brought was — fresh insulin."

The little anesthetist had been staring at him speechless, his face a blank, dazed mask. Now, in the deep silence, while every atom of concentration in the room was fixed on him, he rose pointlessly to his feet. He looked pathetically small and helpless. "I — I saved his life," he said dully.

"You saved his life once," agreed Jim quietly. "And Dr. Knudsen showed his gratitude by giving you an opportunity to restore the money you'd blackmailed out of his sister. You used that opportunity to take the life you had previously saved."

"They were all getting money out of Mrs. Broderick. They had so much. . . . I had so little. . . . I never

dreamed it would come to . . ." Venner's voice trailed off. He looked around him wildly. Then suddenly he crumpled and fell to the floor.

They had taken him away.

For a while Rona was left alone in that austere, familiar room which had been the scene of so much tragedy and violence. She felt numb and tired.

At some later, indeterminate stage she was dimly aware that the door had opened. She looked up, to see the dark figure of Dr. Hugh Ellsworth.

"Well, Rona, we brought him around. When he heard Peters had found hyoscine in the hypodermic syringe, he made a full confession."

Rona shivered. "And they were friends! Poor little Venner, it seems incredible."

"It doesn't to me. People often get desperate when they grow old and feel their security slipping. He'd never felt his job was safe; he'd never had enough money; and he'd set his heart on going mountain-climbing in Switzerland. When he had a chance to read Linette's case history in the record-room, you can see what a temptation it must have been. A chance to get everything he wanted in life at a price Mrs. Broderick wouldn't even feel! And then Knudsen guessed, and accused him of the blackmail. Everything crashed — his new hopes and the few things he'd had to cling to in the past. He'd lost the respect of the one man who mattered to him; he'd lost the only influence which stood between him and Broderick's expressed intention of getting rid of him. There was nothing left to him except the money — and to preserve that he killed his best friend."

For a long moment they stood there without speaking. At length Ellsworth's lips moved in a slight smile. "Well, it's out of our hands now, and there's no use agonizing about it. At least, there's one piece of good news. Broderick's going to do everything in his power to put the grant through. That means a lot of expansion in the Neurological Clinic. I'll have some real work for you there if you return."

As he spoke, the door from the scrubroom swung open and Oliver Lord came in. He crossed to Rona's side and put a possessive arm around her shoulders. Beneath the red hair his blue eyes stared belligerently at Ellsworth. "What's this about Rona going back to work for you?" he demanded. "She's staying on with me."

Ellsworth did not speak. The wry smile was still on his mouth as he moved to the door. At the threshold he turned. "Rona will have to make up her own mind, of course. But, as a psychiatrist, I strongly advise the Neurological Clinic."

"Why?"

Ellsworth was grinning now. "Because I've always thought it is bad psychology for people to work together in the same department when they're — in love with each other."

He slipped out of the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

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