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*he Post-Mortem Murder*
*ll the Way Home*
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*he Honorable Gentleman*
*he Man with the Sneer*
*line Minus Nine Equals One*
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*We welcome the first appearance of Charlotte Armstrong in EQMM — the Charlotte Armstrong you have met in such outstanding detective-suspense novels as* THE UNSUSPECTED *and* MISCHIEF *. . . Charlotte Armstrong was born, in the author's own words, "nobody's business when." The place, however, is no secret: the iron-mining country of upper Michigan. Papa Armstrong was a mining engineer. The North Country is still described as a wild, frontier part of the world, and very romantic; Charlotte doesn't remember it as that, but it was good country for children, with woods and lakes and very snowy winters.*

*Education? All around these United States — including a boarding school in Lake Forest, the University of Wisconsin, and Barnard. Her first job was taking classified ads over the telephone for "The New York Times." She stayed on it long enough to meet the man she married.*

*Her second job was fashion reporting. This involved trotting up and down Fifth Avenue every day. Charlotte's "beat" was from Gimbel's on 33rd Street to Saks on 50th Street, and all department-store stops in between. But her business career, Charlotte confesses, never amounted to much: she soon married and had a baby and began to write plays. All the rest, she tells us, is more of the same — now she has three children, has survived two flops on Broadway, and has produced, so far, six books. But we have met Charlotte Armstrong. She sat in our library — in the big red-leather chair — and talked detective stories; and in that famous phrase from "Showboat," Charlotte's six books "are only the beginning." Charlotte Armstrong is going to make detective-story history.*

# ALL THE WAY HOME

*by CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG*

I'D dreamed, so many times, how I would save the man I loved. In a dozen wild plots all would depend on me, my nerve, and my wits. And I'd dreamed how I'd win.

But what happened wasn't like my dreams at all — nothing like them.

I work in Madame Elise's *Salon de Beauté*, on the Boulevard. Tom isn't crazy about the idea of me working, but we haven't any children, yet, and we can use the money. It's a good place. Madame Elise is strict, in some ways, but she runs a smart shop.

I'd combed out my four o'clock patron, that Wednesday, and was deep in the back of the narrow place when this woman came in. Madame Elise came out of a booth and stalked, in her stiff-legged way, down the middle aisle. I turned my head. I saw the woman's face.

The first thing I thought was, *Run!* But you can't get out of the shop at the back. Then I thought, *Get sick! Go home sick!* But I knew exactly what Madame Elise would do. She'd stand over me and ask all my symptoms, loudly, so the patrons would know this wasn't Madame's fault. I couldn't put myself in that spotlight of attention. That was the very last thing I could do.

I couldn't walk out. I couldn't run away. I couldn't go home sick. It was just like a trap — I couldn't get out.

And if this woman recognized me when she saw my face, then Tom's life and my life would be ruined.

I went into the lavatory. I was standing there, looking through the window bars, when Joan put her head in. "Elise is hollering. Mrs. Smith. Shampoo and set. She's yours, dear."

"Mine? In the blue coat?"

"New, isn't she?"

"I guess so," I said. I took my hands off the bars. Joan couldn't take her instead of me. Nobody could. Any attempt I made to get out of this would only call attention to me.

That woman wasn't any Mrs. Smith. She was Mrs. Maybee. What I'd have to do, to save the man I loved, was just what I always do, day after day — shampoo and set a woman's hair. There was one chance. If I could master my own body, my hands and my voice, my breath and the pump of my heart, she might not realize who I was.

When Tom first got into trouble, I dreamed hard about helping him in some miraculous way. But help finally came out of the blue. They stumbled over the man who *had* taken all that money from Tom's office. They found the money, and the man confessed, and there was a hullabaloo, because by this time Tom had served a whole month of his sentence in the penitentiary, on top of all the time they'd held him during his arrest and trial.

Of course, they let Tom go, at once. We were married the next day. What our friends and families back east said of us, now, was just that we had gone "out west" and were "doing well."

Tom had a pretty good job, here in L.A., as a salesman, and I was working for Elise, and we were buying our little stucco house that was falling apart nearly as fast as we could nail and plaster it back together. Still, I knew we weren't really doing so well. Tom had been completely cleared and he was supposed to be perfectly free. But he wasn't free — not yet.

He was bitter. Oh, that was an awful thing to go through — being accused of a crime you had not committed, and being convicted, in spite of all you or your friends could do,

and only saved in the end almost whimsically. It shook you, all right. And yet — you mustn't throw good time after bad. So I dreamed. But all I could do, actually, was stand by, and hope that the days or the years would wash out the bitterness.

Tom was fanatically careful about everything we did. He feared and mistrusted the law, the police, the courts — any part of them. For instance, he drove the car with a tense correctness that hurt us both. But I was the same. I could no more go through a red light than I could kill somebody. We were living like guilty people.

Once I thought that if we could find some doctor who understood these things and go to him. . . . But when I said something like that, one Sunday morning, Tom reacted as if I had hit him.

"How could it be inside of *me*? They put me in jail, didn't they? They wouldn't believe me, would they? I *was* innocent. I *was* truthful."

"Yes, Tom, yes. I know it."

"Don't talk as if there's something wrong with *me*! Don't do it, Ellen! A man's a fool who doesn't learn from experience," he added, more quietly.

"I only want us to be — well, easier in mind. Possibly we ought to remember that they did finally get it straightened out. They *did* let you go."

"When they let me go, Ellen," he said drearily, "this was their attitude. A kind of hard stare, they gave me. Not as if they were looking at an innocent man, but just at a lucky man. 'Looks like we've got to let you go this time, Harkness. O.K., brother, but watch your step.'"

"Tom, who had that attitude?"

"All of them," he said. "All of them." His big fist went up and down, striking his thigh, and I tried to stop it with my two hands.

"All right, then. Let's sue them! For false arrest or something!"

"Not me," he said, with that wary, sharp look I had grown to hate. "I don't get mixed up with Them again. Not as long as I live."

I couldn't argue with him. I wasn't wise enough. I said, "Skip it. We'd be dumb to drag it up again. We'd better get going on those cupboards."

Tom's a good-looking blond beast with brown eyes. He said, "Pig . . ."

"What?"

"Little pig, that cries, *We . . . we . . . we . . .*" and there was that light in his eyes.

"I love you, you big mutt," I said. "Hand me the paint brush. All right, then," I snuffled. "*All the way home.*"

Oh, I dreamed up crazy plots, about me rescued from deadly peril by a flock of gallant cops. They were just dreams. All I could do was go along, loving him, and time went along, too, and got in a few good licks — until one Friday night.

We'd gone about twelve miles from home to catch a movie we'd missed, and on the way back we got lost. We knew we were going in the right direction, but we didn't know exactly

where we were. So we were creeping along one of those open roads, through a section that hadn't been built up much. It was pretty dark. There was a tall eucalyptus hedge on our right. We were both squinting for the street sign at the next intersection, when the right front wheel struck something like a soft lump in the road. The car lurched over it.

Tom's reflexes were quick. We stopped, straddling what I hoped was a sack of some soft stuff. I opened my door and put my foot down. It touched something. I fell out, scrambling. My hand groped in the dark and touched warm skin.

"He shouldn't have been lying in the road," I said, and my voice sounded funny to my own ears. "The thing to do is find a doctor." I got up and my knee cracked. I heard it so clearly — I heard everything, magnified a million times. The car idling, Tom's breath. I could tell Tom's muscles screamed to drive like fury away. But I said, "House — back of the hedge. I'll go. I'll phone."

I went up a graveled drive. I don't know how I knew, but I did know that somewhere inside this dark house there was a light. Everything was so vivid. I could feel each pebble turn under my shoe. I knew, in the dark, each brick of the steps to the door. There was a button to push and I pushed it. I knew there were ears in the house to hear the bell.

I could see through the glass pane when a door opened and let light into a hall. A woman in a housecoat appeared at the far end, put her hand to a switch, and a bulb came on in the ceiling, just inside the door. She walked toward me. I could hear every fall of her foot. She rattled chains. The door opened about five inches, and she put her face near the gap.

The ceiling light was harsh and it came straight down on her face. I could see her hand on the edge of the door. I could see the pink petunias of the print she was wearing. I could hear a clock. I could smell the house-smell. I knew what she'd had for dinner and what she'd been doing when I rang.

I said, "Do you know a doctor? There's a man hurt in the road. May I use your phone?"

"Hurt?" she said. Her hand was going toward the chain that kept the door from opening any farther, but it seemed to move so slowly.

I said, "Oh, hurry!" Then an arm went around my waist, snatching me almost off my feet. I screamed. For a terrible moment I didn't even know who it was. He put his hand over my face and shut off the noise I was making. He said in my ear, "Come away!" I heard the woman yelp, the door slam.

Then I knew it was Tom who was making me run down the drive. He dragged me around the car and stuffed me in under the wheel, over to my own side. Then I saw the other car — its big cat eyes, hunting the driveway of a dark house ahead of us. The beams swerved off the road and then jerked back, as if the big eyes had

caught sight of us and wanted to look again.

Tom yanked our car into gear and got out of there. We tore past the neighbor's stopped car. We flew down the dark road, screamed around the next intersection. We nosed into traffic. We settled into line. Tom's face was wet with sweat, trying to drive as if we were two people coming home from the movies.

He didn't say a word until we were almost home. Then he said, "Ellen, I'm sorry . . ."

"He was dead, Tom?"

"Ellen, we hit a corpse. The man had been shot in the head. He was dead before we ever . . ."

He took his right hand off the wheel and I saw something on his first two fingers. I thought it was blood, but then I saw that it was a purple-red. "What's that, Tom!"

"I don't know." He rubbed the stain. It seemed dry.

We were at home, finally, and we could talk. Tom said the minute I'd left him, he'd taken the flashlight and turned it on the man. Our wheel had gone over his legs. Tom got out and tried for the pulse, but he couldn't be sure. He said he'd had a lot of vague mixed-up thoughts — better not try to move him, better wait for a doctor. Then he wondered about identity. He'd wiggled his hand under the body to get into the right hip pocket, to see if he could find a name and address. But there was no wallet. Instead, there was a broken bottle, wrapped in paper, leaking this purple stuff. Tom had pulled his hand out, sniffed at the stain. An odor he couldn't describe — it was gone now. The light had fallen on a wallet lying in the road. Tom said it looked as if it were bleeding that purple stuff.

If the man was drunk, had somebody come along and robbed him while he was helpless? Tom said his mind creaked around to the realization that maybe robbery explained everything. Then he'd looked at the face and head, and he'd seen where the bullet went, and he knew it was murder.

I didn't blame him. How could I blame him? A man has no business lying on a dark road. We hadn't broken any laws, any laws at all. The man was dead. There wasn't anything we could do. We didn't know a single thing that could help explain what had happened to him. Why should we have stayed? To answer questions with the innocent truth until our faces reddened and our tongues began to stammer. "Harkness, eh? In trouble once before, weren't you, Harkness? Grand larceny, eh? Just happened along, you say? Well, we know how these things go. So whatja do with the gun? Whatja do with the money?"

They wouldn't believe what we'd say. That's what Tom thought.

We pretended to each other that we slept that night. There wasn't anything in the morning papers, but it was there, that night. *Merchant, slain, robbed . . .*

The woman had called the police

right away. The neighbor, a man named Keefer, had caught an impression of a man forcing a woman into a car, and, of course, he had seen us run away. He did *not* get our license number. When the patrol car got there, this Keefer had found the body and identified it. The dead man was Howard Maybee. He lived right there, in the house behind the eucalyptus hedge. The woman was locked in, terrified. When the cops told her who was lying dead in the road, she fainted. It was her husband.

Afterwards, she told them that her husband was in the habit of bringing large sums of money home from his store on Friday nights. He was always late and he had to walk from the bus. Somebody might have known this. That dark spot under the tall hedge was ideal for a hold-up.

And there I was right in the middle of the news! *Mystery girl forced from scene. Blonde's safety feared for . . .*

I was the bizarre note that lifted the whole story out of the ordinary hit-and-rob class. Mrs. Maybee told how I'd been snatched from her doorstep by a sinister figure and dragged away, screaming. The neighbor, Mr. Keefer, had actually witnessed my kidnaping. So the papers feared for my safety.

It was ridiculous. It was also terrifying.

I didn't think Mrs. Maybee gave the police a dangerous description of myself. Honey-blonde means whatever kind of honey you have in mind; my eyes are more green than blue, and I am an inch and a half shorter than she guessed. Of course, I wouldn't wear my tan suit or my coral blouse ever again. And at the shop we experiment a lot. So I cut my hair in bangs.

There was one thing the papers didn't mention. That broken bottle of purple-red stuff in the dead man's pocket. "They're setting a trap," Tom said, grimly. The stain was gone from his fingers now — he'd spent half the night getting it off.

"If that stuff was all over the wallet," I said, "maybe it's on the money. Maybe they hope to trace the stolen money."

We were in for it. We were hiding something now, and we'd have to go on hiding it, and the more we did to cover ourselves up, the worse it grew and the guiltier we felt. Tom took all the tires off the car and put on some very old ones. He took the shoes we'd worn that night and destroyed them. It made me sick. What scared him most was that he might have left his fingerprints. He thought that if they did have his prints, they would have them identified by Monday.

In the middle of the night, Sunday night, I woke and he was sitting up in bed. He said to the ceiling shadows when I stirred, "I'll never go through that again. Ellen — *I never will!*"

Oh, God, I was frightened!

But Monday came and went. All day nobody bothered us. All evening nobody came. I dreamed of purple money. Tuesday went by. Time was working on it.

But Wednesday . . . Wednesday,

the one person in this world who had seen my face walked into Madame Elise's Salon to get her hair done.

And I couldn't get out. I was trapped.

I thought, she won't know me again. It was such a brief moment. I'm not dressed as I was that night. People in any kind of uniform always look different. I've got flat heels on. I look even shorter. And I've got bangs now.

That I'd seen her face only as long as she'd seen mine and knew *her* immediately, wasn't significant. I'd seen her picture in the papers so many times since.

You don't think out all the details. You just know when it's danger . . .

I started to walk towards the third booth where I knew Elise would put Mrs. Smith. There were two Ellens walking in my skin. The frightened one, the real one, was lying low, watching, planning, scheming, hoping; then there was a second Ellen, a false and ordinary one, and *she* walked down the aisle. She had to. The sweat dried on her palms. . . .

I knew the worst moment would come when I entered the booth and she, facing the glass, saw me behind her. I spoke before I could be seen. "Mrs. Smith? Just a shampoo, Ma'am? Or re-styling?" I stepped in and put my hands on her hair. Sure enough, her glance snapped to her own image.

Sometimes they hardly see you, these women. They come to be beautified, so they tend to look at themselves.

I whipped the covering cloth around her and pinned it around her neck quickly. I slipped out her few bobby-pins. I began to brush and manipulate. My hands were trained, and every bit of their skill was in them now. "You have nice high cheekbones," I said, "and your skin is good. A little more severe around the temples might be stunning."

"I'm getting old and gray," she said.

"That isn't so. I think an oil shampoo and a tiny rinse will bring out all those reddish lights."

Her eyes had a little tinge of satisfaction. It was true, what I said. I couldn't lay all this on with a shovel — it had to be just true enough. She must have been about thirty. Her hands were well-kept, unblemished, not hard-worked housewifely hands at all. Of course she was a bit dowdy. Her clothes weren't expensive and they weren't doing anything for her. There was something stiff about her.

I said, "Shall we go back now?" and led the way to the washing booth.

Oh, she'd *seen* me. Of course, she'd seen me. But she'd only used the tail of her eye. Why should she study me, anyhow? Somebody neat and clean in a white uniform, paid to fuss over her.

As I turned the water on, a feeling, beginning in the stomach, rippled up like a chill, and into my mind came all that depended on this. I worked with my head bent outside her range of vision, and with my arm crossed over her face. I lathered and scrubbed.

I made myself think about her. Funny she made an appointment under a phony name. No, it wasn't either. She wouldn't want to be stared at. She came to a strange, new place because she didn't want to be criticized, either. She just wanted her hair done.

I went back to the supply room and mixed her tint. I could hear Madame Elise shouting to somebody under a dryer, and Joan's voice in the last booth. When I went back, Mrs. Maybee had her eyes closed. I brushed and scrubbed the color in. And then I had to rinse her for the last time. Now I'd have to put her curls in. There isn't so much for a woman to look at, while her hair goes into pin curls. Her own image isn't very attractive.

I toweled her head lightly, tilted the chair, and we paraded back to Booth Three. Her eyes looked sleepy. I met them in the glass . . . and I smiled. "Shall I try drawing it back at the sides and curling it high?"

Her eyes flew to the mirror. "Not — today," she said a little lamely.

"Not in the mood?" I said lightly. I felt that thing, like a chill, again. Oh, no, not today. How stupid of me! If there were two Ellens, there were also two women in the chair. Mrs. Smith and the widow Maybee. "Madame Elise is very clever with a henna pack," I said. "With those red lights in your dark hair, I think it would be very successful. Did you ever think of having your hair brightened?"

"What woman hasn't," she said, with her awkward laugh. "Oh, I may . . . some day."

"But not today," I laughed. She was going to look at me now! I'd overplayed my little joke! I reached for a jar on the shelf. "This is with Madame's compliments," I told her. "Won't you try it and tell us whether you like it?"

She read the label. "Hand cream?"

"It's something a little bit different," I lied. That kept her busy for a while. She massaged cream on her hands while I worked like lightning.

I'd thought of something! Tom was calling for me at half-past five! But it didn't matter — she'd never seen him.

She said, "This seems rather nice. Nice fragrance." We discussed the hand cream, languidly. Sometimes a woman talks about herself and her kids and her troubles. Sometimes she gets curious about you. *We* kept on the hand cream — the four of us.

When she was getting bored, I put her handbag near her. "You must keep the whole jar." She was pleased, and she fussed around in her bag a while. I finished the front and sides, and was starting on the back of her head.

"You're very quick," she said.

My heart jumped and I commanded it, shouting *Down!* at it in my mind, as if it were a dog. "We all are," I said. I put a clip in my teeth and grimaced around it. I was getting that scared feeling. I shut up. I concentrated on the short back hair.

Then she was all pinned. I felt the stirring of jubilation. I beat *that*

down, too. I put the silk net over her set, and the pads of cotton batting at her temples and ears. I led her to a drying booth. I swooped up a big bundle of magazines and dumped them in her lap. I put the cord with the hot-and-cold controls over her shoulder and yanked down the dryer. I touched the curtains.

Then I felt Elise breathing down my neck. I'd been quicker than normal, so of course she had to snoop and see if I'd been cutting corners or something. She brushed past me. "Are you comfortable, Mrs. Smith?" She pretended to adjust the hood of the dryer. "Did Ellen take care of you nicely?"

"Very nicely," said Mrs. Maybee.

I let the curtain fall between me and her smile. The worst was over. When she was dry, I'd take the clips out and comb her hair. But if she hadn't recognized me yet, she wasn't going to. I'd got through it and lived. And it was all right. I went into the lavatory and nearly vomited.

I met Madame Elise, outside the door. "Ellen," she said briskly, "Mrs. Smith will have a manicure."

My heart felt like a leaf falling in sick spirals. "Couldn't — one of the girls, please — give Mrs. Smith — a manicure?"

"No one is free," she said sharply. "Is anything wrong, Ellen?"

I stared at her and felt my skin move in a smile, and why it did I do not know. "My head aches," I murmured. "But I'll try, of course."

"You'll be all right," she said, not very sympathetically. "Then you can go home."

I thought, *I wonder.* To give a manicure you sit facing the woman under the dryer. You have your little wheeled table with its white cover and its jars and instruments, with its bright goose-neck lamp, between the two of you. She has nothing to do, nothing to look at, but the four hands on the table, or — your face.

In the end I just went, numbly. I thought, she will or she won't, and so be it. She smiled at me. "My nails are really terrible."

I said, as I always do, "We'll soon fix that." When I had everything arranged, I sat down on my little stool. I switched the lamp on, began.

It hit me in the nerves of my hands. They began to shake. I had to let hers go. I looked up and saw a flicker cross her face. I grabbed the edge of the table. I felt as if I were going all to pieces, but I wasn't. I was coming together — the two of me.

I said, "Don't you know who I am, Mrs. Maybee?"

And it felt good — it was a delicious relief to be all in one piece again.

She bent forward as if she'd duck her head out from under the dryer.

"Wait," I said. "Wait, Mrs. Maybee . . . please."

"*You* . . . you came to my door . . ." she whispered.

"Yes. Yes, I'm the one. You're Mrs. Maybee, and I'm the mystery girl. I'm caught," I said. "All you have to do is scream. The police are looking for me. But please listen —"

She caught her lip in her teeth and settled back a little.

"Maybe you're a merciful woman," I babbled. "Not like Elise. If she had only let me go home quietly, this wouldn't have happened. *She* wouldn't listen. She'd call the cops and wash her hands . . . Maybe you'll be kinder."

"Kinder?"

"We don't know anything. We can't help. We had nothing to do with your husband's death. The newspapers are silly. It wasn't any killer who took me away. It was only my husband, Mrs. Maybee. How can I make you understand?"

"What is there to understand?"

"We can't get mixed up with the police. There are reasons."

"Oh?" she said.

"He was lying in the road and we thought at first we'd hit him with our car. Oh, don't you see! We couldn't do any good. But if you tell who I am, now, it won't help find who killed your husband. It'll only ruin *us*."

"But . . . why?" Her eyes shifted.

"All right. I'll tell you. Once, back east, they arrested my husband for something he didn't do. He was cleared. But he can't stand . . . he couldn't stand it again!"

She moistened her lips.

"Nobody in the world," I said, "knows about me except you, Mrs. Maybee. Won't you be merciful?"

"You . . . certainly . . ." she said, with long spaces between her words . . . "scared . . . me . . ."

"I'm sorry. We're sorry. I'll bring Tom to talk to you. We'll do anything, Mrs. Maybee. But don't make us go through all that again!"

She lifted her hands nervously and put them back on the table. "Suppose you fix my nails and let me get out of here," she snapped.

My head sagged forward. Curtain rings rattled. Madame Elise swiveled her hips around me and the table. She pushed the hood of the dryer up, away from Mrs. Maybee's head. She turned it off. Mrs. Maybee, looking past me, winced around the eyes. The cop moved up beside me. "You Mrs. Maybee?" he said, just checking.

He was a young cop, a handsome kid. His eyes on me were cool and intelligent. His gun was resting, neat and flat, on his slim hip. "We'll wait a little minute," he said. "Somebody will be along who knows about this." He was neither ruffled nor bored. The four of us were motionless in that tiny pink cubicle. Outside, in the shop, there was whispering.

I sat on my stool, my left arm on the table. I could see my watch. In twenty minutes, maybe sooner, Tom would drive up to the door. There must be a police car . . .

Mrs. Maybee said, "Can't I get out of here, please?"

"In a minute, Ma'am."

Her hand started toward her head. One white cotton pad was slipping over her eye. Madame Elise bent and did things. With the fluffs of cotton gone and the net off, Mrs. Maybee didn't look quite so ridiculous.

I watched my watch.

When we heard the street door open, Madame Elise sailed out of the booth like a hostess going to greet a guest. The cop shifted his weight. Our pink compartment seemed to relax.

Mrs. Maybee licked her lips. "I'm sorry," she said to me, feebly.

The cop said, in a curious voice, "Pardon me, Miss. But didn't you know you were shouting at the top of your lungs? You could be heard all over the place."

"Of course," I said. "*I* knew it, but *she* didn't. They never realize. It's the dryer, roaring in their ears. They can't hear a sound unless we scream."

His eyes changed. Then he said, respectfully, "Sergeant Davis. This is Mrs. Maybee."

"We've met," the man we'd been waiting for said quietly behind me.

I looked up at him. "Then you'll know!" I gasped. My watch said the twenty minutes were more than half gone, and now there would be two police cars, maybe a crowd . . .

I took a big breath. "Ask Mrs. Maybee where she got that purple-red stuff under the right middle fingernail. Please, sir, ask her *when*!"

He got it at once. He didn't have to be told one word more. There was that bottle, broken when the man fell down. The man fell down when he was shot. So *when* had Mrs. Maybee put her hand into her husband's hip pocket?

The purple stain said — *after he was shot!* But it wasn't after we had run away, because the neighbor was out there then. Mrs. Maybee was locked in the house, and when the police came she had fainted, and it was the neighbor who had identified the dead man. *When*, then?

This detective — he was in plain-clothes — picked up her right hand.

"You know what it is?" I said. We had to hurry. I didn't *know* what Tom would do.

"Yeah," he said. "A special wood-stain. He had it mixed downtown the same day. He had a hobby. How about it, Mrs. Maybee?"

"I . . ." She didn't say more than that single sound.

Sergeant Davis looked thoughtfully at me. "So she was out there and found him before you and your husband did?"

"And didn't notify us," the young cop said.

"Sergeant," I said, "there's one thing more. When I rang her bell, I knew what she had just been doing. I knew the smell, absolutely, certainly. *She'd been painting her fingernails!*"

"So she was out there," he said, "after he died. And she didn't tell us. Instead, she went back in the house and covered up her nails with some paint. Your idea is that she had a little something to do with that shooting?"

"Don't you think so?"

He frowned. "So she shoots her husband. And she sits down . . ." He touched a bottle of polish on my table. "I've heard it takes a pretty steady hand to put that stuff on your own nails."

"It does," I said. "But she *had* to. What did *she* put her hand into his

pocket for? *She* knew him. And somebody was bound to find him soon. The police were bound to come eventually. She could scrub the purple off the skin of her hand, but she couldn't possibly get it out from between the nail and the quick. She absolutely *had* to cover it!" Then I told him very firmly, because this I was sure of. "You can be steady when you have to be."

"Uh-huh," he said.

Then we heard the street door open again. There were hard, quick footsteps. High, nervous, but very angry, Tom's voice demanded, "Where is my wife? Ellen, what are they doing to you?"

Now I knew what Tom would do — now and from now on. "They're listening to me," I called. "P-pig," I blubbered, with his hand in mine, "help me explain it to them . . ."

It was a strange thing that out of all the people in the world she asked *me* to do her nails. The only person — the only woman, anyway — who could recognize that purple mark.

She'd walked right into a trap.

It wasn't a very new plot on her part. There was a boy friend, hidden in her life. He'd done the actual shooting. I suppose she had to be out there, supervising, and helping make it look like a robbery. They never would have tried to spend that purple money. There was much more — in the insurance.

All this came out after a while. That day, when Sergeant Davis talked quietly with Tom and me, he didn't exactly scold us. But he made us understand what a nuisance we'd been, and how we'd wasted his time. For, of course, we'd have to be explained. When he heard how Tom had been mixed up in that old trouble, he said soberly, "Rough deal, Harkness." But then he laughed a little. "You kids don't want to be so sure you know what the other guy is going to think. It isn't easy, you know, to admit you were dead wrong. Believe me, if they had you and let you out, back there, I'd *know* you were clear."

I babbled all the way home. But Tom said, "Why the pitch about mercy, Ellen?"

"I was scared she'd take her hand to Canada or somewhere. I was scared she'd cut the finger off and throw it in the garbage. I was so shocked — with hope — once I took her old polish off and saw the purple stain. I knew somebody else had to see it, somebody who'd know, somebody like Sergeant Davis."

"Nice guy," said Tom, very offhand.

I swallowed. "And I knew Elise could hear me. She'd yell for the police. In the meantime I had to talk about *something*! I chose mercy because — well, it was a sort of test. You see, if she'd been right with the world, she'd have had no mercy, Tom! That was s-silly!"

"She ought to have called the cops," Tom said, nodding, and that was when I finally began to bawl . . . all the way home.

*Another charming and altogether delightful short story by Margery Sharp, author of* THE NUTMEG TREE *and* CLUNY BROWN . . . *another blend of crime and comedy in post-war England as only Margery Sharp can combine lightness with larceny. . . .*

*Mr. Partridge was faced with only two great Enemies in all his drab, middle-class existence. The first encounter became a fabulous footnote in the pages of History; the second — well, read the second for yourself.*

*We are deeply indebted to Jerome J. Duane of Rochester, New York, not only for calling this story to our attention but also for graciously permitting us to transcribe his original text. If any of you have favorite short stories whose reprinting would give pleasure to other readers, by all means spread the cheer: simply let us know the titles and authors' names (and where the stories appeared, if you have that information), and we will track down the Missing Murders and Forgotten Ferrets if it takes us to the dustiest archives this side of Hereafter.*

# MR. PARTRIDGE AND THE ENEMY

## *The Troubles of an Amateur Burglar*

*by MARGERY SHARP*

ON A fine Sunday morning in late summer Mr. Partridge and Mr. Brough, having deposited their respective families at the church door, set out for their customary walk over Southolt Common, past the allotments, and so round again to Ferndale Road. Mr. Brough was fifty-two, Mr. Partridge fifty-seven. Each wore a dark blue suit and a bowler hat, each carried a rolled umbrella. They looked exactly what they were — respectable and moderately prosperous members of the British middle-class; and the same might have been said of them even in their pajamas and slippers.

It always came as a surprise to Mr. Partridge to remember that a man once tried to kill him with a dagger, and would indeed have done so but for being shot through the head by Mr. Brough.

Extraordinary, almost unbelievable occurrence! It happened in the war, of course, and the victim was merely a unit in the vast anonymous mass known as The Enemy; but of late Mr. Partridge, whenever the memory recurred, thought of him not as an Enemy but simply as Another Man. It was odd how the incident stuck out: from two years of nightmare — and

Mr. Partridge, middle-aged and civilian to the core, never found warfare anything else — it was the only moment that he could still visualize with any clarity. The reappearance of Mr. Brough as his neighbor had possibly something to do with it; and at the same time made the whole thing more incredible. Mr. Brough, Ballantyne's trusted expert on old glass — how impossible to connect him with the offhand violence of that astounding scene!

Well, nothing of the sort was likely to happen again, thought Mr. Partridge thankfully. Life, if not exactly easy, was peaceful enough. There were bad moments: he had had his pocketbook stolen with ten pounds in it — a trifle to some people, no doubt, but it played the deuce with the Partridge summer holiday — and Mrs. Brough got pleurisy and had to be operated on, while her husband went about looking like a ghost; but taken all in all, things weren't too bad. Whatever one felt about the pay, the Civil Service, in which Mr. Partridge filled an inconspicuous niche, was undoubtedly safe.

"It's a very fine day," observed Mr. Partridge cheerfully.

To his surprise his companion made no answer. Mr. Brough was walking — marching, rather — with shoulders squared and eyes fixed straight ahead, sparing no glance for either the greenery of the common or the blue of the sky. "I'm on his deaf side," thought Mr. Partridge; and raising his voice a little repeated the remark.

It is doubtful whether, even then, Mr. Brough heard. In any case his answer was completely irrelevant.

"Partridge, old man," he said huskily, "it's all up with me."

A pigeon, plump and smug in its gray plumage, fluttered over their heads and disappeared into an oak. The common was so quiet that each beat of its wings made a distinct sound.

"I'm going to get the sack," said Mr. Brough.

Mr. Partridge stood still. The sack! That silly, ominous, despair-inducing phrase that summed up all the worst terrors of their quiet lives! But surely, surely, it could have no terror for old Brough? He was invaluable. In the antique-dealing world his name stood as high almost as that of old Ballantyne himself, and Ballantyne admittedly knew nothing about glass or ceramics; he was a furniture-man pure and simple; without Brough he would be lost. "They're not reducing staff?" asked Mr. Partridge fearfully. (That was another dreadful phrase; it could throw whole offices into panic.) "And even if they are, how can they spare you?"

"Old Ballantyne has a nephew," replied Mr. Brough obliquely, "who simply loves old glass and wants to get married."

"But you are married," pointed out Mr. Partridge. "You don't" — he thought kindly of the Civil Service — "even get a pension. Besides, your reputation —"

"My reputation!" The expert tried

to smile. "That's just the point. By this time tomorrow, old man, it'll be in smithereens."

He stared up into the oak, where the pigeon had now found a companion. Fortunate birds, to whom that one tree no doubt represented board and lodging for the rest of their lives! Mr. Brough looked at them and unconsciously uttered a groan.

"Tell me," said Mr. Partridge sympathetically. "It mayn't be as bad as you think."

"It happened a month ago," said Mr. Brough still glaring at the pigeons. "You remember my wife's operation? I ought to have asked for the day off, but I knew it would be inconvenient; I had to go into the country to look at some glass. Well, I went, and I bought a pair of Waterford salad-bowls."

"I remember your mentioning them," agreed Mr. Partridge, "as something very fine."

"They were marvelous. 1780, twelve inches high, scalloped edge, moulded stem, perfect cutting. Every point you could think of, even the Penrose-Waterford mark. They looked like museum pieces — and that's what should have warned me. Because they are museum pieces: they're in the Victoria and Albert."

"But," began Mr. Partridge, bewildered, "if they're in a museum —"

"I'm speaking of the originals. The pair I bought — for five pounds apiece, the bargain of a lifetime — are first-class Dutch fakes. I didn't go wrong on proportion, you see — I couldn't do that; but I ought to have noticed the color and the weight. Even the color was pretty good — Waterford varies a lot; but the weight!" He groaned again; his grief was an expert's as well as a man's. Mr. Partridge waited a moment in respectful silence, then ventured to ask when the fraud had been discovered.

"Just about a fortnight ago. I'd put them aside — we were very busy, I had to go to Ireland — then a fortnight ago I went over them again. Then I found out. I didn't say anything: after all, it was only ten pounds of the firm's money, and we could easily get fifteen for them as fine copies. I thought I'd just wait till the old man was in a good humor, and then say simply that they couldn't be guaranteed. Then he was away, all last week, and yesterday morning I got a note from him. He's coming in tomorrow, bringing Sir James Tulloch to look at our pair of Waterford bowls."

"Tulloch, the Belfast shipping man?"

With an impatient gesture Mr. Brough relegated an entire mercantile fleet to the limbo of the unimportant.

"I don't know what he does for a living, but he's the foremost authority on Irish glass. Now do you see? Either I tell Ballantyne first and make him look a fool — he's evidently been boasting of the things — or else I let Sir James spot the fake himself and have the pleasure of showing me up. Either way I'm discredited, and in

two days the whole trade will know it."

They finished their walk in depressing silence. Beyond assurances of sympathy and friendship Mr. Partridge had no consolation to offer; and what good were they to a man in danger of losing, at one blow, his professional reputation and the livelihood that depended on it? "It's unreasonable," he began once. "A solitary lapse. . . ."

"Reason doesn't come into it," returned Mr. Brough grimly. "I'm still as good a man as I've ever been, and some bosses would stand by me. But not Ballantyne. First he'll be mad with fury, then he'll remember his nephew. I'm as good as sacked at this minute."

So they walked on in silence again, the shadows of Sir James Tulloch and of Ballantyne's nephew dogging their footsteps; and parted at last in Ferndale Road without the least appetite for their Sunday dinners.

After his usual siesta and his usual cup of tea Mr. Partridge went into the garden to dig. He was making a new flower-bed at the bottom of the lawn, and though it was quite the wrong time of year for such work Mr. Partridge never allowed theory to interfere with practice; but on this particular afternoon he enjoyed himself less than usual.

The dreadful predicament of his friend barred all pleasant thoughts; the wartime memory of that morning recurred again and again to his mind. Then he had been nearly done for, himself, and old Brough had saved him; now an enemy was upon old Brough, and he, Mr. Partridge, was powerless to assist.

"I'd do anything!" he thought. "Anything! I'd commit a crime!"

In his desperate sympathy he felt absolutely lawless; he dreamed of kidnaping Sir James, of blackmailing Ballantyne; housebreaking, assault — anything short of actual murder — all presented themselves as praiseworthy, indeed useful, acts. But he knew nothing disreputable about the antique dealer, and nothing of Sir James's movements; burglary —

"A burglary!" whispered Mr. Partridge aloud.

He drove his spade into the earth and stood, leaning on it, with startled eyes. For if Ballantyne's were burgled, if the bowls were stolen, old Brough's solitary mistake would never be discovered. "A burglary!" said Mr. Partridge again. Once, in France, he had stolen a chicken; it was the sole theft of his life, and had been committed only because he could find no one to pay; but he had stalked and collared the bird with a good deal of address. "I could do it all right," he thought. "Brough can give me the lie of the land . . . and I must wear gloves, to avoid fingerprints, and perhaps socks over my shoes."

The vision of himself thus accoutred was so exciting that he left his spade sticking in the earth and began to pace up and down the grass. A torch — his son Ronald had a torch, and kept it with his bicycle in

the toolhouse. Mr. Partridge swerved across the lawn, dived into the narrow flower-pot-encumbered shed, and came out not only with the torch but with a spanner as well. He had never seen a jimmy, but the spanner corresponded with his idea of one, so he slipped it into his pocket.

The torch, in strong sunlight, had little effect, but no doubt in a darkened shop it would produce just such a circle of light as Mr. Partridge had often watched, in moving pictures, climbing slowly over the outside of a safe. It was one of his favorite shots, and always made the hair prickle a little on his neck — just as it prickled at the other well-known image where a policeman stood hammering outside while the murder was getting under way within.

With a really furtive gesture Mr. Partridge thrust the torch into his pocket. The police! Though the officer he had been visualizing was the American sort, he had no difficulty in substituting an English Bobby. Suppose a policeman saw him — supposing he were caught?

"I'll have a tale ready," thought Mr. Partridge, with a most ill-grounded faith in his own powers. "I'll say it's for a bet, and Brough will have to back me up."

But his happy confidence was flawed. He paced the lawn with a more pensive step. For if his friend had a wife and family, so had he: if old Brough, once sacked, would find it almost impossible to get another job, how much more hope was there for a sacked Civil Servant? So pondering, Mr. Partridge found himself opposite a spot in the fence where a plank had fallen loose and needed nailing up again; it was a nice little job which he had meant to do that very afternoon, and automatically he stepped onto the flower-bed to examine the wood on either side. As he stooped he glanced through into the next-door garden, and there saw Mr. Brough standing alone with a look on his face as though it were the end of the world.

For an instant Mr. Partridge crouched motionless. When he straightened himself again, every doubt had fled. With a firm hand he rapped on the fence to attract his friend's attention.

"Sst! Come round here!" whispered Mr. Partridge. "Come the back way!"

"Well?" asked Mr. Brough.

Mr. Partridge took him by the arm and led him to a rustic seat, shaded by a trellis, where they were safe from observation. His manner had already taken on a strong conspiratorial tinge.

"Look here, old man," he said, "whereabouts in the shop are these salad-bowls kept?"

Mr. Brough winced.

"They're in Ballantyne's private room — with most of the other glass — in the case opposite his desk. I wish you wouldn't talk about them."

"I'm going to do more than talk," said Mr. Partridge lightly. "I'm going to steal 'em."

It was some time before Mr. Brough, struggling between admiration, incredulity, and gratitude, could be brought to grasp even the possibility of so reckless a scheme. Its beauty, its completeness, he admitted; but he simply could not see his friend in the role of a burglar.

"Never mind that," said Mr. Partridge impatiently. "There's a lot more in me than you'd think. In France, for instance, I — I stole right and left."

"So did I," retorted Mr. Brough. "I once stole —" it was only a tin of bully beef, so he decided not to go into details but stick to the main point. "It's a wonderful scheme, old man, but I can't let you. I'll be the burglar myself."

"Nonsense," snapped Mr. Partridge. "If you were seen you'd be too easily identified, because everyone round knows you. I should be just an unknown criminal." The thought at once alarmed and exhilarated him: that he, a Government official, should take on even for an hour the personality of an unknown lawbreaker, was indeed a soul-shaking thought. But he did not let it overwhelm him; in curt, gangster-like tones he bade his confederate give him the lie of the land.

Unwillingly at first, then with dawning hope, Mr. Brough did so. The front part of the shop, on Upper Mount Street, was one vast window, and this part was protected by the automatic switching on of all lights half an hour before dusk: very risky, explained Mr. Brough (with unnecessary relish) to do anything there. But Ballantyne's, unlike most of its neighbors, was semi-detached, being separated from the premises on the right by the entrance to Mount Street Mews, and this mews, though so desirably situated, was not yet residential, for it ran between the backs of the shops and the boundary wall of a churchyard. . . .

"And Ballantyne's have a back door on the Mews?" prompted Mr. Partridge.

"The door of Ballantyne's private room. It's fastened from the outside by a lock and a bar."

"And who lives over the shops?" continued Mr. Partridge, who saw what was coming and had already visualized a dozen flung-up windows and a couple of heads at each.

"Dressmakers, mostly — but they won't be there," Mr. Brough reassured him. "It's as quiet a place for a burglary as you could find. We don't worry, because only the big stuff's left above; everything small and really valuable goes down into the strong-room. It's lucky you haven't got to get in there."

"I daresay I'd manage even that," returned Mr. Partridge, slightly nettled. "As it is, I've got to get through a barred door."

For answer Mr. Brough dived into his trouser pocket and produced two keys. One was a small modern Yale, the other larger and heavier, as though it belonged to an old-fashioned padlock. In silence he held them out;

in silence Mr. Partridge stretched forth his hand to receive them.

"Gloves!" snapped Mr. Brough.

With a slight flush of mortification the prospective burglar reached under the seat for his gardening gauntlets and slipped them on. The gesture started a most interesting discussion on the subject of alibis and disguises — whether Mr. Brough, in the fictitious company of Mr. Partridge, should go to the movies or for a long walk, whether Mr. Partridge himself should chalk on a mustache or merely turn up his collar. In the end it was decided that he should simply look as inconspicuous as possible; which rather disappointingly entailed no change at all from his normal appearance.

"I tell you one thing, though," said Mr. Brough at last, "you'll have to steal something else as well. If you take just the two salad-bowls, they'll smell a rat."

"But I can't be landed with a whole lot of — of swag!" protested Mr. Partridge, aghast. "What would I do with it?"

"I wasn't thinking of anything big," explained Mr. Brough thoughtfully. "We've got some very nice snuff-boxes, quite worth taking, that would just slip into your pocket."

Mr. Partridge looked at his friend in alarm; it seemed to him that old Brough was entering too much into the spirit of the thing altogether.

"And how would we get them back?" he asked. "I don't mind stealing ten pounds' worth, because I know how shockingly they pay you. But valuable snuff-boxes!"

Mr. Brough sighed; artistically — nay, practically — he was right; but the consequences, he now realized, would be too far-reaching. To pull off a thoroughly conscientious burglary was going to be more difficult than either of them had foreseen, and for a moment they sat dubious. Then all at once the brow of Mr. Partridge cleared, and the light of inspiration beamed from his eye.

"I've got it!" he cried. "I'll be disturbed. I'll get the things out, but I won't have time to take them away."

"You'll have to take the bowls," pointed out Mr. Brough urgently.

"No, I won't. That's just the point. When I'm disturbed I shall drop them — onto something hard. I'll smash them to smithereens. How will that do?"

"It's genius," said Mr. Brough sincerely.

One disadvantage about committing a Sunday burglary in Town, if the burglar happens to live at Southolt, is that the last tube back leaves shortly before midnight; and this point, negligible no doubt to topnotch cracksmen with their own cars, had a definite effect on Mr. Partridge's plans. If the job couldn't be done conventionally at three in the morning — the hour he secretly hankered after — he saw no reason why it shouldn't be done in comfort at half-past ten; for which time, indeed, as Mr. Brough pointed out, it would be

much easier to supply an alibi. It was their well-known practice, on fine Sunday evenings, to go for a long walk: they would set out just as usual, then while Mr. Partridge took the tube from Southolt East (where there was an automatic ticket machine, and where he was less likely to be recognized than at his own familiar station of Southolt West), Mr. Brough would spend an hour or so rambling over the unfrequented parts of the common. At eleven o'clock he would return to the pond, and there, barring accidents, be retrieved by Mr. Partridge.

"Though if I'm a bit late, old man," said the latter, as they set out on this perilous adventure, "you'll just have to wait for me."

"You won't be," said Mr. Brough stoutly. "It'll all go like clockwork."

He was both right and wrong. The subsequent events of that evening, so far as Mr. Partridge was concerned, moved less with the smooth regularity of clockwork than with the unpredictable perverseness of a firecracker; but on the other hand, he was not in the least late getting back.

All the way up in the tube, and as he threaded the turnings between Piccadilly and Upper Mount Street, Mr. Partridge's gloved fingers clutched ever and anon at four small objects in his raincoat pocket. Three of these objects were keys — two for the door on the Mews, one for the case containing the pseudo-Waterford bowls; the fourth was a small pair of tweezers, abstracted by her father from Miss Brough's dressing-table. Their usual and innocent purpose was the plucking of Miss Brough's eyebrows; pressed into criminal service, they were to be employed in making convincing scratches on the insides of locks. Both torch and spanner had been left behind, because Ronald most inconveniently wanted them.

The thoroughfares of the West End were very quiet — so remarkably quiet, indeed, that Mr. Partridge, unused to the desolation of fashionable London on a Sunday evening, felt vaguely uneasy. The few passers-by seemed to stand out so. A solitary policeman, seen in the distance down Bond Street, looked at least seven feet high. Mr. Partridge hastily turned left to avoid passing him. Upper Mount Street, too, was completely deserted, and at the entrance to Mount Street Mews a cat sprawled, making its toilet in the middle of the way. Some obscure instinct — a desire, perhaps, to demonstrate his complete ease of mind — moved Mr. Partridge to address it as Nice Puss. It took no notice of him. Then he stepped past and followed the angle of the Mews.

It certainly seemed safe enough. Between the wall of the churchyard and the backs of the shops not a light showed save that cast by a single official lamp, and Ballantyne's door was just outside its immediate range. Mr. Partridge approached and took out his keys.

The first touch of his gloved hand on the padlock sent a most peculiar thrill through his whole body — not

of fear, as he hastened to assure himself, but of excitement. Lifting the heavy bar he inserted the second key in its lock and pushed cautiously inwards; two steps took him over the threshold into an air faintly warm and smelling of carpets. Mr. Partridge replaced the keys in his pocket, extracted the tweezers (he scratched so vigorously as to put the Yale lock unwittingly back on the latch), and for a moment stood listening to what he took for the unusually rapid ticking of some large clock. The discovery that it was his own heart roused him to action, and feeling along the wall to the left, as Mr. Brough had directed, he found and turned on the electric light.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Partridge aloud.

It was an involuntary tribute to the distinction and dignity of Mr. Ballantyne's private room. It wasn't like an office at all, it was like a drawing-room: the floor was covered with a gray carpet, the walls were masked by glass-fronted cases containing all manner of exquisite bricabrac. For a desk Mr. Ballantyne evidently employed a small table of Eighteenth Century rosewood. On either side of this stood an armchair of the same period, upholstered in rose-colored silk; and the only other furniture was a tiny rosewood pedestal bearing a Celadon bowl.

For an instant Mr. Partridge's thoughts flashed back to his own drawing-room in Ferndale Road: he felt a sudden sympathy with his wife's desire for a new carpet. If all went well — if he pulled off the job — she should have one. Pale gray, like the pile under his feet. . . .

The job, however, had to be done first; it was no time for domestic musings, but time to use the third and smallest key. With cautious steps Mr. Partridge moved across the room and unlocked the centre case opposite the rosewood desk. On its topmost shelf, conspicuous among the many smaller objects, and easily recognizable from Brough's description, stood two cut-glass bowls.

It was perhaps fortunate that Mr. Partridge did not think much of them. They were all right, handsome pieces in their way, but not, in his eyes, markedly superior to the salad-bowl at home which his wife had won at a whist drive; and since he was going to smash them, this, as has been said, was just as well. For there were some things in that case he felt he couldn't have smashed, even to save his life — the shepherdess with the lamb, for instance, or the creamy dancer with her wonderful filigree skirt; these were so beautiful that Mr. Partridge, pressing closer, actually held his breath in admiration. Brough, or any other expert, could have told him that their value was comparatively small, that the Waterford bowls (supposing them to be genuine) were immeasurably more worthy of a collector's eye; but Mr. Partridge would not have cared. To him the shepherdess and the dancer were the loveliest things he had ever seen, and in that moment a new vista of delight opened before

him. He determined, in future, never to pass an antique shop without looking in the window, just to enjoy whatever beauty might lie behind.

With a guilty jerk Mr. Partridge raised his head. He had been letting his mind wander in a most unprofessional way, and the pseudo-Waterford bowls still glittered on their shelf. Reaching up, he bore them one after the other to the desk and there set them down, close to the edge, to wait until he was ready to be disturbed. A disturbed and baffled housebreaker — the role was scarcely congenial to his mood; but Mr. Partridge did his best. Gingerly, so as not to damage it, he picked up one of the chairs and laid it on its side. The other he tilted forward against the desk, taking care not to scratch the wood. The paper-basket (an old fireman's bucket) gave him a specially good idea; he filled it with the least fragile pieces of china and placed it near the door. As a final touch he added the Celadon bowl to the swag and rolled its pedestal into the middle of the floor. All was now prepared: Mr. Partridge advanced towards the desk, and with an artistic sweep of the elbow knocked the first of the dishes to the floor.

Now the carpet of Ballantyne's private room was of superfine gray pile, thick, soft, and almost mossy to the feet. Upon it the bowl bounced slightly, but did not break. It did not even chip. It lay there, good as new, winking up from all its facets.

"Bother," said Mr. Partridge.

He picked it up and tried again, with no better results. The carpet was like a mattress. It was fitted close to the walls, moreover, leaving no margin of bare wood; and the walls themselves were masked by the unbroken ranks of the cases.

"Bother," said Mr. Partridge again. "I'll have to use a poker."

But there was no poker. Ballantyne's admirable premises were centrally heated throughout.

Now baffled in earnest, Mr. Partridge stared anxiously about the room. The only hard surface was the top of the rosewood desk, and he could not bear the thought of scarring its lustrous beauty. The door from the private room to the shop was a mere curtained arch, and whatever hard surfaces lay beyond were exposed, under brilliant lights, to the view of Upper Mount Street. But there was also the door by which he had entered, of good solid wood, and since this appeared to be his only chance, Mr. Partridge stood back, took careful aim, and hurled the bowl at its centre panel.

The bowl broke at the stem, into two pieces; Mr. Partridge picked up the larger fragment and by energetic hammering broke it into two more. So utterly absorbed was he, so lost to everything but the perverse solidity of the object in his hand, that he heard neither the heavy footfall outside nor the sudden knocking, like an echo of his own, on the other side of the door; and when a voice followed the knocking, it took him completely by surprise.

"Here!" said the voice. "Is anyone trying to get out?"

At once — in a flash — beyond any manner of doubt — Mr. Partridge knew that the voice was the voice of a policeman. It had the authoritative ring, the calm deliberation, which in happier circumstances he had always admired; now it overwhelmed him with fear. Instinct, not reason, sent him headlong to the switch to turn off the light; instinct, too, bade him snatch up the second bowl along with the three fragments. These clasped to his breast, he stood cowering in the darkness, tongue-tied, without any plan of defense, while the door swung slowly in.

"Here!" repeated the voice. "Is anyone there?"

A familiar helmet loomed against the lesser darkness of the Mews. The policeman paused uncertainly, for if the din created by Mr. Partridge had firmly planted in his mind the notion of a rescue rather than of an arrest, the door, on the other hand, was certainly unsecured. A circle of light danced suddenly over the room, and in that instant, in the shock of seeing his vision so clearly realized, Mr. Partridge recovered his wits. Whatever else happened, whatever his personal fate, he had now at any rate an opportunity to carry out one part of his plan. Behind the constable lay the hard, gritty pavement of Mount Street Mews: as quick as thought Mr. Partridge hurled his four pieces of evidence through the open door.

But Mr. Partridge was both highly conscientious and a very bad shot; and these two characteristics now worked together in a most curious way. Because, even in so desperate a strait, he had no desire to injure a policeman, Mr. Partridge deliberately aimed above the man's head; and because he was such a bad shot, the unbroken bowl caught the constable bang on the helmet and knocked him flat.

For a moment Mr. Partridge stood aghast. Then as the man stirred, proving that he was not dead, but merely stunned, Mr. Partridge stirred too. He did more: he ran. With astounding presence of mind he trod on as much glass as possible, reducing shards to fragments and fragments to powder; then, reaching the angle of the Mews, he paused to get his breath before turning out into Upper Mount Street. From behind him came the sound he had dreaded — that of a window being flung up and a voice raised in inquiry; but he was already out of sight. Briskly, but without noticeable haste, he walked along to the first turning, turned, turned left again, and made for Piccadilly. Whatever else the owner of the voice was doing, he had evidently not had the sense to use the policeman's whistle.

"You should always blow the whistle first," thought Mr. Partridge, as he reached the Underground; and at the entrance to the subway he actually paused as though to go back and give a little citizenly advice. The Civil Servant was once more uppermost; only just enough of the crimi-

nal remained to make him avoid the pigeon-hole in favor of an automatic ticket machine.

They never caught him. With a slightly shaken Mr. Brough he was back in Ferndale Road by eleven ten, or exactly five minutes before the latter was summoned by telephone to go up to town. "It's Ballantyne's," exclaimed Mr. Brough, perfectly genuine in his horror. "There's been an — an attempted burglary!"

"Good gracious me!" cried his wife, from the bedroom. "Have you got your keys?"

"I'm just getting them now," called back Mr. Brough, grabbing at his friend's raincoat. "Thank you very much for reminding me. . . ."

But they never caught Mr. Partridge. For a week he suffered a good deal of uneasiness, but it wore off, and his new-found delight in antique-shop windows was ample compensation. The policeman was hardly damaged, Mrs. Partridge got her new carpet, Mr. Brough kept his job. It might almost be said, indeed, that of his one and only criminal act Mr. Partridge had nothing but the happiest of memories. Almost, but not quite.

"They're baffled, aren't they?" he inquired of Mr. Brough about a fortnight later.

"Oh, completely," agreed Mr. Brough. "It's an unsolved crime. Nothing to trace, no fingerprints — even the Bobby you laid out scarcely saw you. In fact, the Inspector —"

"Poor chap!" murmured Mr. Partridge tolerantly.

"— told me there was only one thing he was sure of, and that was that it was the work of an amateur. He said most unsolved crimes were. He said —"

But Mr. Partridge's attention had wandered; looking up at the sky, he observed that he ought to water the garden.

Amateur, indeed! When he had baffled the whole Police Force! The word rankled, and no wonder. But as he turned on the hose, as he watched the dry earth drink and darken, the sting was dulled. Hadn't that word, he reflected, once been used about an army — about an army of clerks and shop-assistants, like himself and old Brough? And what did it matter about being an amateur, so long as you defeated the Enemy?

# *MORE WOOLRICHIANA*

*Exactly two years ago we gave you, as the editorial preface to a story by Cornell Woolrich, a complete check list of all the books of shorts by Cornell Woolrich-William Irish published up to that time. This bibliographic service was welcomed enthusiastically both by fans and aficionados, and we received many letters asking us to keep the Woolrich check list up to date. Here, then, is an up-to-the-minute record, with tables of contents and minimum first-edition data. Please bear in mind that all the volumes of short stories by Cornell Woolrich have been published under his pseudonym — that is, as by William Irish.*

I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1943. First edition, 12mo, blue cloth. Reissued in two volumes: I WOULDN'T BE IN YOUR SHOES (New York: American Mercury, [1944], 12mo, colored pictorial wrappers) and AND SO TO DEATH (New York: Jonathan Press, [1947;] 12mo, colored pictorial wrappers). Part of the original contents reissued as NIGHTMARE (New York: Readers-Choice Library, 1950, 18mo, colored pictorial wrappers).

*I Wouldn't Be in Your Shoes*
*Last Night*
*Three-O'Clock*
*Nightmare*
*Papa Benjamin*

AFTER-DINNER STORY.
New York: J. B. Lippincott, [1944]. First edition, 12mo, green cloth. Reissued as SIX TIMES DEATH (New York: Popular Library, [1948], 18mo, colored pictorial wrappers).

*After-Dinner Story*
*The Night Reveals*
*An Apple a Day*
*Marihuana*
*Rear Window*
*Murder-Story*

IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I WAKE.
New York: Avon, (1945). First edition, thin 12mo, colored pictorial wrappers.

*If I Should Die Before I Wake*
*I'll Never Play Detective Again*
*Change of Murder*
*A Death Is Caused*
*Two Murders, One Crime*
*The Man Upstairs*

BORROWED CRIME.
New York: Avon, (1946). First edition, thin 12mo, colored pictorial wrappers.

*Borrowed Crime*
*The Cape Triangular*
*Detective William Brown*
*Chance*

THE DANCING DETECTIVE.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, (1946). First edition, 12mo, beige cloth.

*The Dancing Detective*
*Two Fellows in a Furnished Room*
*The Light in the Window*
*Silent as the Grave*
*The Detective's Dilemma*
*Fur Jacket*
*Leg Man*
*The Fingernail*

DEAD MAN BLUES.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, (1948). First edition, 12mo, light turquoise simulated cloth. Most of the original contents reissued under the same title (New York: American Mercury, [1949], 12mo, colored pictorial wrappers).

*Guillotine*
*The Earring*
*If the Dead Could Talk*
*Fire Escape*
*Fountain Pen*
*You Take Ballistics*
*Funeral*

THE BLUE RIBBON.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, (1949). First edition, 12mo, tan cloth. Most of the original contents reissued as DILEMMA OF THE DEAD LADY (New York: Graphic, 1950, 18mo, colored pictorial wrappers).

*The Blue Ribbon*
*The Dog with the Wooden Leg*
*The Lie*
*Hot Towel*
*Wardrobe Trunk*
*Wild Bill Hiccup*
*Subway*
*Husband*

SIX NIGHTS OF MYSTERY.
New York: Popular Library, (1950). First edition, 18mo, colored pictorial wrappers.

*One Night in New York*
*One Night in Chicago*
*One Night in Hollywood*
*One Night in Montreal*
*One Night in Paris*
*One Night in Zacamoras*

SOMEBODY ON THE PHONE.
Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, (1950). First edition, 12mo, light turquoise simulated cloth.

*Johnny on the Spot*
*Somebody on the Phone*
*Collared*
*The Night I Died*
*Momentum*
*Boy with Body,*
*Death Sits in the Dentist's Chair*
*The Room with Something Wrong*

*We plan to give you, from time to time, a similar bibliographic service on other important writers of detective short stories whose books have not yet been listed in handy reference form. For example, on one of the newly discovered stories by Dashiell Hammett — a series of ten "new" stories by "the ace performer" in the hardboiled field which will begin to appear in the April 1951 issue and continue through most of this year and next — we will prepare a definitive check list of Hammett's contribution to the short form. Other outstanding writers who may be included in this bibliographic service are Dorothy L. Sayers, Georges Simenon, and Roy Vickers.*

# THROUGH A DEAD MAN'S EYE

*by CORNELL WOOLRICH*

THE IDEA in swapping is to start out with nothing much and run it up to something. I started out with a buckle without a tongue and a carved peach pit, that day, and swapped it to a kid named Miller for a harmonica that somebody had stepped on. Then I swapped that to

another kid for a penknife with one blade missing. By an hour after dark, I had run my original capital up to a baseball with its outside cover worn off, so I figured I'd put in a pretty good afternoon. Of course, I should have been indoors long before then, but swapping takes time and makes you cover a lot of ground.

I was just in the middle of a deal with the Scanlon kid, when I saw my old man coming. He was still a block away, but he was walking fast like when he's sore, and it's hard to use good business judgment when you're being rushed like that. I guess that's why I let Scanlon high-pressure me into swapping for a piece of junk like he had. It was just somebody's old cast-off glass eye, that he must have picked up off some ash heap.

"You got a nerve!" I squalled. But I looked over my shoulder and I saw Trouble coming up fast, so I didn't have much time to be choosy.

Scanlon knew he had me. "Yes or no?" he insisted.

"All right, here goes," I growled, and I passed him the peeled baseball, and he passed me the glass eye.

That was about all I had time for before Trouble finally caught up with me. I got swung around in the direction in which I live, by the back of the neck, and I started to move over the ground fast — but only about fifty per cent under my own speed. I didn't mind that, only people's Old Men always have to make such long speeches about everything. I don't know why.

"Haven't I got troubles enough of my own," he said, "without having to go on scouting expeditions looking for you all over the neighborhood every time I get home? Your mother's been hanging out the window calling you for hours. What time d'ye think it is, anyway?" And all that kind of stuff. I got it for five solid blocks, all the way back to our house, but I just kept thinking about how I got swindled just now, so I got out of having to hear most of it.

I'd never seen him so grouchy before. At least not since that time I busted the candy-store window. Most times when he had to come after me like this, he'd take a lick at the bat himself, if we were playing baseball for instance, and then wink at me and only pretend to bawl me out in front of Ma when we got back. He said he could remember when he was twelve himself, and that shows how good he was, because twenty-three years is a pretty long time to remember, let me tell you. But tonight it was the McCoy. Only I could tell it wasn't me he was sore at so much, it was something else entirely.

By the time we got through supper my mother noticed it too. "Frank," she said after a while, "what's eating you? There's something troubling you, and you can't fool me."

He was drawing lines on the tablecloth with the back of his fork. "I've been demoted," he said.

Like a fool I had to butt in right then, otherwise I could have listened to some more. "What's demoted

mean, Pop?" I said. "Is it like when you're put back in school? How can they do that to you, Pop?"

Ma said, "Frankie, you go inside and do your homework!"

Just before I closed the door I heard her say, kind of scared, "You haven't been put back into blues, Frank, have you?"

"No," he said, "but it might just as well have been that."

When they came out after a while they both looked kind of downhearted. They forgot I was in there or else didn't notice me reading *Black Mask* behind my geography book. She said, "I guess now we'll have to move out of here."

"Yeah, there's a big difference in the salary."

I pricked up my ears at that. I didn't want to have to move away from here, especially since I was marbles champion of the block.

"What hurts most about it," he said, "is I know they couldn't find a thing against me on my record. I'm like a burnt sacrifice, the captain practically admitted as much. Whenever the Commissioner gets these brain waves about injecting more efficiency into the division, somebody has to be made the goat. He calls that getting rid of the deadwood. If you haven't cracked six cases in a row single-handed, you're deadwood."

"Well," she said, "maybe it'll blow over and they'll reinstate you after a while."

"No," he said, "the only thing that'll save me is a break of some kind, a chance to make a big killing. Once the order goes through, I won't even be on Homicide any more. What chance'll I have then, running in lush-workers and dips? What I need is a flashy, hard-to-crack murder case."

Gee, I thought, I wish I knew where there was one, so I could tell him about it. What chance did a kid like me have of knowing where there was a murder case — at least that no one else knew about and he could have all to himself? I didn't even know how to begin to look for one, except behind billboards and in vacant lots and places, and I knew there wouldn't be any there. Once in a while you found a dead cat, that was all.

Next morning I waited until Ma was out of the room, and I asked him, "Pop, how does somebody know when a murder case has happened?"

He wasn't paying much attention. "Well, they find the body, naturally."

"But suppose the body's been hidden some place where nobody knows about it, then how do they know there was a murder case?"

"Well, if somebody's been missing, hasn't been seen around for some time, that's what first starts them looking."

"But suppose no one even tells 'em somebody's missing, because nobody noticed it yet, *then* how would they know where to look?"

"They wouldn't, they'd have to have some kind of a clue first. A clue is some little thing, any little thing, that don't seem to belong where it's found. It's tough to explain, Frankie;

that's the best I can do. It could be some little thing belonging to someone, but the person it belongs to isn't around; then you wonder why he isn't, and what it's doing where you found it instead of where it ought to be."

Just then Ma came back in again, so he said, "You quit bothering your head about that stuff, and stick to your school work. That last report you brought back wasn't so hot, you know." And then he said, more to himself than to me, "One flop in the family is enough."

Gee, it made me feel bad to hear him say that. Ma must have heard him, too. I saw her rest her hand on his shoulder, and kind of push down hard, without saying anything.

I looked the Scanlon kid up after school that afternoon, to ask him about that eye I'd traded off him the night before. It was about the only thing I had in the way of a clue, and I couldn't help wondering. . . .

I took it out and looked it over, and I said, "Scanny, d'you suppose anyone ever *used* this? I mean, really wore it in his puss?"

"I dunno," he said. "I guess somebody musta when it was new; that's what they're made for."

"Well, then, why'd he quit using it, why'd he throw it away?"

"I guess he got a new one, that's why he didn't want the old one no more."

"Naw," I said, "because once you've got one of these, you don't need another, except only if it cracks or breaks or something." And we could both see this wasn't cracked or chipped or anything. "A guy can't see through one of these even when it's new; he just wears it so people won't know his own is missing," I explained. "So why should he change it for a new one, if it's still good?"

He scratched his head without being able to answer. And the more I thought about it, the more excited I started to get.

"D'you suppose something *happened* to the guy that used to own it?" I whispered. I really meant did he suppose the guy that used to own it had been murdered, but I didn't tell him that because I was afraid he'd laugh at me. Anyway, I couldn't figure out why anybody would want to swipe a man's glass eye, even if they did murder him, and then throw it away.

I remembered what my old man had said that morning. A clue is any little thing that don't seem to belong where it's found. If this wasn't a clue, then what was? Maybe I could help him. Find out about somebody being murdered, that nobody else even knew about yet, and tell him about it, and then he could get re — whatever that word was I'd heard him and her use.

But before I could find out who it belonged to, I had to find out where it came from first. I said, "Whereabouts did you find it, Scan?"

"I didn't find it," he said. "Who tole you I found it? I swapped it off

a guy, just like you swapped it off me."

"Who was he?"

"How do I know? I never seen him before. Some kid that lives on the other side of the gas works, down in the tough part of town."

"Let's go over there, try and find him. I want to ask him where *he* got it."

"Come on," he said, "I bet I can show him to you easy. He was a little bit of a runt. He was no good at swapping, either. I cleaned him just like I cleaned you. That's why he had to go inside his father's store and bring out this peeper, he didn't have anything else left."

I got sort of disappointed. Maybe this wasn't the right kind of a clue after all. "Oh, does his father sell them kind of glims in his store?"

"Naw, he presses pants."

I got kind of relieved again. Maybe it still was a useful clue.

When we got over there on the other side of the gas works, Scanny said, "Here's where I swapped him. I don't know just where his father's store is, but it must be around here some place, because it didn't take him a minute to go back for that glim." He went as far as the corner and looked down the next street, and then he said, "I see him! There he is!" And he stretched his mouth wide and let out a pip of a whistle.

A minute later a dark, undersized kid came around the corner. The minute he saw Scanlon he started to argue with him. "You gotta gimme that thing back. I took out of the shop yesterday. My father walloped me for picking it up off the ironing board. He says maybe the customer'll come back and ask fer it, and what'll he tell him?"

"Where'd it come from?" I butted in. I tried to sound tough like I imagined my old man did when he questioned suspects.

"I should know. It came out of one of the suits that was brought in to be cleaned."

"From the pocket?"

"Naw. It was sticking in one of the cuffs on the bottom of his pants. They were wide open and needed basting."

"In the *cuff!*" Scanlon piped up. "Gee, that's a funny place to go around carrying a glass eye in!"

"He didn't know it was down there," I said impatiently. "It musta bounced in without his knowing it, and he brought the suit over to be pressed, and it stayed in there the whole time."

"Aw, how could that happen?"

"Sure it could happen. Once my father dropped a quarter, and he never heard it hit the floor; he looked all over for it and couldn't find it. Then when he was taking his pants off that night, it fell out of the cuff. He carried it around with him all day long and never knew it."

Even the tailor's kid backed me up in this. "Sure," he said, "that could happen. Sometimes a thing rolls around to the back where the cuff is tacked up, and the stitching holds it in. People have different ways of

taking their pants off; I've watched it in my father's shop when they're getting a fitting. If they pull them off by the bottom, like most do, that turns them upside down, and if something was caught in the cuff it falls out again. But if they just let them fall down flat by their feet and step out of them, it might still stay in, like this did." He was a smart kid all right, even if his old man was just a tailor and not a detective. I had to hand it to him.

I thought to myself: The only way a thing like that could fall into a man's trouser cuff without him seeing it would be from low down, like if the owner was lying flat on the floor around his feet and he was bending over him shaking him or something. That made it seem like maybe I *could* dig up a murder in this and help my old man after all. But I had to find out where that eye came from.

I said to the tailor's kid, "Do you think this guy'll come back, that left the suit?" If he'd really murdered someone, maybe he wouldn't. But then if he wasn't coming back, he didn't have to leave the suit to be cleaned in the first place, so that showed he probably was.

"My father promised it for him by tonight," he said.

I wondered if there was any blood on it. I guessed not, or the guy wouldn't have left it with a tailor. Maybe it was some other kind of a murder, where there wasn't any blood spilled. I said, "Can we come in and look at it?"

Again his shoulder went way up. "It's just a suit," he said. "Didn't you ever see a suit before? All right, come in if you gotta look at it."

We went around the corner and into his father's shop. It was a little dinky place, down in the basement like most of them are. His father was a short little guy, not much taller than me and Scanlon. He was raising a lot of steam from running a hot iron over something.

"This is it, here," the kid said, and he picked up the sleeve of a gray suit hanging there on a rack with two or three others. The cuff had a little scrap of paper pinned to it: "Paulsen — 75¢."

"Don't any address go with it?" I said.

"When it's called for and delivered, an address. When it's brought in and left to be picked up, no address, just the name."

His father noticed us handling the suit just then and he got sore all of a sudden and came running at us waving his hands, with the hot iron still left in one. He probably wasn't going to hit us with it, he just forgot to put it down, but it was no time to wait and find out. He hollered, "Keep your hands off those cleaning jobs, you hear me? What you want here? Outside!"

When we quit running, outside the door, and he turned back and went in again, I said to Sammy, that was this kid's name, "You want these five immies I got with me?"

He looked them over. They weren't as good as some of my others, but they

were probably better than he was used to playing with. "Why should I say no?" he said.

"All right, then here's what you gotta do. When the customer that left that suit comes in to get it, you tip us off. We'll be waiting down at the corner."

"What do you want from him?" he asked.

"This feller's father is a —" Scanlon started to say. I just kicked him in time, so he'd shut up.

"We're just playing a game," I changed it to. I was afraid if we told him, he'd tell his father the first thing, and then his father would probably tell the customer.

"Some game!" he said disgustedly. "All right, when he comes I'll tell you."

He went back inside the shop and we hung around there waiting by the corner. This was about half-past four. At half-past six it was all dark, and we were still waiting there. Scanlon kept wanting to give up and go home. "All right, no one's keeping you here," I told him. "You go home, I'm staying until that guy shows up. I don't care if it takes all night. You can't expect a civillion to show as much forty-tude as a police officer."

"You're not a police officer," he grumbled.

"My father is, so that makes me practic'ly as good as one." I had him there, so he shut up and stuck around.

The thing was, I had to go home for supper sooner or later. I couldn't just stay out and keep watch, or I'd get the tar bawled out of me. And I knew he had to, too.

"Look," I said, "you stay here and keep watching for Sammy's signal. I'll beat it back and get my mother to feed me fast. Then I'll come back here again and relieve you, and you can go back to your house and eat. That way we'll be sure of not missing him if he shows up."

"Will they let you out at night during school?" he asked.

"No, but I'll slip out without them knowing it. If the man calls for his suit before I get back, follow him wherever he goes, and then come back and meet me here and tell me where it is."

I ran all the way back to our house, and I told Ma I had to eat right away. She said, "What's your hurry?"

I explained, "Well, we got an awful important exam coming up tomorrow and I gotta study hard tonight."

She looked at me kind of suspicious and even felt my forehead to see if I was running a temperature. "You're actually *worried* about an exam?" she said. "Well, you may as well eat now. Your poor father's way out at the ends of the earth; he won't be home until all hours."

I could hardly wait until I got through but then I always eat fast so she didn't notice much difference. Then I grabbed up my books for a bluff and said, "I'm going to study upstairs in my room, it's quieter."

As soon as I got up there I locked the door and then I opened the window and got down to the ground easy by way of that old tree. I'd done it

plenty of times before. I ran all the way back to where Scan was waiting.

"He didn't come yet," he said.

"All right, now it's your turn," I told him. Parents are an awful handicap when you're working on a case. I mean, a detective shouldn't have to run home to meals right in the middle of something important. "Come back as soon as you get through," I warned him, "if you want to be in on this."

But he didn't. I found out later he got caught trying to sneak out.

Well, I waited and I waited and I waited, until it was almost ten o'clock. It looked like he wasn't coming for that suit any more tonight, but as long as there was still a light showing in Sammy's father's shop I wasn't going to give up. Once a cop came strolling by and looked me over, like he wondered what a kid my age was doing standing so still by himself on a corner, and I just about curled up and died, but all he said was, "Whaddye say, son?" and went on his way.

While I was standing there hoping the cop wouldn't come back, Sammy, the tailor's kid, suddenly came up to me in the dark when I least expected it. "What's the matter with you, didn't you see me calling you with my hand?" he said. "That guy just come in for his suit."

I saw someone come up the steps out of the shop just then, with a folded suit slung over his arm; he turned and went up the street the other way.

"That's him. Now gimme the marbles you said."

I spilled them into his hand with my eyes on the guy's back. Even from the back he didn't look like a guy to monkey around with. "Did your old man say anything to him about the eye that popped out of his cuff?" I asked Sammy.

"Did he ask us? So why should we tell him? In my father's business anything that ain't missed, we don't know nothing about."

"Then I guess I'll just keep that old glass eye."

The guy was pretty far down the street by now, so I started after him without waiting to hear any more. I was kind of scared, because now there was a grown-up in it, not just kids any more. I was wishing Scan had come back, so I'd have him along with me. But then I thought maybe it was better he hadn't. The man might notice two kids following him quicker than he would just one.

He kept on going, until we were clear over in a part of town I'd never been in before. He was hard to keep up with, he walked fast and he had longer legs than me. Sometimes I'd think I'd lost him, but the suit over his arm always helped me pick him up again. I think without it I would have lost him sure.

Some of the streets had only about one light on them every two blocks, and between lights they were as black as the dickens. I didn't like the kind of people that seemed to live around here either. One time I passed a lady with yellow hair, with a cigarette in her mouth and swinging her purse around

like a lasso. Another time I nearly bumped into a funny thin man hugging a doorway and wiping his hand under his nose like he had a cold.

I couldn't figure out why, if he lived this far away from Sammy's father's shop, the man with the suit had to come all this way over just to leave it to be cleaned. There must have been other tailors that were nearer. I guess he did it so he'd be sure the tailor wouldn't know who he was or where he lived. That looked like he had something to be careful about, didn't it?

Finally the lights got a little better again, and it was a good thing they did; by that time I was all winded, and my left shoe was starting to develop a bad squeak. I could tell ahead of time he was going to look back, by the way he slowed up a little and his shoulders started to turn around. I ducked down quick behind an ash can standing on the sidewalk. A grown-up couldn't have hidden behind it, but it hid me all over.

I counted ten and then I peeked around it. He was on his way again, so I stood up and kept going myself. He must have stopped and looked back like that because he was getting close to where he lived and he wanted to make sure no one was after him. But, just the same, I wasn't ready for him when he suddenly turned into a doorway and disappeared. I was nearly a block behind him, and I ran like anything to get down there on time, because I couldn't tell from where I'd been just which one of them it was, there were three or four of them that were alike.

The entrances had inside doors, and whichever one he'd just opened had finished closing already, and I couldn't sneak in the hall and listen to hear if the stairs were creaking under him or not. There were names under the letter boxes, but I didn't have any matches and there were no lights outside the doors, so I couldn't tell what they were.

Another thing, if he went that far out of his way to have a suit cleaned, he wouldn't give his right name on that little scrap of paper that was pinned to the sleeve.

Suddenly I got a bright idea. If he lived in the back of the house it wouldn't work, but maybe he had a room in the front. I backed up all the way across to the other side of the street and stood watching to see if any window would light up. Sure enough one did a minute or two later, a dinky one way up on the top floor of the middle house. I knew that must be his because no one else had gone in there just now.

Right while I was standing there he came to the window and looked down, and caught me staring square up at him with my head way back. This was one time I couldn't move quick enough to get out of sight. He stared down at me hard, without moving. I got the funniest creepy feeling, like I was looking at a snake or something and couldn't move. Finally I turned my head away as if I hadn't been doing anything, and stuck my hands in

my pockets, and shuffled off whistling, as if I didn't know what to do with myself.

Then when I got a little further away, I walked faster and faster, until I'd turned the corner out of sight. I didn't dare look back, but something told me he'd stayed up there at that window the whole time looking after me.

It was pretty late, and this was miles from my own part of town, and I knew I'd better be getting back and put off anything else until tomorrow. At least I'd found out which house he lived in — 305 Decatur St. I could come tomorrow with Scanny.

I got back into my room from the outside without any trouble, but Ma sure had a hard time getting me up for school the next morning.

Scanlon and I got together the minute of three, and we left our books in our school lockers and started out right from there, without bothering to go home first. I told him what I'd found out. Then I said, "We'll find out this guy's name first, and then we'll find out if there's anyone living around there who has a glass eye, and who hasn't been seen lately."

"Who'll we ask?"

"Who do you ask when you want to find out anything? The janitor."

"But suppose he don't want to tell us? Some people don't like to answer questions asked by kids."

I chopped my hand at his arm and said, "I just thought of a swell way! Wait'll we get there, I'll show you."

When we got there I took him across the street first and showed him the window. "That's it, up there on the top floor of the middle house."

We went over and started looking under the letter boxes in the vestibule for his name. I don't think we would have found it so easy, it was hard to tell just which name went with which flat, only I happened to notice one that was a lot like the one he left his suit under at the tailor's: Petersen. "That must be it," I told Scanny. "He just changed the first part of it."

"What do we do now?" he said.

I pushed the bell that said Janitor. "Now watch," I said, "how I get it out of him."

He was a cranky old codger. "What you boys want?" he barked.

I said, "We been sent over with a message for somebody that lives in this house, but we forgot the name. He's got a glass eye."

He growled, "There's nobody here got a glass eye!"

"Maybe we got the wrong number. Is there anybody around here in the whole neighborhood got a glass eye?"

"Nobody! Now get out of here. I got vurk to do!"

We drifted back to the corner and hung around there feeling kind of disappointed. "It didn't get us nothing," I said. "If no one in his house has one, and if no one in the neighborhood has one, where'd he get it from?"

Scanlon was beginning to lose interest. "Aw, this ain't fun no more," he said. "Let's go back and dig up a game of —"

"This isn't any game," I told him

severely. "I'm doing this to help my old man. You go back if you want to, I'm going to keep at it. He says what every good detective has to have is preservance."

"What's 'at, some kind of a jam?" he started to ask, but all of a sudden I saw something and jumped out of sight around the corner.

"Here's that guy now!" I whispered. "He just came out of the house."

We got down in back of a stoop. There were plenty of people all around us, but nobody paid any attention to us, they thought we were just kids playing a game, I guess.

A minute later this Petersen got to the corner and stood there. I peeked up and got a good look at his face. It was just a face, it didn't look any different from anybody else's. I'd thought until now maybe a murderer ought to have a special kind of a face, but I'd never asked my old man about that, so I wasn't sure. Maybe they didn't, or maybe this guy wasn't a murderer after all, and I was just wasting a lot of good ball time prowling around after him.

He looked around a lot, like he wanted to make sure nobody was noticing him, and then he finally stepped down off the curb, crossed over, and kept going straight along Decatur Street.

"Let's follow him, see where he goes," I said. "I think he saw me last night from the window, and he might remember me, so here's how we better do it. You follow him, and then I'll follow you. I'll stay way back where he can't see me, and just keep you in sight."

We tried that for a while, but all of a sudden I saw Scanlon just standing there waiting for me ahead. "What'd you give up for?" I said when I got to him. "Now you lost him."

"No, I didn't. He just went in there to get somep'n to eat. You can see him sitting in there."

He was sitting in a place with a big glass front, and he was facing our way, so we had to get down low under it and just stick the tops of our heads up. We waited a long time. Finally I said, "He oughta be through by now," and I took another look. He was still just sitting there, with that same one cup still in front of him. "He ain't eating," I told Scanlon, "he's just killing time."

"What do you suppose he's waiting for?"

"Maybe he's waiting for it to get dark." I looked around, and it pretty nearly was already. "Maybe he's going some place that he don't want to go while it's still light, so no one can see him."

Scanlon started to scuff his feet around on the sidewalk like he was getting restless. "I gotta get back soon or I'll catch it," he said. "I'm in Dutch already for trying to sneak out last night."

"Yeah, and then when you do go back," I told him bitterly, "you'll get kept in again like last night. You're a heck of a guy to have for a partner!"

"No, tonight I can make it," he promised. "It's Thursday, and Ma

wants to try for a new set of dishes at the movies."

"All right, get back here fast as you can. And while you're there, here's what you do. Call up my house and tell my mother I'm staying for supper at your house. If she asks why, tell her we both got so much studying to do we decided to do it together. That way I won't have to leave here. This guy can't sit in there forever, and I want to find out where he goes when he does come out. If I'm not here when you come back, wait for me right here, where it says 'Joe's Coffee Spot'."

He beat it for home fast and left me there alone. Just as I thought, he wasn't gone five minutes when the guy inside came out, so I was glad one of us had waited. I flattened myself into a doorway and watched him around the corner of it.

It was good and dark now, like he wanted it to be, I guess, and he started up the street in the same direction he'd been going before — away from that room he lived in. I gave him a half a block start, and then I came out and trailed after him. We were pretty near the edge of town now, and big openings started to show between houses, then pretty soon there were more open places than houses, and finally there weren't any more houses at all, just lots, and then fields, and further ahead some trees.

The street still kept on, though, and once in a while a car would come whizzing by, coming in from the country. He would turn his face the other way each time one did, I noticed, like he didn't want them to get a look at him.

That was one of the main things that kept me going after him. He hadn't been acting right ever since I first started following him the night before away from the tailor shop. He was too watchful and careful, and he was always looking around too much, like he was afraid of someone doing just what I was doing. People don't walk that way, unless they've done something they shouldn't.

I couldn't stay up on the road out here, because there was no one else on it but him and me and he would have seen me easy. But there were a lot of weeds and things growing alongside of it, and I got off into them and kept going with my back bent even with the tops of them. When they weren't close together I had to make a quick dive from one clump to the next.

Just before he got to where the trees started in, he kind of slowed down, like he wasn't going very much further. I looked all around, but I couldn't see anything, only some kind of old frame house standing way back off the road. It didn't have any lights and didn't look like anyone lived in it. Gee, it was a spooky kind of a place if there ever was one, and I sure hoped he wasn't going anywhere near *there*.

But it looked like he was, only he didn't go straight for it. First he looked both ways, up and down the road, and saw there was no one around — or thought there wasn't. Then he

twisted his head and listened, to make sure no car was coming just then. Then he took a quick jump that carried him off the road into the darkness. But I could still see him a little, because I knew where he'd gone in.

Then, when he'd gotten over to where this tumbledown house was, he went all around it first, very carefully, like he wanted to make sure there was no one hiding in it waiting to grab him. Luckily there were plenty of weeds and bushes growing all around, and it was easy to get up closer to him.

When he'd gotten back around to the front again, and decided there was no one in it — which I could have told him right from the start just by the looks of it — he finally got ready to go in. It had a crazy kind of a porch with a shed over it, sagging way down in the middle between the two posts that held it. He went in under that, and I could hardly see him any more, it was so dark.

I heard him fiddling around with something that sounded like a lock, and then the door wheezed, and scraped back. There was a white something on the porch and he picked it up and took it in with him.

He left the door open a crack behind him, like he was coming out again soon, so I knew enough not to sneak up on the porch and try to peep in. It would have squeaked under me, anyway. But I moved over a little further in the bushes, where I could get a better line on the door. A weak light came on, not a regular light, but a match that he must have lit there on the other side of the door. But I've got good eyes and it was enough to show me what he was doing. He was picking up a couple of letters that the postman must have shoved under the bottom of the door. He looked at them, and then he seemed to get sore. He rolled them up into a ball with one hand and pitched them way back inside the house. He hadn't even opened them, just looked at the outside.

His match burned out, but he lit another, only this time way back inside some place where I couldn't see him. Then that one went out too, and a minute later the door widened a little and he edged out again as quietly as he'd gone in. He put something down where he'd taken that white thing up from. Then he closed the door real careful after him, looked all around to make sure no one was in sight, and came down off the porch.

I was pretty far out in front of the door, further than I had been when he went in. But I had a big bush to cover me, and I tucked my head down between my knees and made a ball out of myself, to make myself as small as I could, and that was about the sixteenth time he'd missed seeing me. But I forgot about my hand, it was sticking out flat against the ground next to me, to help me balance myself.

He came by so close his pants leg almost brushed my cheek. Just then a car came by along the road, and he stepped quickly back so he wouldn't

be seen. His whole heel came down on two of my fingers.

All I could remember was that if I yelled I would be a goner. I don't know how I kept from it. It felt like a butcher's cleaver had chopped them off. My eyes got all full of water, mixed with stars. He stayed on it maybe half a minute, but it seemed like an hour. Luckily the car was going fast, and he moved forward again. I managed to hold out without moving until he got out to the road.

Then I rolled over on my face, buried it with both arms, and bawled good and hard, but without making any noise. By the time I got that out of my system, it didn't hurt so much any more.

Then I sat up and thought things over, meanwhile blowing on my fingers to cool them. He'd gone back along the road toward the built-up part of town. I didn't know whether to keep on following him or not. If he was only going back where he came from, there didn't seem to be any sense to it, I knew where that was already. I knew he didn't live here in this house, people don't live in two places at once.

What did he want out here then? What had he come here for? He'd acted kind of sore, the way he looked over those letters and then balled them up and fired them down. Like they weren't what he wanted, like he'd had the trouble of coming all the way out here for nothing. He must be waiting for a letter, a letter that hadn't come yet. I decided to stick around and find out more about this house if I could.

Well, I waited until I couldn't hear him walking along the road any more, then I got up and sneaked up on the porch myself. That thing he had put down outside the door was only an empty milk bottle, like people leave for the milkman to take away with him when he brings the new milk. So that white thing he had picked up at first must have been the same bottle, but with the milk still in it. He must have just taken it in and emptied it out.

What did he want to do a thing like that for? He hadn't been in there long enough to drink it. He just threw it out, and then brought the empty bottle outside again. That showed two things. If the milkman left milk here, then there was supposed to be somebody living here. But if this guy emptied the bottle out, that showed there wasn't anyone living here any more, but he didn't want the milkman or the mailman or anyone else to find out about it yet.

My heart started to pick up speed, and I got all gooseflesh and I whispered to myself: "Maybe he murdered the guy that lives here, and nobody's found out about it yet! I bet that's what it is! I bet *this* is where that eye came from!" The only catch was, why did he keep coming back here afterwards, if he did? The only thing I could figure out was he must want some letter that he knew was going to show up here, but it hadn't come yet, and he kept coming

back at nights to find out if it had been delivered. And maybe the whole time there was someone dead inside there. . . .

I kept saying to myself, "I'm going in there and see if there is. I can get in there easy, even if the door is locked." But for a long time I didn't move.

Finally I said to myself like this: "It's only a house. What can a house do to you? Just shadows and emptiness can't hurt you. And even if there is somebody lying dead in there, dead people can't move any more. You're not a kid any more, you're twelve years and five months old, and besides, your old man needs help. If you go in there you might find out something that'll help him."

I tried the door first, but like I'd thought, it was locked, so I couldn't get in that way. Then I walked slowly all around the outside of the house trying all the windows one after the other. They were up higher than my head, but the clap-boards stuck out in lots of places and it was easy to get a toe-hold on them and hoist myself up. That wouldn't work either. They were all latched or nailed down tight on the inside.

Finally I figured I might be able to open one of the top-floor windows, so I went around to the front again, spat on my hands, and shinnied up one of the porch posts. There were some old vine stalks twisted around them, so it was pie getting up. It was so old the whole thing shook bad, but I didn't weigh much, so nothing happened.

I started tugging at one of the windows that looked out over it. It was hard to get it started because it hadn't been opened in so long, but I kept at it, and finally it jarred up. The noise kind of scared me, but I swallowed hard and stuck my legs inside and slid into the room. The place smelled stuffy, and cobwebs tickled my face, but I just brushed them off.

I couldn't see much, just the gray where the walls were and the black where the door was. A grown-up would have had matches, but I had to use my hands out in front of me to tell where I was going.

I didn't bump into anything much, because I guess the upstairs rooms were all empty and there was nothing to bump into. But the floorboards cracked and grunted under me. I had a narrow escape from falling all the way down the stairs and maybe breaking my neck, because they came sooner than I thought they would. After that I went good and easy, tried out each one with my toe first to make sure it was there before I trusted my whole foot down on it. It took a long time getting down that way, but at least I got down in one piece. Then I started for where I thought the front door was. I wanted to get out.

I don't know what mixed me up, whether there was an extra turn in the stairs that I didn't notice in the dark, or I got my directions balled up by tripping a couple of times over empty boxes and picking myself up again. Anyway I kept groping in what I thought was a straight line out from the foot of the stairs, until I

came up against a closed door. I thought it was the front door to the house, of course. I tried it, and it came right open. That should have told me it wasn't, because I'd seen him lock it behind him when he left.

The air was even worse on the other side of it than on my side, all damp and earthy like when you've been burrowing under the ground, and it was darker than ever in front of me, so I knew I wasn't looking out on the porch. Instead of backing up I took an extra step through it, just to make sure what it was, and this time I did fall — and, boy, how I fell! Over and over, all the way down a steep flight of brick steps that hurt like anything every time they hit me.

The only thing that saved me was that at the bottom I landed on something soft. Not real soft like a mattress, but kind of soft and at the same time stiff, if you know what I mean. At first I thought it was a bag of some kind, filled with sawdust.

I was just starting to say to myself, "Gee, it's a good thing that was there!" when I put out my hand, to brace myself for getting up on my feet again, and all of a sudden I turned to ice all over.

My hand had landed right on top of another hand — like it was waiting there to meet it! It wasn't warm and soft like a hand, it felt more like a stiff leather glove that's been soaked in water, but I knew what it was all right. It went on up into a shoulder, and that went up into a neck, and that ended in a head.

I gave a yell, and jumped about a foot in the air and landed further over on another part of the floor. Then I started scrambling around on my hands and knees to get out of there fast.

I couldn't get at the stairs again without stepping over it at the foot of them, and that kept me there a minute or two longer, until I had time to talk to myself. And I had to talk good and hard, believe me.

"He's murdered, because when dead people die regular they're buried, not left to lie at the bottom of cellar steps. So you see, that Petersen *did* murder someone, just like you been suspecting for two whole days. And instead of being scared to death, you ought to be glad you found him, because now you *can* help your old man just like you wanted to. Nobody knows about this yet, not even the milkman or the letterman, and he can have it all to himself."

That braced me up a lot. I wiped the wet off my forehead, and I pulled my belt over to the fourth notch, which was the last one there was on it. Then I got an idea how I could look at him, and make sure he was murdered. I didn't have any matches, but he was a grown-up, even if he was dead, and he just might have one, in — in his pocket.

I started to crawl straight back *toward* him, and when I got there, I clenched my teeth together real hard, and reached out one hand for about where his pocket ought to be. It shook so, it was no good by itself, but I

steadied it by holding it with the other hand, and got it in. Then I had to go around to the other side of him and try that one. He had three of them in there, those long kind. My hand got caught getting it out, and I nearly went crazy for a minute, but I finally pulled the pocket off it with my other hand, and edged back.

Then I scraped one of them along the floor. His face was the first thing I saw. It was all wrinkled and dry-like, and it had four black holes in it, one more than it should have. The mouth was a big wide hole, and the nostrils of the nose were two small ones, and then there was another under one eyelid, or at least a sort of a hollow place that was just like a hole. He'd worn a glass eye in that socket, and it was the very one I had in my pocket that very minute. I could see now how he'd come to lose it.

He'd been choked to death with an old web belt, from behind when he wasn't looking. It was still around his neck, so tight and twisted you would have had to cut through it to get it off. It made his other eye, which was a real one, stand out all swollen like it was ready to pop out. And I guess that was what really did happen with the fake one. It got loose and dropped out while he was still struggling, down on the floor between the murderer's spread legs, and jumped into his trouser-cuff without him even seeing it. Then, when it was over, he either didn't notice it was missing from the dead man's face, or else thought it had rolled off into a corner and was lying there. Instead it was in the cuff of the suit he'd had cleaned to make sure it wouldn't have any suspicious dirt or stains on it.

The match was all the way down to my fingertips by now, so I had to blow it out. It had told me all it could. It didn't tell me who the dead old man was, or why that Petersen fellow had killed him. Or what he was after that made him come back again like that. I crept up the brick cellar steps in the dark, feeling like I could never again be as scared as I had been when I first felt that other hand under mine. I was wrong, wait'll you hear.

I found my way back to the front door without much trouble. The real front door, this time. Then I remembered the two letters I'd seen him crumple and throw away. They might tell me who the dead man was. I had to light one of the two matches I had left to look for them, but the door had no glass in it, just a crack under it, and Petersen must be all the way back in town by now, so I figured it was safe if I didn't keep it lit too long.

I found them right away, and just held the match long enough to smooth them out and read who they were sent to. The dead old man was Thomas Gregory, and that road out there must still be called Decatur Street even this far out, because they said: 1017 Decatur Street. They were just ads. One wanted to know if he wanted to buy a car, the other one wanted to know if he wanted to buy a set of books.

I blew the match out and stuck

them up under the lining of my cap. I wanted to take them home and show them to my father, so he'd believe me when I told him I'd found someone murdered way out here. Otherwise he was liable to think I was just making it up.

I found out I couldn't get the door open after all, even from the inside. He'd locked it with Gregory's key and taken that with him. I found another door at the back, but that turned out to be even worse, it had a padlock on it. This Gregory must have been scared of people, or else kind of a crazy hermit, to live all locked up like that, with the windows nailed down and everything. I'd have to go all the way upstairs, climb out, catwalk over that dangerously wobbly porch, and skin down to the ground again.

I'd gotten back about as far as where the stairs started up, and I'd just put my foot on the bottom one, when I heard a scrunch outside. Then someone stepped on the porch! There was a slithering sound by the door, and a minute later a little whistle went *tweet!* I nearly jumped out of my skin. I don't know which of the three scared me most. I think it was that whispering sound under the door. The only reason I stayed where I was and didn't make a break up the stairs was, I could hear steps going away again outside.

I tiptoed to one of the front windows and rubbed a clean spot in the dust and squinted through it. I could see a man walking away from the house back toward the road again. He climbed on a bicycle and rode off. It was only a special delivery mailman.

I waited until he'd rode from sight, then I groped my way back toward the door, and I could see something white sticking through under it, even in the dark. I got down and pinched it between my thumb and finger, but it wouldn't come through, it seemed to have gotten caught. He hadn't shoved it all the way in, and first I thought maybe it was too thick or had gotten snagged on a splinter.

I opened my fingers for a minute to get a tighter grip, and right while I was looking at it, it started getting smaller and smaller, like it was slipping out the other way. I couldn't understand what was making it do that, there was no tilt to the sill. When there was only about an inch of it left, I grabbed at it quick, and gave it a tug that brought it in again.

Then all of a sudden I let go of it, and stayed there like I was, without moving and with my heart starting to pound like anything. Without hearing a sound, something had told me all at once that there was someone out there on the other side of that door! I was afraid to touch the letter now, but the damage had already been done. That jerk I'd given it was enough to tell him there was someone in here.

Plenty scared, I picked my way back to the window again, as carefully as if I was walking on eggs, to try and see if I could get a side-look at the porch through it. Just as I got to it,

one of those things like you see in the movies happened, only this time it wasn't funny. My face came right up against somebody else's. He was trying to look in, while I was trying to look out. Our two faces were right smack up against each other, with just a thin sheet of glass between.

We both jumped together, and he straightened up. He'd been bending down low to look in. Mine stayed down low where it was, and he could tell I was a kid. It was Petersen, I could recognize him even in the faint light out there by the shape of his hat and his pitcher-ears. He must have been waiting around near-by, and had seen the mailman's bike.

We both whisked from the window fast. He jumped for the door and started to stab a key at it. I jumped for the stairs and the only way out there was. Before I could get to them, I went headfirst over an empty packing case. Then I was on them and flashing up them. Just as I cleared the last one, I heard the door swing in below. I might be able to beat him out of the house through the window upstairs, but I didn't give much for my chances of beating him down the road in a straight run. My only hope was to be able to get into those weeds out there ahead of him and then lose myself, and I didn't know how I was going to do it with him right behind me.

I got to the upstairs window just as he got to the bottom step of the stairs. I didn't wait to look, but I think he'd stopped to strike a light so that he could make better time. I straddled the window sill in a big hurry, tearing my pants on a nail as I did. A minute later something much worse happened. Just as I got one foot down on the wooden shed over the porch, and was bringing the other one through the window after me, the two ends went up higher, the middle sank lower, and then the whole business slid to the ground between the two posts that had held it up. Luckily I was still holding onto the window frame with both arms. I pulled myself back just in time and got my leg up on the sill again.

If there'd been a clear space underneath, I would have chanced it and jumped from where I was, although it was a pretty high jump for a kid my size, but the way those jagged ends of splintered wood were sticking up all over, I knew one of them would stab through me sure as anything if I tried it. He'd run back to the door for a minute — I guess at first he thought the whole house was coming down on him — and when he saw that it was just the porch shed, he stuck his head out and around and looked up at me where I was, stranded up there on the window frame.

All he said was, "All right, kid, I've got you now," but he said it in such a calm, quiet way that it scared you more than if he'd cursed.

He went in and started up the stairs again. I ran all around the three sides of the room, looking for a way out, and on the third side I finally found a narrow brick fireplace. I jumped in

through that and tried to climb up on the inside. I fell back again to the bottom just as he came into the room. He headed straight over to the fireplace and bent down, and his arm reached in for me and swept back and forth. It missed me the first time, but the second time it got me. There was nothing I could hang onto in there to keep from being pulled out. I came out kicking, and he straightened up and held me by the throat, out where I couldn't reach him with my feet.

He let me swing at his arm with both my fists until I got all tired, and then he said in that same quiet, deadly way, "What're you doing around here, son?"

"Just playin'," I said.

"Don't you think it's a funny place and a funny time of night for a kid your age to be playing?"

What was the use of answering?

He said, "I've seen you before, son. I saw you standing on the street looking up at my window last night. You seem to be crossing my path a lot lately. What's the idea?" He shook me till my teeth darn near came out, then he asked me a second time, real slow: "What's the idea?"

"Nothin'," I drooled. My head lolled all around on my shoulders, dizzy from the shaking.

"I think there is. Who's your father?"

"Frank Case."

"Who's Frank Case?"

I knew my only chance was not to tell him. I knew if I told him then he'd never let me get out of here alive. But I couldn't help telling him, it made me glad to tell him, proud to tell him; I didn't want any mercy from him. "The best damn dick in town!" I spit out at him.

"That's your finish," he said. "So you're a cop's son. Well, a cop's son is just a future cop. Squash them while they're little. Did your father teach you how to go out bravely, kid?"

Gee, I hated him! My own voice got nearly as husky as if it was changing already, and it wasn't yet. "My father don't have to teach me that. Just being his kid shows it to me."

He laughed. "Been down to the cellar yet, son?"

I didn't answer.

"Well, we're going down there now."

I hated him so, I didn't even remember to be scared much any more. You're only scared when there's a chance of not getting hurt, anyway. When there's no chance of not getting hurt, what's the use of being scared? "And I'm not coming up again any more, am I?" I said defiantly while he felt his way down the stairs with me.

"No, you're not coming up again any more. Glad you know it."

I said, "You can kill me like you did him, but I'm not afraid of you. My pop and every cop in the city'll get even on you, you dirty murderer, you. You stink!"

We'd gotten down to the first floor by now. It was better than the basement, anyway. I twisted my head around and got my teeth into his arm, just below the elbow. I kept

it up until they darn near came together, through his sleeve and skin and muscle. I couldn't even feel him hitting me, but I know he was, because all of a sudden I landed flat up against the wall all the way across the room, and my ears hummed.

I heard him say, "You copper-whelp! If you want it that quick, here it is!" The white of his shirt showed for a minute, like he'd pushed back his coat to take out something. Then a long tube of fire jumped at me, and there was a sound like thunder in the room.

I'd never heard a gun go off before. It makes you kind of excited. It did me, anyway. I knew the wall was pale in back of me and that was bad because I was outlined against it. I dropped down flat on the floor, and started to shunt off sideways over it, keeping my face turned toward him. I knew another of those tubes of light was coming any second, this time pointed right, pointed low.

He heard the slithering sound my body was making across the floor. He must have thought I was hit but still able to move. He said, "You're hard to finish, ain't you, kid? Why ain't you whimpering? Don't it hurt you?" I just kept swimming sideways on the floor. I heard him say:

"Two shots don't make any more noise than one. I'll make sure this time." He took a step forward and one knee dipped a little. I saw his arm come out and point down at me.

I couldn't help shutting my eyes tight for a minute there on the floor. Then I remembered I was a detective's son and I opened them again right away. Not for any murderer was I going to close my eyes.

The tube of light came again, and the thunder, and a lot of splinters jumped up right in front of my face. One of them even caught in my lip and hurt like a needle. I couldn't keep quiet even if I wanted to; the way I hated him made me say, real quiet, like I was a grown-up talking to another grown-up, not a kid who knew he was going to die in another minute:

"Gee, you're lousy, mister, for a murderer!"

That was all there was time for. All of a sudden there was a sound like someone ploughing through that mass of wreckage outside the door, and the door swung in and hit back against the wall; he hadn't even locked it behind him in his hurry to get his hands on me. For a minute there was complete silence — me flat on the floor, him in the shadows.

Then a low voice that I knew by heart whispered, "Don't shoot, fellows, he may have my kid in there with him."

You could make him out against the lighter sky outside, but he had to have light to see by, or I knew Petersen would get him sure. He was just holding his fire because he didn't want to give away where he was. I had one match left in my pocket from the dead man. But a match goes out if you try to throw it through the air. I got it out of my pocket, and I put its tip to the floor and held it there, ready.

Then I drew my legs up under me, reared up on them, and ticked the match off as I straightened. I held it way out across the room toward Petersen, with my arm stretched as far as it could reach, as it flamed, and it showed him up in smoky orange from head to foot. "Straight ahead of you, Pop!" I yelled.

Petersen's gun started around toward me fast and angry, to put me and my match both out at once, but there's only one thing that can beat a bullet, and that's another bullet. The doorway thundered, and my pop's bullet hit him so hard in the side of the head that he kicked over sideways like a drunk trying to dance, and went nudging his shoulder all the way down the wall to the floor, still smoky-orange from my match to the last.

I stood there holding it, like the Statue of Liberty, until they had a chance to get over to him and make sure he wouldn't still shoot from where he was lying.

But one of them came straight to me, without bothering about him, and I knew which one it was all right, dark or no dark. He said, "Frankie, are you all right?"

I said, "Sure, I'm all right, Pop."

And the funny part of it was, I still was while I was saying it; I was sure I could've gone on all night yet. But all of a sudden when I felt his hands reaching out for me, I felt like I was only twelve years old again and would have to wait a long time yet before I could be a regular detective, and I flopped up against him all loose and went to sleep standing up or something. . . .

When I woke up I was in a car with him and a couple of the others, riding back downtown again. I started to talk the minute my eyes were open, to make sure he hadn't missed any of it, because I wanted to get him re— you know that word.

I said, "Pop, he killed an old guy named Thomas Gregory, he's down —"

"Yeah, we found him, Frankie."

"And, Pop, there's a letter under the front door, which is why he killed him."

"We found that too, Frankie." He took it out of his pocket and showed it to me. It wasn't anything, just an old scrap of pale blue paper.

"It's a certified check for twelve thousand dollars, in payment for a claim he had against a construction company as a result of an accident."

My father explained, almost like I was a grown-up instead of a kid, "He was hit in the eye by a steel particle while he was walking past one of their buildings under construction. He had to have the eye taken out. That was five years ago. The suit dragged on ever since, while he turned sour and led a hand-to-mouth existence in that shack out there. They fought him to the last ditch, but the higher court made them pay damages in the end.

"The day the decision was handed down, some of the papers ran little squibs about it, space-fillers down at the bottom of the page like they do. One of these evidently caught Peter-

sen's eye, and he mistakenly thought that meant the check had already come in and the old man had cashed it. He went out there, got himself admitted or forced his way in, probably tortured Gregory first, and when he couldn't get anything out of him, ended up by killing him.

"He was too quick about it. The check didn't come in until tonight, as you saw. He had to keep coming back, watching for it. Once the old man was gone and the check still uncashed, the only thing he could do was take a desperate chance on forging his name to it, and present it for payment, backed up by some credentials taken from Gregory.

"He wasn't very bright or he would have known that he didn't have a chance in a thousand of getting away with anything like that. Banks don't honor checks for that amount, when the payee isn't known to them, without doing a little quiet investigating first. But he wanted *something* out of his murder. He'd killed the old man for nothing. . . . But how in the blazes did *you* —"

So then I took out the glass eye and showed it to him, and told him how I traced it back. I saw them give each other looks and shake their heads sort of surprised over it, and one of them said, "Not bad! Not bad at all!"

"Not bad?" snapped my father.

"How'd you know where I was?"

"In the first place," he said, "your mother caught right on that Scanny was lying when he said you were studying over at his house, because in your excitement you kids overlooked the fact that tomorrow's Thanksgiving and there's no school to study for. She sent me over there, I broke Scanny down, and he showed me where this room was you'd followed this fellow Petersen to earlier in the day.

"I broke in, looked it over, and found a couple of those newspaper items about this old man Gregory that he'd taken the trouble to mark off and clip out. I didn't like the looks of that to begin with, and your friend Scanny had already mentioned something about a glass eye. Luckily they gave the recluse's address — which was what had put Petersen onto him, too — and when eleven-thirty came and no sign of you, I rustled up a car and chased out there fast."

We stopped off at Headquarters first, so he could make out his report, and he had me meet some guy with white hair who was his boss, I guess. He clapped my shoulder right where it hurt most from all those falls I'd had, but I didn't let him see that. I saw my father wasn't going to say anything himself, so I piped up: "The whole case is my father's! Now is he going to get re-instituted?"

I saw them wink at each other, and then the man with white hair laughed and said, "I think I can promise that." Then he looked at me and added, "You think a lot of your father, don't you?"

I stood up straight as anything and stuck my chin out and said, "He's the best damn dick in town!"

*A great deal was known about Achmed Abdullah — or seemed to be — but even more was shrouded in mystery and doubt. He appeared to be that rare type of writer who first lived his stories, then wrote about them. Yet no one apparently knew his real name, or the real facts of his life and background — and this despite the publication in 1933 of his autobiography,* THE CAT HAD NINE LIVES. *An adventurer and soldier-of-fortune in the great tradition, he wrote from intimate knowledge of all parts of the world — China, India, Tibet, Egypt, Mesopotamia — wherever romance flourishes, according to our occidental minds. And always his tales reveled in intrigue and flashing color.*

*Yet it has always seemed to us that Achmed Abdullah's finest work, and most serious work, were the short stories he wrote about New York's Chinatown. In Pell Street, that transplanted cul-de-sac of the Orient, Captain Abdullah planted a real part of his heart. Different from Thomas Burke's* LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS, *yet belonging to the same genre, they have almost as memorable a quality, and project almost as shocking a conviction of basic truth. Yet the tales of Pell Street and its honorable gentlemen are almost forgotten today . . .*

# THE HONORABLE GENTLEMAN

*by ACHMED ABDULLAH*

YEARS later, when Tsing Yu-ch'ing had "resigned his dignities and ascended the dragon" — which was the priest Yu Ch'ang's happy euphemism for death; when his emaciated body, dressed in twelve white linen garments and enclosed in a red lacquer coffin made air-tight with cement to ward off the "little devils who nag the soul," had been shipped from New York to Canton; there carried in state, with fifty hired mourners in green and scarlet cloaks accompanying the cortège, to the house of his honorable ancestors in the Loo-man-tze Street; and finally buried, together with his carved, inlaid chopsticks, a bowl of rice and dried bits of pork, and a roll of paper money, in a charming and carefully chosen spot where his spirit might find esthetic delight in contemplating running water and a grove of flowery, feathery *loong-yen* trees — years later, the members of the Tsing clan, which prospered from London to San Francisco, from Manila to Singapore, from Pekin to Buenos Aires, subscribed ten

thousand taels gold with which to build a *pailan* — an honorary arch to commemorate the exceeding righteousness of Tsing Yu-ch'ing, the deceased Pell Street newspaper editor.

The *pailan* itself is of plain, dull-finished ivory, without any ornaments, to prove to posterity the dead man's simplicity, honesty, and modesty. But, as you pass through, you see on the western, the lucky, side a carved, chiseled, and fretted teakwood beam, lit up from above by three enormous paper lanterns that are shaped to resemble the pleasant features of the Goddess of Mercy, a rich violet in color, and inscribed each with a different sentence in archaic Mandarin ideographs, extolling the character of Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

The first reads: "*The elements of Tsing Yu-ch'ing's faith had their roots in the eternity of understanding.*"

The second: "*Tsing Yu-ch'ing was just in affirming the permanency and reality of trust.*"

And the third: "*Tsing Yu-ch'ing was a wise man. Through death did he make love eternal.*"

On the teakwood beam itself is carved a quotation from the *Book of the Unknown Philosopher*, and it says that the man who is departing on a sad journey often leaves his heart under the door. But it is worth while remembering that the Chinese ideographs *sin* (heart) and *menn* (door) when placed one above the other and read together make a third word: "melancholy"; which latter, by a peculiar Mongol twist, is considered an equivalent of "eternal love."

And it was of eternal love that Tsing Yu-ch'ing dreamed one day, twenty years earlier, as he walked through the viscous, sluttish reek of Pell Street. Fastidiously, so as not to muddy his socks which showed white and silken above the padded, black velvet slippers, he stepped over a broken pocket flask that was trying to drown its despair in a murky puddle, turned into the Bowery, passed beneath the spider's web of the Elevated that screamed down at him with sneering, strident lungs of steel, and walked up two blocks.

A pawnbroker's place, pinched in north by a ten-story, tubercular giant of a house where tenement flats mingled odorously with unclassified home industries, and south by the eight-sheet posters of a Yiddish vaudeville theatre, was his goal: a squat building, moldy, acrid, red bedaubed, crouching there like a beast of prey; the showcases garish with the cheap, heart-breaking luxuries of the poor, and here and there a bit of fine old Sheffield plate, an ancient mosaic and filigree brooch, a piece of cerulean Bristol glass, or a rose-cut diamond in an old-fashioned, black onyx setting — a passing, tragic tale in each of them. The three balls above the door twinkled ironically in the direction of Mr. Brian Neill's saloon, as if to show the way.

The proprietress, Widow Levinsky, *née* O'Grady, a short, heavy, square-

shouldered, good-looking woman of forty, with straight nose, firm, well-shaped lips, and violet eyes, stood in the open door. She smiled when she saw Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

"I thought ye'd never come," she greeted him.

He bowed courteously, and shook hands.

"The weekly Chinese newspaper which I publish goes to press today," he replied in his beautifully modulated, slightly precious English which he had learned at Harvard. "Few of my countrymen can read the American newspapers. It is therefore my duty ——"

"Yer duty? Say!" Mrs. Levinsky obeyed the suggestion of the word. She spoke with hectic, running ease. "You — and yer duty! It's man's favorite excuse when he don't want to play the game none, see? Look a-here, Tsing, did ye ever stop to think wot's yer duty to my little Minnie — in there?"

She pointed with thumb across shoulder into the shop, and when Tsing looked puzzled, she went on: "Say! All men are just the same, ain't they? Ain't got no thought in yer head 'xcept yerself, have ye? Selfishness! That's man's middle name — though —" she paused — "mebbe it's thoughtlessness more'n selfishness."

"My dear Mrs. Levinsky, I assure you ——"

Tsing had no idea of what he was going to assure the belligerent Irishwoman. Nor did she give him time.

She waved a pudgy and derisive hand.

"Aw!" she cried. "Come off'n yer perch. Don't try and play the little blue-eyed angel all dressed up in white innercence and floppy wings and never a bad thought in yer pumpkin! Ye know what I mean, all right."

"I do not." Tsing Yu-ch'ing stiffened. His Chinese dignity was beginning to bridle.

But it was lost on Mrs. Levinsky.

"If ye don't know it's high time ye learned," she countered. "D'ye ever consider what a goil thinks when a feller calls on her night after night like you been doin' on Minnie, for over two years now — and brings her candy and flowers and talks to her soft and mushy-like — as *you* do?"

A dull, blotchy red was beginning to mantle the Chinese's sallow, ugly features.

"Mrs. Levinsky!" he exclaimed. "I give you my word ——"

"G'wan! Keep yer word! Ye may need it some day! No use denyin' that ye're talkin' tootsie-wootsie to Minnie, young feller! I heard ye myself, many's the time, when ye thought I was asleep. I heard ye tell my daughter ——"

"Nothing that you shouldn't have heard! I told her the little charming fairy stories of my own country," he defended himself.

Mrs. Levinsky sniffed.

"Git out! That don't go down with me none. Fairy stories — God! Minnie ain't a baby in diapers no more. She's sixteen, see? And all the fairy

stories she wants is a feller poppin' the question and doin' the regular thing with a wedding-ring and choich bells and a flat furnished on the instalment plan."

Tsing looked up, a strange light eddying in his narrow-lidded eyes. His breath came staccato, distinct.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that she is —" he slurred and stopped.

"Sure! She's stuck on yer — if that's what yer tryin' to say. How can she help herself, eh? Ye're the only guy wot ever calls on her regular except onct in a while her cousins and them's just roughneck bums and talk of nuthin' 'xcept baseball and gang fights and mebbe a doity story or two. Sure Mike! How can the poor little kid help bein' stuck on ye? You mush all over her — and I told you she's sixteen!"

"I am sorry. Of course you are right. I see that now. I — I didn't mean — to ——"

"Don't ye be sorry, my lad. Just ye go in there and — well — pop the question." She interrupted herself with a jolly, Irish laugh. "Say! Here I'm matchmakin' like a regular — what do my Levinsky in-laws call it? Sure — *schadchen* — marriage broker — that's the woid." She laughed again and added: "I can't say as I admire Minnie's taste none too much. But — well — it's her own funeral."

"You really mean that you won't object to ——"

Tsing Yu-ch'ing made a helpless gesture, quickly understood by the sharp-eyed, intelligent woman.

"Forget it, Tsing!" she said, with something almost like affection in her voice. "Sure ye're yeller and ye're homely even for the likes of you — with that long, thin mutt of your'n, and them beady, woozy eyes, and that mouth that looks more like a cellar door than a place to push food in, and them spidery legs and arms. But —" she smiled — "Minnie's blind, ain't she? *She* don't know the difference!"

"Yes." The Chinese breathed softly. "She is blind. She doesn't know the — ah — difference ——"

"I thought I could make yer see sense. And I'm glad I put it up to yer straight. Yer see —" there was the suspicion of a break in her voice — "Minnie's my only child, and I just know she's crazy about yer. There's more than one goil around here that'll toin up her nose at Minnie, I guess, when she's Mrs. Tsing. But wot the devil? And so I sez: let's fix it straight and regular with a ring and a weddin'-cake. Sure I know wot my mother's family'll say, livin' all proper and swell up in the Bronx! But what do I care? They washed their hands off'n me when I married Jake — and ol' Jake didn't beat me up, as my father beat up my mother. And I guess they'll do the same thing all over again when Minnie marries yer. Well — let 'em! Their hands need washin' ——"

She talked on and on. But Tsing Yu-ch'ing hardly listened to her.

A great pain was in his heart and, too, an all-pervading sense of beauty

and glory and sweetness; and he passed through the shop into the tiny back garden where a few potted plants were making a brave, losing fight against the dust and grime and reek of the Bowery.

Minnie Levinsky was one of those purely and exclusively American miracles by the strength of which, all theories of eugenics to the contrary, two underfed, underbred, atavistically inimical races mix their pitiful seed and produce a perfect human body. Tall she was, and round breasted, but with a delicate, boyish touch in her narrow hips that tapered down to yet narrower ankles and the feet of a Cinderella. Her hair was like golden, curled sunlight, her nose small and straight with nervous, flaring nostrils, her tragic, unseeing eyes were sea-green beneath the audacious hood of black lashes.

There was a sweet curve to her upper lip and a quick lift at the corners as she heard the soft, familiar pad-pad-pad of Tsing's felt-soled slippers.

"Hello, Tsing!" she said, holding out her hand.

"Hello, Plum Blossom!"

That was the name he had given her two years earlier when, just out of Harvard, he had come to Pell Street to share with his countrymen the wisdom the West had taught him. His clan, typically Chinese in their admiration for him, the literatus, the educated gentleman, had backed him with capital for his enterprise, a weekly newspaper which he called the *Eminent Elevation* — with an ironically democratic side-glance, the result of American training, at the Empress-Dowager Tzu Hsi who, within the crenelated battlements of Pekin's Tartar town, was known by the same honorific title. But there was little money in the newspaper, heavy expenses, great risks, and so one day he had entered the pawnbroker's place on the Bowery and had exchanged his gold watch for a small sum; enough to tide him over for a week or two.

Behind the counter he had seen Minnie, then a golden-haired child of fourteen, and blind.

"Plum Blossom," he had called her, in a surging, warm access of pity. "Plum Blossom," he called her now, his pity given way to love.

"I just adore to have you call me Plum Blossom," she said in her soft, careful English, which Miss Edith Rutter, the social settlement investigator, had taught her.

"Do you?" He smiled. "And I adore to call you that and — other names."

He sat down by her side.

"For instance?" she asked, looking up radiantly, expectantly. And when he did not reply, she went on with a little sigh: "Any more stories about your own country?"

"Yes, Plum Blossom."

She sat up straight, eager, interested. For two years, nearly every day, he had called on her, and always had he told her the stories of his own land.

Stories of China! Stories of Asia!

He had woven the warp and woof of them around her with adroit and ardent hands. Nor can it be said that he had woven close to the loom of lies. But his love for her had blended with his love for China. Subtly they had influenced each other; and thus the China which he pictured to her was a charming land of pale yellows and exultant blues; a land that tinkled with tiny silver pagoda bells through the lotus-scented spring breezes; a land that had the mellow patina of ancient wisdom, ancient culture, ancient justice — and intolerance.

He showed it to her through his yearning, poet's eyes, and she — the eyes of her body blind — saw it all through the eyes of her love for him; love that had grown, steadily, day by day.

"I wish I could see China," she would say, "China and the Chinese."

And he would shudder a little and draw his bony hand across his repulsive Mongol devil-mask of a face.

"Yes, Plum Blossom," he would reply. "I wish you could see it."

"Seeing must be wonderful."

"Feeling is even more wonderful. And only the blind can feel — really feel ——"

Then, after Tsing had been silent, dreaming, she said:

"Why don't you go on with your story?"

"Because my heart is too full for words, Plum Blossom. Because I feel both proud and humble in your presence. Because — oh —" he continued, getting more stiffly, archaically Chinese by the minute — "I taste in your company the refined and exquisite happiness that was tasted by Tcheng Tsi, the insignificant disciple, when, with the zither singing under his fingers, he accompanied with his timid harmony the teaching of the great Koung Tzeu. Because, Plum Blossom ——"

"Tsing!"

Suddenly the girl interrupted him, her mother's belligerent Celtic blood breaking through the brooding patience which was her Semite heritage, and just a faint shade of bitterness bubbling amidst her words.

"Tsing! Why don't you tell me straight out that you love me? Is it because I am — blind? Tsing! Why don't you tell me that you love me? Why *don't* you?"

And he did.

He took her in his arms.

With the correct intonation of Harvard, but the slightly fustian, slightly stilted, entirely delicious phraseology of China, he told her that hers was the strength of his body, hers the dreams of his soul, hers the pulsing of his heart and the ambition of his mind. He told her that he would weave his love in a flower chain and tie it gently about her wrist; that he would change his love to a rose-red pearl to hang in her little white ear. Of love he talked, while the houses that pinched in the dusty back garden on all sides looked down like sardonic sentinels, while the roofs flashed hard and sinister under the naked tenuity

of the August sun, while the Pell Street litany brushed in on strident, stained pinions.

She snuggled close against him.

"I love you, dear," she said. "Love — it's wonderful, glorious! And —" her voice splintered and broke — "I wish I could see you. I wish I could understand what seeing means, what beauty means — to the eye! I wish I could see — *you!* For I know that you are beautiful, beautiful, Tsing! I just know it!"

He gave a little start.

Again he drew his bony hand across his repulsive Mongol devil-mask of a face. Again he told her that he loved her; that his love was a strong and eternal thing; that it would last forever, through the days dripping with golden sunlight, the starless nights loud with pattering rain, and beyond.

"Everything shall I give to you," he said, "except sorrow."

It was a proper marriage with the pealing of church bells, an enormous, pink-iced wedding-cake, and a gargantuan banquet at the Great Shanghai Chop Suey Palace; the food furnished free of charge by Mr. Nag Hong Fah, the pouchy proprietor of the restaurant, in honor of the literatus, the educated gentleman who was the bridegroom, so as to gain face for himself, his ancestors, and his descendants with Faoh Poh, the God of Learning, the Jewel of the Law; and the beer and whiskey and green and purple liqueurs for the ladies contributed by Mr. Brian Neill, the saloonkeeper, for the negative reason that, a week earlier, he had had a fist fight with Mr. Sarsfield O'Grady, Mrs. Levinsky's brother, who had come down from the aristocratic Bronx to tell off his sister, but instead had fallen foul of the saloon-keeper over a question of Tammany politics.

Yet, for all the splendor of the wedding, Pell Street and the Bowery whispered and sneered. If the whites objected to the union on racial grounds, because the bridegroom was a Chinese, the yellows objected on physical grounds, because the bride was blind.

"*I lou fou sing* — may the star of good fortune protect you!" piously said Nag Hop Fat, the soothsayer, to Tsing Yu-ch'ing. "But, O wise and older brother, think left and think right. Think much. Remember what is written in the *Kiou-li*: 'The blind rise and depart when the torches are brought in!' "

"Love never departs!" replied Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

Thus the talk, to and fro. Too, though this was restricted to officious and sincere outsiders since Pell Street knew better — and worse — there was the usual babble of opium and Chinese slavery and other resplendently, romantically wicked things; and Miss Rutter, the social settlement investigator, took it upon herself to look into the matter.

Mrs. Levinsky would have boxed her ears, had it not been for the close proximity of Mr. Bill Devoy, Detective of the Second Branch. Instead, she

contented herself with giving the well-meaning amateur sociologist a piece of her mind.

"Getta hell outa here!" she said. "Who asked ye to come here and stick yer ugly snub nose in other people's pots? Well — it ain't my fault if ye don't like the smell, see? Bad luck to ye and the likes o' ye!"

Then, her good nature getting the better of her indignation as she saw the hurt expression on Miss Rutter's ingenuous features:

"Gwan! I didn't mean to hurt yer feelings!"

At which the other took fresh courage and returned to the attack:

"My dear Mrs. Levinsky — I know Tsing is an educated man, and he may be a fine man. But ——"

"He's yeller. Right ye are foist shot out o' the box. But, yeller or pea green or black with white polka dots, he's a real gent — get that? And Minnie's my only child, and I got rheumatiz of the heart, and she'll be all alone, and she's blind — and Tsing 'll take care of her. I trust him — see? And there ain't many — white *or* yeller — that I trust around Pell Street."

Yet, as the days grew into weeks and months, and the young couple kept house in a small flat above the store of Yung Long, the grocer, it was not Mrs. Levinsky's tirade as much as the testimony of her own eyes and ears which convinced Miss Rutter that, for once, there was here a mixed marriage which was bringing happiness and peace to both the yellow and the white.

Detective Bill Devoy put it in a nutshell.

"Sure!" he said. "He's a Chink. But he's white, all right, all right. And Minnie — say — she's just an angel —" and he added, as a profane sop to his sentimentality: "Yep! A damned little angel — that's what she is!"

When, on the first day of each month, the few local members of the Tsing clan residing in New York met at the Pell Street liquor store which belonged to the Chin Sor Company and was known as the Place of Sweet Desire and Heavenly Entertainment, and talked over matters vital to Chinatown with the numerous clan of their distant cousins, the Nags, Tsing Yu-ch'ing's married life, though he himself was usually present, was a topic of never ceasing interest to the company.

It was Nag Hong Fah, the restaurant proprietor, rather than Tsing Yat, the head of the clan of that ilk, who occupied the seat of honor on these occasions. Not because of his stout burgess wealth, but because he was considered an authority on mixed unions since he himself had married a half-caste — one Fanny Mei Hi who, on a mysterious distaff side, was related to Mr. Brian Neill, the saloonkeeper.

Nag Hong Fah would lean well back in his chair, smoke a leisurely pipe of *li-un*, fragrant with the acrid sweetness of India's scarlet poppy fields, look dreamily at the wall which was covered with yellow satin all em-

broidered from ceiling to floor with philosophical sentences scrawled vertically in purple characters, and give of his garnered wisdom.

"Happiness between the black-haired and the red-haired race is possible," he said sententiously, "if a few simple rules be observed. Let the woman open to her husband not only the door of her house, but also the door of her heart. Let the man listen to the woman without answering; let him listen to her advice and —" he said it unsmilingly — "then do the opposite. Let them both unite in producing strong and healthy men children, thus taking of the white woman's feverish substance and gently kneading it into a child of our own strong, placid race."

With calm disapproval he looked at Tsing Yu-ch'ing. For, since everything from drawing teeth to shaving, from birth to burial, is a matter of communal interest to the Chinese, who do not know the meaning of the word privacy and have no objection to the most glaring publicity, it was a scandal in the nostrils of all respectable Pell Street householders that Minnie Tsing, married now nearly three years, had not as yet brought a child into the world and that there seemed no prospect of her doing so.

"Given obedience to these few simple rules, chiefly the last one," Nag Hong Fah resumed, "happiness between the black-haired and the red-haired race is possible;" and he sipped his jasmine-flavored tea noisily from a precious cup of *iao* jade, while Tsing Yu-ch'ing smiled.

"O serene father of many and healthy children!" he replied. "Happiness *is* possible. But my rules differ from yours. I say that happiness demands only one thing: love!"

"Love?" Yu Ch'ang, the priest, picked up the word like a battle gage and tossed it to the crowd. "Love is an infidel act. Love is the mental refuse of the very young and the very old. Love — *'ju lai-che, chi-chu-har-ru-i* — Buddha alone is love and law'! Remember what the book says!"

"The book?" Tsing laughed. "O priest, what you cannot find in the written book, the brook will whisper to you — the brook in the soul of the loved one —" and he pointed through the window at his little snug flat across the street that winked through the malicious, faltering maze of Chinatown with golden eyes.

"Such love," brutally said Tsing Yat, head of his clan, "is the love of the eye. And your honorable wife has no oil in her eyes" — using the Chinese simile for a blind person.

"Indeed!" gravely assented Tsing Yu-ch'ing. "She is blind."

And he added under his breath:

"For which praised be the Goddess of Mercy!"

*"For which praised be the Goddess of Mercy!"*

The prayer was always in his heart; often on his lips when — since Harvard had not touched the roots of his life, his faith, his traditions, and an-

cient racial inhibitions — he entered the joss temple around the corner and burned there Hung Shu incense sticks before the purple-faced image.

"Praised be the Goddess of Mercy!" he mumbled when Minnie, in a sudden wild, choking longing for the unattainable, would wave inarticulate, stammering arms and complain about the hard fate which was hers:

"If I could only see! Only for one minute! If I could see your face! For I know you are beautiful, beautiful — my lover, my sweetheart, my husband! As beautiful as your soul — your heart!"

And she would take his face between her white hands and touch the ugly, flat nose, the thin eyebrows, the broad, narrow-lipped gash of a mouth, the high angular cheek-bones with the sallowish, yellow skin drawn tight across so that it looked like crackly egg-shell porcelain, the ludicrous lantern jaw, the skinny, emaciated neck which supported the repulsive head as a slimy stalk supports an evil, leering jungle flower.

"I know you are beautiful, best beloved in all the world!" she repeated, kissing his lips. "And I want to see your beautiful face — if only for a minute!"

Then fear — nameless fear of the unknown, unknowable — crept into Tsing Yu-ch'ing's heart on silent, unclean feet, and in all Pell Street there were only two who understood him: Tsing Yat, the head of his clan, and Mrs. Levinsky.

The former would listen politely when his young cousin came to him and clothed his brooding fear in clumsy, stuttering words. He would busy himself with his opium lay-out, the tasseled bamboo pipe that had been colored a deep, golden brown by a "thousand and ten thousand smokes," as he put it, the box filled with treacly *chandoo*, the *yen-hok*, and the *yen-shi-gow*, and then reply calmly:

"Do not give wings to trouble. It flies swiftly without them."

Mrs. Levinsky told him the same thing in her slightly more crisp phraseology.

"Forget it," she said. "It'll all come out in the wash. You'll cross that there bridge when ye get to it — and ye never will. Minnie is blind, ain't she? *She'll* never see that ugly mutt of your'n!"

On her very death-bed, a year later, she repeated her advice:

"Cut it out! Don't be a fool!"

And she passed from the mephitic chaos of Pell Street into another world, serene to the last in her faith that Tsing was all right and sure he'd see to it that there wasn't no sorrow would ever come to her little blind "goil" — blessed be the dear Saints!

It was about a year later that Tsing Yu-ch'ing, back from his newspaper office, found Minnie in animated conversation with a visitor, an American, who rose at his entry, slapped him heartily on the back, and hailed him by his old Harvard nickname:

"Well — old Tsingaloo! It's a coon's

age since I've seen you. Five years, I wager."

"Nearly six," smiled Tsing, shaking hands with the other, a tall, dark man with a thin face ending in a projecting, rather predatory chin and a domed forehead furrowed by the abyss of deep-set sparklingly intelligent eyes. "I'm awfully glad you looked me up, Hardwick. How did you find me?"

"Oh — what's the chap's name — countryman of yours who went to Chicago and became consul there ——?"

"You mean Ma Lü-k'un?"

"The same. I ran across him the other day when I ran up to the Windy City to see a patient. We spoke of old times, including your noble self. He gave me your address. And here I am — and here you are! Regular married, tired businessman, aren't you? Completely Americanized, eh? — with mission furniture and a victrola and Axminster rugs and cold tea in the ice chest and —" he laughed — "you know I've always been a tactless brute — a pretty little golden-haired wife!"

Minnie smiled, while Tsing inclined his head.

"I am all you say, old man," he replied. "And what have *you* been doing with yourself since I saw you last, Hardwick?"

"I?" The other heaved a mock dramatic sigh. "*Sic transit!*" he quoted more or less appropriately. "Do you mean to say that Pell Street hasn't heard of me, the little boy wonder of his chosen profession? That you have not heard of Travers Hardwick, the ——"

Suddenly he checked himself. Afterwards he could have sworn that, simultaneously with Minnie's cry, "You are the eye specialist — the famous eye specialist!" he heard a deep, sonorous, "Hush — for God's sake, hush!" issuing from between Tsing's tightly compressed lips. But he was not looking at the latter, could not read the brooding, sinister tragedy in his heart. He only saw the tragedy of Minnie's unseeing, sea-green eyes — a commingling of awe and fear and hope — and then her words, flat, slurring, hectic:

"Doctor — Doctor Hardwick — please!"

And, a second later, Tsing's voice cutting in, even, clear, yet somehow marred and tainted by something unknown, something racially unknown:

"Doctor — will you — oh ——?"

"Of course. Let me see." He consulted a little notebook. "Yes. Come to my office tomorrow at half-past two. Here's my card. I'll make a thorough examination —" and he launched into cold, passionless, professional talk while Minnie looked at him out of her blind eyes as she might at her Saviour.

"Perhaps, dear! Perhaps I shall see — *you!* You — strong and fine and beautiful!" she sobbed in her husband's arms after the doctor had left, caressing his repulsive face with her narrow hands.

"Yes."

Tsing's voice was numb, like the dull stroke of a passing-bell. Then, in-

congruously it seemed, he told her again what he had said to her that time when he had asked her to marry him, five years earlier:

"Everything shall I give to you, except sorrow."

It was twenty-four hours later, and Tsing Yat, head of the Tsing clan, his amorphous form wrapped in baby-blue, embroidered satin, silently and gently pushed the warm bamboo pipe aside and substituted for it one of carved ivory with a burnished jade tip. Leaning his left cheek against the leather cushion, he looked hard at his visitor, Tsing Yu-ch'ing.

"It is said in the Book of Meng Tzeu," he drawled dreamily, "that he who cannot fulfill his charge must resign it."

Having spoken his judgment, he smoked two pipes one after the other. The kindly drug poured a spirit of tolerance into his soul, and he smiled.

"It is not the question of love being right or wrong," he continued, kneading the amber opium cube over the flame. "I, personally, being wise and old and fat believe that love is like wings upon a cat, like rabbits' horns, like ropes made of tortoise hair. You, being young, look for the impossible. You look for flowers in the sky. You put self-exertion above Fate."

"One cannot argue about love," agreed the younger man. "It is or is not. But, love or no love, I am a literatus, a gentleman. I cannot break the faith I have once given, nor the trust. I promised her that I would give everything to her, except sorrow. I cannot lose face, O wise and older brother."

"Indeed." Tsing Yat refilled his pipe. The opium in the lamp boiled over, and the opalescent smoke rolled in heavy clouds over the mats. "You cannot lose face. For, if the precious vase be broken in pieces, shall not the treasure of ancient precepts be lost forever? There are also your honorable ancestors to be considered."

For a while he smoked in silence. Then he asked: "You have thought it out well?"

"Yes," came Tsing Yu-ch'ing's reply, dry and passionless.

"You are sure the foreign doctor speaks the truth?"

"He says that, without doubt, the operation will be successful. He has already arranged for a room in the hospital and a nurse. Inside of a month, perhaps six weeks, she will see. She will see — me!" he added in a curiously lifeless voice.

"And then?" asked the other, replacing the ivory pipe with one of speckled tortoise-shell; and, when his cousin did not reply, he laughed, rather gratingly, and went on: "You think she will see you as you are — and, O little brother, you are not beautiful — and the love of her soul will choke and die in the disgust of her eyes!"

Tsing Yu-ch'ing shrugged his lean shoulders.

"I do not know," he replied. "Perhaps the love of her soul will be stronger than the disgust of her eyes.

Perhaps not. Perhaps — having always thought me beautiful — the honey of five years' happiness and peace and sweetness will turn into bitter, stinking gall when her seeing eyes show her the living lie. I know —" he spread his lean hands like the sticks of a fan to show the futility of his words, the futility of life itself — "nothing — except the immutability of my honorable oath that I shall give to her everything, but sorrow."

"There is also the possibility of your honorably committing suicide," calmly suggested Tsing Yat.

"Of that, too, have I thought. For suicide is *fah-lien* — approved in the law. But if now, before the operation, I through my own hands should ascend the dragon the shock of it might kill her and her last hours would then be hours of sorrow. If I should wait until after the operation, she will see me on my death-bed, perhaps in my coffin while the last rites are being celebrated. And then again, perhaps, seeing me as I am — me, whom she thought beautiful — the honey of the past years will turn into the gall of disgust — of hatred."

Tsing Yat raised himself on his elbow and looked closely at his visitor, his almond eyes, almost hidden beneath the opium-swollen lids, flashing a look that was strangely mocking and strangely pitying.

"You have decided, little brother?" he asked.

"Yes."

Tsing Yu-ch'ing made a great gesture. It was more than a mere moving of hand and arm. It seemed like an incident which cut through the brown, smoke-wreathed stillness like a tragic shadow. Pell Street, America, the white man's law and prejudices and inhibitions, seemed very far away at that moment.

"There is only one way," he continued. "I myself shall carry the burden of sorrow and unhappiness and loneliness through the many years. Without her, my life shall be an empty, meaningless shell. But there is my honorable love, my honorable promise. Too, there is her love for me. I shall make it eternal. I shall kill her — lest her eyes see the living lie of my repulsive face."

"Ah," gently breathed Tsing Yat, kneading the opium cube against his pipe. "Presently I shall rise and speak to Lu Hsi, the hatchetman. He has a poison which leaves no trace. You can give it to your wife tonight, in a cup of hot tea. The white devils will never know."

Then, after a pause:

"Will you smoke?" — courteously indicating the carved ivory *toey* filled with opium.

"Yes," replied Tsing Yu-ch'ing, with equal courtesy.

Outside, the wicked, saturnine lights of Pell Street hiccoughed through the trailing dusk.

"Q"

## *DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"*

*Henry E. Giles's "The Sheriff Went to Cincinnati" is one of the eight "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Fifth Annual Contest. It is what might be called a hillbilly-regional-dialect story, and a good one — with the slow drawl of the hills in every sentence and an earthy authenticity in every word. One of the miracles of this tale is that the author never even tried to write before; but his wife is a writer, and a man can try to build a better mousetrap than his wife, can't he?*

*Henry Giles is in his mid-thirties. He was born and raised on the ridge in Kentucky which bears his family's name — Giles Ridge. There have been Gileses living on that ridge for the past 150 years — ever since the first one came through the Cumberland Gap from Virginia in 1805 to settle on the 610 acres of hills and hollows which were granted to the first American Giles as pay for his services in the Revolutionary War.*

*The Gileses were always farmers, and so is Henry. True, he took time out to spend five years in the Army, two of them with the 291st Combat Engineers in Europe; Henry was handed his honorable discharge on October 10, 1945, and he got married the very next day.*

*Henry guesses that writing is contagious. He has watched his wife "fool around with it so much" that he got a hankering to try it too. The hills of his childhood, the hills of home, are full of yarns, and about all Henry has to do is start remembering; the hill speech is his native tongue — "it drops from his lips as slow and as sweet as molasses."*

*Now Mr. and Mrs. Giles farm a little, hunt a little, fish a little, write a little — and live a lot. That's real living — down-to-earth living. And some mighty good stories can come out of it. . . .*

# THE SHERIFF WENT TO CINCINNATI

*by HENRY E. GILES*

THE old man was tall, bony, and lean as a lath. He folded his legs under my dining table and forked himself a cob of corn. He chiseled a neat row down its side before he spoke. "Right tasty, ma'am," he said, "most wimmin leaves it cook too long." And then to Henry, "Yer woman's a good cook, boy."

If I'd been our dog, Honey, I'd

have wagged my tail. I'm a sucker for compliments from menfolks. Even on my cooking.

Henry and I had just bought a farm down on Persimmon Ridge. Or what passed for a farm. It was forty acres of scrub and brush with a three-room house thrown in for good measure, and we were shoestringing along until our first book hit the market. It was in page-proof before we had the nerve to cut the strings to our jobs in the city and head for the tall timber.

Henry, being always a precise sort of person, couldn't rest until he had the boundaries of our piece of hogback surveyed. So he had gone to the county seat and brought the surveyor back with him. My job consisted of feeding the man, and out of our rackety little garden I had scraped up the last of the sweet corn, a right good mess of pole beans, some tomatoes and squash, and then I had prayed for a light hand with the apple dumplings. On Persimmon Ridge that's a pretty good meal.

I didn't catch the old fellow's name. Henry has a way of mushing his words in his throat and I'm just a little deaf in one ear. So I didn't bother. It didn't matter anyhow. The old man was here to survey the boundaries, and I'd never see him again. I was interested only in seeing that he filled himself up. Which he did.

When he had finished he shoved his chair back and took out an old corncob pipe. "With yore permission, ma'am," he said, in a courtly, old-fashioned manner. I nodded with what I hoped was a queenly gesture. Then I proceeded to roll me a homemade out of Henry's sack of Duke's. We were down to that, waiting on the dratted book!

The old man lit his pipe and held the match for me. Out of the corner of one eye I watched to see if he was going to snicker over my clumsy makeshift. When I build a cigarette it always bulges in the middle. But he kept a straight face, whatever he was thinking. He blew a couple of smoke rings and then pointed his pipe at Henry. "You've got a right nice place here," he said. "Leastways hit will be some day. Hit'll take work, but I allus figgered that when a man works fer hisself he don't mind sweatin'."

Henry sucked on his own pipe and blew a fraternal ring back at the old man. I always like to see a couple of guys get chummy over their pipes. It's as if they belonged to the same lodge and had given the secret password. I've often wished I could join.

The old man went on talking. "This here's good country. Ain't no better nowheres. And they ain't no better folks, neither. You'll make out all right here. Time was, though, when this here ridge was purty mean country. Back in the old days. Hit's right fur back in the hills, and them days the roads wasn't much more'n cow trails. They wasn't much of a way to git in, less'n you was borned in, and they wasn't no better way to git out. They was many a man livin' on this ridge hadn't never been offen it. And hit's a quare thing, but seems like

bein' bottled up like that without no way to let off steam they was a heap more meanness them days. Yessir, this ridge got itself a right bad name oncet. I mind the time . . ." He stopped and drew on his pipe. Then he settled himself lower in his chair.

You could tell a story was brewing. Now, writers are a different breed of people from the average human beings. In a sense, they're not even people. They're sort of walking sponges, going around soaking up everything they see and hear to use in a story. I looked at Henry. His eyes had that squinty look they get when he's on the ball, so I relaxed to enjoy the story. *If* it was worth enjoying. And I thought it would be. I liked the dry way the old man talked, and I'm a fool for this hill dialect. It dropped from the old fellow's lips as slow and as sweet as molasses. . . .

I mind the time (the old man said), forty, forty-five year ago, when the young bucks in these here hills was purty wild. Nowadays come a Satiddy night they kin pile in their cars and go into the county seat and have a right decent time, quiet-like. But them days they couldn't do nothin' but throw a blanket over their old Beck mule and head off down the holler to the old log school and buy 'em a bottle of moonshine. Good roads has shore made a heap of diffrunce.

They was a goodly passel of boys them days. Folks had bigger families, I reckon. But I recollect four, especial. Silas Tucker, Ab Barnes, Sim Parker, and Walt Higgins. They was all purty good friends. All about the same age, all borned and raised right here in the hills, all went to school together, fished and hunted together, and in gineral pranked around together. Wasn't a mean streak in ary one of 'em then, but they was full of life. I reckon you might say they was the ringleaders in most of the mischief done around the county.

Silas, he was a big, black-headed feller, strong as an ox, but not much on looks. Ab was a short, roly-poly feller, allus a-laughin' and jokin'. Best natured feller I ever knowed. Sim, he was sorta quiet-like. Right shy most times. Hit was Walt I reckon you'd call the handsomest one of the lot. Tall, whippy boy with curly yaller hair. Wide-shouldered and slim-hipped he was, and he come clost to bein' right down purty. Reckon he was the most reckless of the lot, too. Leastways hit appeared so, fer in time him and his pa takened to moonshinin' back up their holler.

When they all got through school, Silas and Ab set to work helpin' their folks on the farm. Sim, he went into the county seat and got hisself a job. And like I said, Walt and his pa had 'em a still somewheres back up in the hills. You'll have to understand, they wasn't much law in these parts them days. Everybody on the ridge knowed Enos and Walt had 'em a still hid back in the woods. But they reckoned hit wasn't none of their business. A man could do with his corn what he had a mind to. They never

helt with it, mind, but they wouldn't of dreamt of turnin' 'em in, even if they'd knowed where the still was at. Which they never. Folks didn't hold much with mixin' with the law them days.

Well, Sim bein' in town a-workin', and Walt bein' back up the holler, sorta left Silas and Ab by theirselves. Course Sim, he'd come home of a Satiddy night, and Walt, he'd come down from the holler with his pa, bringin' their week's run to them that wanted to buy, and the four boys'd git together might nigh ever Satiddy night. But they was some diffrunce.

And hit was about that time Silas and Ab started likin' the same girl. Liza Simmons, that was. She was three, four year younger'n them, and hadn't none of the boys paid her no mind when they was growin' up. But when she turned sixteen I reckon she was about the sightliest leetle girl in these here hills. Big, black eyes, long black curls a-flowin' down her back, and a dimple at the corner of her mouth made her look like she was allus jist goin' to laugh. She was a leetle bitty girl, no bigger'n a minnit, but curved like the flanks of old Lo and Behold Mountain. She was a precious treasure. She was that.

Hit seemed like the two boys takened it good-natured, both of 'em likin' her thataway. They'd joke one another about it, threatenin' like, but bein' awful keerful jist the same not to cut in on one another. Silas, he went to see her of a Friday night, and Ab, he went on Sundays. Wouldn't neither go on a Satiddy night, fer that was the night the boys allus got together.

Hit might be if old man Simmons hadn't takened a hand in it, Liza would of made her pick and nothin' wouldn't of happened. But, like I said, Satiddy nights the boys'd git together, the whole shootin' match, Silas and Ab and Sim and Walt and the rest, and they'd whoop it up considerable. Enos and Walt, they made a likker that was dynamite. One swaller was enough to take the linin' outen a man's throat. Gentlemen, I mean to tell you hit was pure lightnin'. Hit plumb bounced when it hit yer stummick! Well, now, you fill young bucks up with that there stuff and hit wasn't to be wondered they'd ride the ridges and hollers a-shootin' and yellin' fit to kill. The boys never meant no meanness, though. They'd jist git a leetle likkered up and have theirselves a good time.

But one Satiddy night they set fire to old man Simmons's haystacks. Liza's pa. Hit'd rained that day and they was jist wet enough to smoulder along. Hit was two, three days before they actual lit up. But they wasn't no puttin' 'em out when they done so. They burnt plumb to the ground.

They ain't no denyin' that was a mean trick. And hit was the first time the boys had ever damaged ary person's property. Hit didn't go so good with folks, and they was a heap of talk about it. And old man Simmons rightfully had his dander up. Hit set him back a right smart.

Hit got rumored around that it was Ab's idee, and Walt Higgins told Sim Parker that he hadn't never liked the idee from the time Ab named it to him. Wasn't nobody could actual prove it was Ab thought of it, but one way or another he got the blame fer it, and hit went a leetle like him, him bein' so high-spirited and good-natured. Anyways, old man Simmons forbid Ab the house, and told him he'd shoot on sight if he ever seen him come around Liza agin.

Course that give Silas the inside track with Liza, and I reckon hit wasn't but human fer him to take it. And I reckon hit wasn't but human fer things to change betwixt him and Ab a leetle. Not overly much in the beginnin'. They was still friends, but seemed like they takened to needlin' one another aright smart, and not so good-natured, neither. But things went along purty much the same.

And then hit seemed like her pa favorin' Silas put Liza in the mind of favorin' Ab. Hit's a risky thing to forbid a woman ary thing. Hit'll turn out nine times outta ten to be jist what she sets her head on, as doubtless you've found out. Well, anyways, Liza started meetin' Ab on the sly. Sly from her pa, that is. Everybody else knowed what was goin' on, includin' Silas. And hit never set well with him atall. Course he still had the inside track, seein' as he could go right up to the house to see her, but I reckon he figgered hit never done him a heap of good if she was goin' to slip out and meet Ab down in the holler. Which she done nigh about ever day.

Silas takened to goin' around scowly and thundery lookin', and him and Ab spoke awful short to one another. When they spoke, that is. Facts is, they never was together no more, except on Satiddy nights with the rest of the boys. And couldn't nobody help noticin' they was bad blood betwixt 'em.

Then come the Satiddy night the boys high-lifed Zeb Barnes' coon hounds. Zeb was Ab's pa, and he had him a pack of coon hounds they wasn't no equal to up and down the ridge. He was real proud of 'em and awful pertickler with 'em. Which he'd ort to of been. But them boys tied that whole endurin' pack together that night and high-lifed 'em. You never heard sich screechin' and hollerin' in yer whole life! Them dogs lit out through Zeb's backyard a-takin' on like they was on fire. Which doubtless they was. They circled the well and tore down the housin'. Then they streaked off to the terbaccer patch a-rollin' and yellin'. I don't have to tell you what nine dogs tied together kin do to a patch of waist-high terbaccer. They might nigh ruint a whole acre! Hit was laid as low as if a mowin' machine had run over it!

Them dogs headed fer the barn then, a-takin' the bob-war fence with 'em. Zeb had left his wagon in the open, and they hightailed it right fer the wagon. They got theirselves and that bob-war tangled up together with the back wheels and started the wagon

rollin' off down the hill, them with it. The whole shootin' match ended up in the creek down in the holler with the wagon busted six ways to thunder and two of the dogs mashed flatter'n a flapjack under it! Man, that was the ungodliest mess I ever hope to see!

Old Zeb, he come out in his long drawers, his old twelve-gauge a-belchin', jist in time to see the wagon headin' fer the holler. He was fit to kill. Stood there in the yard a-shootin' that old twelve-gauge, and dancin' and jumpin' up and down like he had springs in him. Bounced the hatch of them drawers plumb open, and had to quit shootin' long enough to button up! He was real provoked, he was. He allowed he'd have the law on the boys that time. But hadn't nobody seen ary soul, and next day wasn't ary person knowed a thing about it.

Some said Silas had thought up that trick to git even with Ab fer stealin' Liza away from him. But hit didn't hardly go right that Silas would of played sich a mean trick on Ab's pa, him not havin' nothin' to do with Ab takin' Liza away from him. But I reckon Ab believed it, fer after that he never agin spoke one word to Silas, and he takened to goin' around with Walt Higgins and to drinkin' heavier than usual. He wasn't hardly like hisself no more. Jist set around glum and sour and broody. Hardly ever laughed or joked.

(The old man stretched out his long legs and flexed his knees. He knocked out his pipe and refilled it.)

Put together, I reckon hit was two, three months things rocked along without nothin' else happenin'. Then the boys busted loose agin, and this time they done about the durndest thing they ever done. Hit was to paint the outhouses down at the meetin'-house. I allus said they built them outhouses too clost to the church, but wouldn't nobody listen to me.

Well, sir, come that Sunday mornin' and folks started gatherin' fer meetin', and there was them outhouses painted a real bright orange. Jist a plumb punkin yaller, they was. And to make it a heap worse, them boys had painted "pointer" and "setter" in big black letters acrost the front of 'em. Them was the funniest lookin' things ever I seen! There was the meetin'-house, white and clean, and like a pair of big yaller moons a flankin' 'em was them two outhouses! Man alive, if that didn't git up the backs of the sistern and brethern! They was mortified to death! 'Pon my word and honor, you'd a thought they hadn't never takened notice before the way the Lord had made 'em! The wimmin got off to one side and whispered and buzzed around, and the men stood first on one foot and then the other'n a-snickerin' a leetle and tryin' not to. But they wiped the grins offen their faces quick enough when the wimmin got busy, I'll tell you! Nossir! Them wimmin wasn't aimin' to ask the Lord's blessin' on them yaller outhouses. They marched theirselves home, got on their aperns, and made their menfolks git into their

overhalls, and they set to work on them outhouses and had 'em as clean and white as the meetin'-house before they quit. Takened 'em all day, too, fer hit takened a sight of paint to cover up all that bright orange.

(The old man laid his pipe down and took off his glasses. He breathed on them and whipped out a red bandana.)

That's why they never found Ab Barnes 'til late in the afternoon. Wasn't nobody went inside the church atall 'til they was through with them outhouses. And then hit was Ab's own ma stepped inside to set down a spell and found him.

He was lyin' on the back bench, stretched out like he was asleep. But he was cut might nigh to pieces, and he was stiff and cold. Hit was a awful shock to his pore ma, findin' him thataway. She jist give one mighty screech and fainted away, and fer a time folks thought they was goin' to have two corpses on their hands. But she come to, and they takened her home, a-weepin' and a-wailin'. With good cause, too, fer Ab was her oldest, and everbody knows how a mother's heart is allus tied special-like to her oldest.

Right after that they found Silas Tucker's mule tied in the grove back of the church, and they was blood dried on the saddle blanket. Silas never had no chancet when the law made its investigation. Hit come out that the boys had all been down to the holler the night before, same as usual. They said Ab drunk more'n ary one of 'em, and piled up asleep agin a tree. The rest of 'em built 'em up a fire and was a-settin' around playin' cards when somebody had the idee of paintin' the outhouses. Couldn't nobody recollect who it was, but Walt Higgins owned up hit was probably him. Said he'd been drinkin' purty heavy hisself or he wouldn't never of done it. Reckon that question at the inquiry sorta sweated Walt. I recollect he was all broke out with sweat on his forehead. But he owned up to it quick enough. And hit could of been the room was jist so hot. And him with his coat on.

Anyways, whoever had the idee, hit takened holt and the boys started gittin' their mules. Some of 'em went over and tried to rouse Ab, but he wouldn't stir, so they figgered he'd be all right and they jist left him to sleep it off. That was the last ary person seen of him alive.

They all rode along together up the ridge, but at the crossroads Silas left 'em. Said he didn't feel so good and was goin' home. He vowed and declared to the last that's where he went, too. Said he stabled his mule and went right upstairs to bed. But the pore feller couldn't prove it, his folks bein' all asleep, and his mule bein' found in the grove.

Well, the upshot of it was he was convicted and sent to the penitentiary at Frankfort. On account of it bein' circumstantial evidence, the judge let him off the death penalty, but he might as well of give it to him, fer pore Silas died the first year he was

there. Of pneumony, they give out. But folks around here said hit was jist bein' shet up in that place.

(The old fellow stretched and folded his hands back of his head. His voice was very soft now.)

Hit was about six months I reckon before Liza and Walt got married. Walt, he was sick fer a while. Had blood poison in his arm where he ripped it open on a piece of copper. Facts is, he might nigh died, fer he wouldn't see a doctor with it. Well, when he got over it, he come down outta the holler and claimed he was through stillin'. Said he aimed to farm, and him and Liza takened to goin' around together. Like I said, Walt was a handsome boy, and except fer his stillin' wasn't nothin' helt agin him. Folks was willin' to chancet him, but I reckon they never actual expected hit to last.

Him and Liza got married and Walt rented him a leetle farm near the settlement and they set up housekeepin' there. But folks was right, fer in less'n a year he takened Liza back up the holler with him, and him and Enos went to stillin' agin.

That was the year folks was so tetchy around here, what with the Barneses and the Tuckers a-swearin' to shoot on sight. And they was several shots exchanged at that. Everbody takened to packin' a gun, and takin' potshots at shadders in the woods. What with one thing and another, the ridge got itself a purty bad name. But hit wasn't noways true they was feudin' like the Hatfields and the McCoys! Course, it got so a body needn't more'n say he was from Persimmon Ridge fer folks to duck outta sight. Like as if everbody on the ridge packed a gun in the crook of his arm. Which they done, on the ridge. But wouldn't nobody of thought of packin' a gun into the county seat. Out in the open, that is.

But hit's untellin' what might of happened hadn't come election year. Not that the ridge folks helt with havin' ary thing to do with the law. They never. Fer seein' as they felt the way they done, they wasn't ary man would of made his mark to put the Angel of the Lord in office, usual. But things was goin' from bad to worse, and gittin' so's folks was skeered to go to the outhouse even of a daytime. So they went to buzzin' amongst theirselves and decided they'd git 'em a law they could put some faith in.

They picked on Sim Parker. He'd been doin' right good in town, but the main thing was he was one of their own folks. Course, he'd trailed around with the boys, but outside of a leetle mischief he hadn't never been knowed to do no harm, and I reckon on account of he'd been a workin' at the county seat they allowed he was the best suited fer the job. I ain't sayin' how he was elected, but they's a powerful lot of persuasion in the business end of a double-barreled shotgun. Not that there was ary shot fired, mind. Hit wasn't necessary.

Anyways, Sim Parker takened office and went to wearin' the badge. He was

a tall, lean, springy young feller them days. Built like a saplin', he was. He takened it easy the first three, four months. Never showed his hand or talked too much. Jist rode that bay mare of his'n up and down the hills, stoppin' to take the night wherever he lit, bein' pleasant-like with folks. He never ast no questions. He knowed they wasn't no use astin' questions. Folks expected him to do whatever he seen to do without troublin' them none. Had he been a-troublin' them, ever hand on the ridge would of been set agin him, and he knowed it. So he jist ambled around, gittin' the feel of things.

I reckon hit was nigh onto six months after Sim was swore in, before he named his undertakin'. He come plain out then, pint-blank, and says he was gittin' Enos and Walt. Jist in case you never knowed, this county's been dry sincet the year one. Sim, he laid most of the trouble to their moonshine, and allowed he was goin' to put a stop to their stillin' oncet and fer all. That was the way he done it. Jist come plain out and said what he aimed to do. Jist said his say before a bunch of men down at the mill one day, and left out straightway.

Well, sir, the news traveled fast, and the whole ridge and all the hollers jist laid back their ears and waited to see what was goin' to happen. They was more'n a leetle terbaccer laid down on Sim's chances of gittin' Enos and Walt. They was sly as foxes. But I reckon everbody was a hopin' he would. Fer nearly all wanted 'em cleaned out. Folks was tired of havin' these Kentucky hills named as troublesome.

Like I said, they was sly as foxes. Lived way back up Possum Holler, might nigh at the head of the creek. Hit was a reg'lar bottleneck. Wasn't but one way to git up there, and that was to take right up the creek bed and foller it 'til you come to the house. A wagon couldn't noways git near the place. Best way to git in was to ride a-horseback, and hit had best be a sure-footed animal at that. But fer his purposes hit was the best place Enos could of picked. He had a hundred foot clift at his back, and the whole holler a stretchin' out in front of him. Couldn't nobody git up there without him knowin' they was comin'. Walt and Liza lived with the old man, and Liza, she done fer 'em both.

Sim, he tried his hand open, first off. Rode right up the holler on that bay mare of his'n, and tied her to the gate and lit. Enos allus kept three, four dogs that'd set the hills to ringin' when ary person come up. Acted like they was goin' to chaw the ears right offen a feller. But Sim, he never let on he even heared 'em. Jist opened the gate, kicked 'em outen the way, and walked right through 'em. Bein' allus mannerly he stopped at the porch and give his halloo. He had to holler two, three times and then Liza come to the door.

She was thinner'n she used to be, but not much changed elsewise. Same big, black eyes that sparked quicker'n a flash. Same long curly black hair a-

ripplin' down her back. Same dimple in the corner of her mouth, only hit was set sorta rigid-like now. She come to the door, like I said, and when she seen it was Sim she jist stood there. She put her hand up to her throat kinda skeered-like, and Sim seen they was blue marks on the skin. Hit went over him that folks was right, sayin' Walt mistreated her.

"Howdy, Liza," he said, takin' his hat off.

"Howdy, Sim," she says.

"Enos and Walt around?" he ast.

She never said nothin' fer a minnit. Jist stood and eyed him. Then, "They've went to Cincinnati," she said.

Sim looked at her right straight, but he never let on to question her none. Jist give her a good, straight look and put his hat back on. "Thanks," he says, and he went back and crawled on his mare and rode off down the holler.

About a week later he rode back up the holler agin. "Enos at home?" he ast, like before.

And he got the same answer. "They've went to Cincinnati."

I disremember how many times he rode up that there holler, but hit was several. And Enos and Walt had allus went to Cincinnati. Well, ary fool would of knowed they wasn't goin' to Cincinnati that reg'lar, and Sim, he wasn't nobody's fool. He knowed they was around somewheres. Folks wondered why he kept makin' that trip up the holler jist to git the same answer, but he was usin' them trips to scan out the holler fer that still. I reckon he knowed all along he'd have to come up on 'em there. He'd sometimes climb the ridge and come out back of the house on top the clift, but they wasn't no way down from there. He seen Enos oncet, and Walt several times, but much good hit done him. Usual, all he'd see was Liza comin' and goin', doin' up the work.

He searched that holler with a fine-toothed comb. He never left a stone, nor a cove, nor a grove untetched. He knowed fer certain they wasn't no still hid out nowheres in that there holler. Which had him doin' some figgerin'. He takened to settin' up on that there clift, watchin' to see if Enos or Walt'd come in from ary special direction. But they'd come and go down the holler, which didn't help him ary bit. He was gittin' a leetle mite discouraged.

He was settin' up there one day studyin' over the whole thing. He allowed Liza was lyin' fer 'em when she said they'd went to Cincinnati. But hit didn't go right to him that Liza'd lie fer Walt, seein' as hit was said he was so mean to her. Hit didn't appear like she'd do that much fer him. Looked like she'd be glad to git shut of him. Leastways, Sim figgered it thataway. Hit's a piece missin' somewheres, he told hisself, and he got to find the piece.

Hit was gittin' on toward dusky dark and he was jist a thinkin' he'd better be headin' home when a whip-poor-will flew down and lit on a stump clost by. Sim was a lyin' still, so hit

clucked a time or two, then started callin', "Whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will," over and over. Reckon you know how it goes. Sim, he was a watchin' it, and listenin', without payin' much attention, when all of a sudden hit seemed like the bird was a sayin', "Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Cincinnati."

Well, Sim set up straighter'n a ramrod. Cincinnati, he said to hisself. Cincinnati! What if Liza hadn'd been lyin' to him? What if she'd been tryin' to tell him something! But what could she be tryin' to tell him? He knuckled his skull tryin' to think. What would she be tryin' to tell him thataway? Where they was at? At the still, likely. But what did the still have to do with Cincinnati?

He sorta squared around due north, the direction of Cincinnati, like as if jist a-lookin' that way'd help, and then hit come to him. Due north! That's what she was tryin' to tell him. The still was due north from the house! But that was acrost the holler, over on the other ridge! Over towards Lo and Behold! He grabbed his gun and lit out, cussin' hisself fer a fool fer thinkin' like everbody else done that the still was somewheres down Possum Holler!

Hit was moon-up time he made his way down and acrost the holler and started to climb up the Sawtooth ridge. Lo and Behold was straight ahead, and oncet he got his bearin's he headed fer it and helt right onto it. They wasn't no trail, and the goin' was purty rough. Sawtooth's a might rocky old ridge, and hit's sides is well nigh straight up and down. But Sim hadn't coon-hunted that whole country fer nothin'. He knew how to git through.

Lo and Behold sets right in the middle of the ridge, about four mile from Possum Holler. But Sim takened it easy and his wind was still good when he come around the first flank of the mountain. Due north, he kept in his mind all the time, and sir, to make a long story short, he come up on a leetle cabin hid in a woodsy cove jist under the second flank. He come might nigh missin' it at that, fer hit was well hid in a beech grove.

Hit was jist a plain leetle old cabin, about ten by twelve. He could see right good by the moon, so he circled it careful-like. He seen hit never had no winders, and only the one door, which he takened note was padlocked. He wasn't lookin' fer 'em to be there, and when he seen the padlock he wasn't surprised none. But he reasoned this was shorely the still, and they'd be comin' soon or late. He scanned out the lay of the land best he could, and found a leetle spring off in the grove. He bedded down in a pile of leaves in the edge of the trees where he could keep the cabin in sight and set hisself to wait 'em out. Be it one day or ten, he never aimed to leave out of there without Enos and Walt. He knowed in reason they'd be comin'. A couple days went by. He never slept, except in cat-naps.

("Wait a minute," I put in, "what did he eat?" The old man's eyes

twinkled. "Ma'am, he never. Nothin' except some leetle old swiveled up berries. He couldn't risk firin' his gun to kill a squirrel, fer fear they'd be comin' and hear his gun, and even if he'd risked that, he knowed they could smell a cook fire a mile aways. So he jist made out on them leetle old berries. Hit was fortunate they was a spring handy, or he'd of thirsted mightily. He got powerful hungry, I kin tell you that.")

Well, the mornin' of the third day he was to the place he was thinkin' he'd jist have to git him somethin' to eat. He'd jist have to risk firin' his gun at a squirrel. He was jist fixin' to mosey around on yon side the cabin when a sort of weak-like voice called out. "Sim," hit said, "Sim, is that you?"

He whirled around to look down the path. "We're inside," the voice said, and he recognized it as Walt's. "We're inside the cabin, Sim. You've done starved us out. We're comin' out now."

Sim leveled his gun and drawed a bead on the door, bein' skeered of tricks. "Come a-reachin', or a-shootin'," he says. "I've got you covered."

And they come a-reachin'. First, the chain and the padlock fell to the ground, and then the door opened slow-like. Next Enos sidled out with his hands up, and right behind him come Walt. Reckon hit must of been mighty hot in that leetle cabin, fer both men was stripped down to their undershirts.

When they was outside, Sim walked over and searched 'em. When he run his hand down Walt's arm, Walt sorta flinched away. "That old scar still tender, Walt?" Sim said, movin' on to Enos. "Hit must of been right bad when you cut it that time."

"Hit was," Walt said.

Then Sim walked over and eyed that padlock, and he seen why it had fooled him. The real padlock was on the inside. That there door would allus look padlocked from the outside. Ary person wanderin' up would allus think they wasn't nobody there.

"That's a right cute idee," Sim said.

Walt laughed. "Hit's fooled more'n you," he said.

Well, Sim, he takened 'em into the county seat. And when he walked 'em inside, the county attorney's eyes bugged out. "Goddlemighty, Sim," he says, "where you been?"

Sim had a three-day growth of whiskers on his chin, and he was as gant as a razorback. His eyes was red from not sleepin' much, and his clothes was all dirty and mussed up. He looked like a old he-coon, and they wasn't no doubts about it. He let hisself down easy-like in a cheer before his legs give way under him. "I been to Cincinnati," he says, right dry-like. "And I want Walt Higgins fer the murder of Abner Barnes."

(I realized I had been holding my breath, and I blew it out gustily. "Now wait," I said, "now wait a minute! How'd he figure that one out?" The old man's mouth crinkled at the corners and he drooped one

eye at Henry. "Why, ma'am," he said, "hit was easy enough when he begun to put two and two together.")

Well, ma'am, the first thing put Sim to thinkin' was Walt and Liza gittin' married. He couldn't help thinkin' how convenient hit was that Silas and Ab was both outta Walt's way. Hit did look as if everthing had worked out fer him right well. Course, Liza might of picked Walt anyhow, but she hadn't never takened no notice of him 'til Silas and Ab was both gone.

Sim studied and studied on it, and he couldn't fergit Silas a-swearin' to the last that he'd went straight home and to bed. He got to thinkin' about how the boys started feudin', and he remembered hit was Walt had told him Ab thought of firin' old man Simmons' haystacks. That was the start of it, and hit seemed likely to him Walt lay behindst it. And then he remembered Ab had takened up with Walt after Zeb's coon hounds was high-lifed, and Silas was blamed fer that. He thought might be Walt had said somethin' to Ab made him think so. And he recollected hit was Walt's idee to paint the outhouses. And he couldn't noways swear Walt had been along with the crowd the whole time they was paintin' 'em. He ast hisself why couldn't Walt of sneaked off and stole Silas's mule and rode back to the holler, kilt Ab and slung him over the mule and hid him in the church. Hit wouldn't of takened more'n a hour, and with all the millin' around he wouldn't of been missed. Special if he come back and takened back his part.

When he got that fur in his studyin' he'd jist about convinced hisself hit was Walt, and he figgered that rip in Walt's arm hadn't been done by a piece of copper atall. He figgered Ab must of roused up enough to fight a leetle, and give Walt one good slash in the arm before Walt kilt him. He recollected Walt a-wearin' his coat at the inquiry, even though hit was a right warm day fer fall, and how he sweated. He says to hisself, that arm must of been painin' him considerable. And he chose to have blood poison ruther than to have a doctor see it. Sim figgered a doctor would of knowed hit was a knife had slashed him.

He was purty shore when he'd got it studied down to that, but he didn't want to let on. He had plenty of reasons fer takin' Enos and Walt in on a moonshine charge, so he give it out a purpose he was lookin' fer 'em on that account. He knowed Walt wouldn't be too skeered of that, but he'd likely leave the county if he thought Sim suspicioned him otherwise. So that's the way he done it. And when he seen the scar on Walt's arm he knowed he was right, fer hit wasn't noways the kind of scar a jagged piece of copper would of left. And Walt wouldn't of been so flinchy about it. Hit come out jist like Sim figgered when Walt confessed.

There were still some things I didn't understand. "Why did Liza

try to tell him where the still was?" I asked. "Did she suspect Walt of the murder?"

The old man shook his head. "No, ma'am, she never. But Walt had been mistreatin' her, and he'd gone back to stillin' after promisin' her he wouldn't. So that she'd come to hate him might nigh. She figgered they was only one way out fer her, and that was fer Walt to be took in." He rubbed his stomach contentedly.

"Then why didn't she come right out and tell Sim? Why be so mysterious about it?"

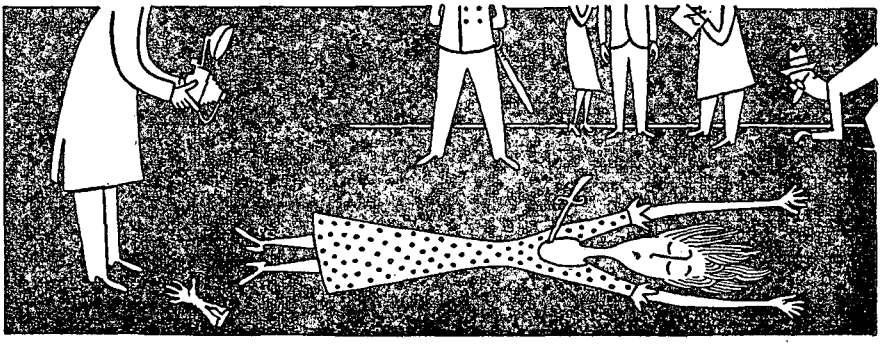
"Because they was one or the other of 'em right there in the house ever time he come. Hit wasn't 'til he quit comin' and takened to watchin' from the clift, which they never knowed, that they both left the house at oncet. They had give her orders allus to say they was away somewheres, if ary person come to the house. They never paid no heed to where she said they was at. And hit was jist her smartness made her think of Cincinnati bein' due north."

"And Sim Parker's smartness for figuring it out!"

"Well, I reckon you could give him credit fer that." And the old man unfolded his long legs and eased his spare frame up out of the chair. "We'd best be gittin' back to that tripod and tape, boy," he said. "Ma'am, that dinner was sure mighty fine."

"But wait," I said, "you've not finished yet! And could we use this in a story of our own?"

He clapped his battered old felt over his bald spot and chuckled. "Why, use it and welcome, ma'am. As fer the end of the story, whyn't you and the boy here come into town and take the day with me and the missis some Sunday? Jist ast ary person you happen to see on the square where Sim Parker lives and they kin tell you the way. Liza, she'd be mighty-proud to have you, too, I'll be bound."



# PAINLESS

*by MACKINLAY KANTOR*

THE last that Dr. William Wall had heard over the radio, the Gila Monster was reported in the town of Brewster, nearly three hundred miles away.

Yet here he was in Sun City. And it was four o'clock of a hot, desert afternoon, and old Dr. Wall was alone in his dental office when the man appeared. He had come in quietly and he had a gun pointed at Dr. Wall's middle.

"Listen," said Luis Gila; "I guess you know who I am."

"Yes," whispered old Dr. Wall.

"O. K.," said the Gila Monster. "You heard about what happened to that other dentist at the pen?"

William Wall nodded. He had heard, in the press and on the air. He remembered — probably everyone in nearby states knew — how the Gila Monster had torn himself out of the penitentiary at Las Montanas. Luis Gila was in the infirmary, and he waited until the prison dentist had put his gutta-percha into those tooth cavities. Then the hidden automatic had come into play . . . two men dead in the infirmary. The warden's niece carried outside as a shield, and left dangerously wounded beside the road a few miles away. And then — Cartago. Dr. Wall didn't like to think of Cartago.

"What," asked the dentist, "do you want me to do?"

"I got hell on both sides," said the Gila Monster. "That soft filling never stayed in. I guess maybe the holes was too big. Don't you try no tricks. I've been in a lot of dentists' chairs, and I know what you got to do. You fill these teeth, but first you give me a couple of shots with the needle. Don't try to give me no Mickey Finns. If I feel myself slipping, I'll let you have this whole clip right where it will do the most good. Just take it easy."

Luis Gila put his head back against the padded rest; his eyes remained open, unblinking, unwavering.

The dentist withdrew the mirror. "Four cavities," he said. He was surprised to learn how calm his voice sounded.

Gila winced and snarled when the needle went in — upper right, then lower left. Soon he reported a heaviness in his jaw and a prickling of his tongue.

The old dentist cleaned all four cavities with his drill, going deeper and deeper, working as fast as he might, driven by the pressure of the automatic pistol. All the time, he was thinking of Cartago. Cartago was a little town, and the Gila Monster had gone through there on Tuesday. The Gila Monster was speeding to

avoid pursuers, and in that town there were little boys and girls playing in the road. Well, two of them would never play again; and if the others played, they would have to play a sedentary game, one of those games that crippled children play pathetically forever.

At last Dr. Wall packed amalgam fillings into the Gila Monster's four cavities and made the surfaces smooth.

"Rinse out your mouth," said Dr. Wall. "I'm through now. You can go."

At seven o'clock the dentist's wife, alarmed because Dr. Wall had not appeared for supper, routed young Dr. Johnson from his apartment down the hall, and Dr. Johnson called a policeman and citizens from the street below. They caved in the office door, and plucked the gag out of the old dentist's mouth, untied him, and gave him a drink of his own whisky.

When Dr. Wall told them the identity of his afternoon's patient they were disbelieving.

"But he's dead, Doc. He's dead, out by Big Fork, a good fifty miles south of here. We just got it on the telephone."

"Yes," whispered Dr. Wall. "I killed him."

They expostulated, quite unable to understand. "He killed himself, Doc! People saw him walking up and down the road beside his car, acting crazy. He tried to shoot at the state police when they came up; but he couldn't hit a thing. Then he shot himself through the head."

Dr. Wall nodded. "I killed him. I kept thinking of Cartago. I was afraid there might be more children, somewhere else, playing in the road."

"Good heavens!" exploded young Dr. Johnson. "What did you do?"

"Four fillings," said old William Wall, "under anesthesia. By the time the anesthesia wore off, I knew he would be alone out there on the desert, and no dentist — no one within reach. Nothing he could do. I put mercury and silver into the horns of the pulp — deep into the pulp chamber in every case. Four nerves — and there was the mercury and silver packed against them. I kind of thought — when the pain finally hit him, I thought that probably he'd —"

Young Dr. Johnson wiped his forehead. "Yes," he said, "I guess you *did* kill him."

*Lord Dunsany's "Two Bottles of Relish" is the fourteenth story of* THE GOLDEN TWENTY *— the twenty best detective-crime short stories, by twenty different authors, as selected by a special panel of critics, connoisseurs, and constant readers. In your Editors' opinion, "Two Bottles of Relish" is one of the twelve best detective stories ever written.*

*We first came upon Lord Dunsany's masterpiece in an obscure English anthology called* POWERS OF DARKNESS: A COLLECTION OF UNEASY TALES, *published in 1934. We still have the comment we wrote on the flyleaf of that small green book: "the finest example of a pure-detective-*horror *short story we know — a classic." We next came across the story in the February 1936 issue of "Story" magazine, edited by Whit Burnett and Martha Foley. Whit Burnett once wrote: "I have always sought the socially meaningful in fiction, but I must say that whenever a story came to me like 'Two Bottles of Relish,' I dropped everything else until I had enjoyed it. I don't think I am crazy either."*

*Then we ourselves included the story in* 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT, *published in 1941 to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the detective story. This was the first book-appearance of "Two Bottles of Relish" in the United States. At that time — ten years ago — we warned the reader: "Read this only when someone is in the house with you."*

*In 1943 it became the title-story in an anthology edited by Whit Burnett, and of it Mr. Burnett said: ". . . but here, curiously enough, is a more realistic Lord Dunsany than we have known in the past. Here is no fairy princess in a mythical realm, but a good substantial story told in a straight, broad Londonese about a . . . shocking London happening."*

*We can only repeat, as a friendly warning: Don't be alone when you read Lord Dunsany's contribution to the* crème du crime . . .

# TWO BOTTLES OF RELISH

*by LORD DUNSANY*

SMITHERS is my name. I'm what you might call a small man and in a small way of business. I travel for Num-numo, a relish for meats and savories — the world-famous relish, I ought to say. It's really quite good, no deleterious acids in it, and does not affect the heart; so it is quite easy to push. I wouldn't have got the job if it weren't. But I hope some day

to get something that's harder to push, as of course the harder they are to push, the better the pay. At present I can just make my way; with nothing at all over; but then I live in a very expensive flat. It happened like this, and that brings me to my story. And it isn't the story you'd expect from a small man like me, yet there's nobody else to tell it. Those that know anything of it besides me are all for hushing it up.

Well, I was looking for a room to live in in London when first I got my job. It had to be in London, to be central; and I went to a block of buildings, very gloomy they looked, and saw the man that ran them and asked him for what I wanted. Flats they called them; just a bedroom and a sort of a cupboard. Well, he was showing a man round at the time who was a gent, in fact more than that, so he didn't take much notice of me — the man that ran all those flats didn't, I mean. So I just ran behind for a bit, seeing all sorts of rooms and waiting till I could be shown my class of thing. We came to a very nice flat, a sitting room, bedroom, and bathroom, and a sort of little place that they called a hall. And that's how I came to know Mr. Linley. He was the bloke that was being shown round.

"Bit expensive," he said.

And the man that ran the flats turned away to the window and picked his teeth. It's funny how much you can show by a thing like that. What he meant to say was that he had hundreds of flats like it, and thousands of people looking for them, and he didn't care who had them or whether they all went on looking. There was no mistaking him, somehow. And yet he never said a word, only looked away out of the window and picked his teeth. And I ventured to speak to Mr. Linley then; and I said, "How about it, sir, if I paid half, and shared it? I wouldn't be in the way, and I'm out all day, and whatever you said would go, and really I wouldn't be no more in your way than a cat."

You may be surprised at my doing it; and you'll be much more surprised at him accepting it — at least, you would if you knew me, just a small man in a small way of business. And yet I could see at once that he was taking to me more than he was taking to the man at the window.

"But there's only one bedroom," he said.

"I could make up my bed easy in that little room there," I said.

"The Hall," said the man, looking round from the window, without taking his toothpick out.

"And I'd have the bed out of the way and hid in the cupboard by any hour you like," I said.

He looked thoughtful, and the other man looked out over London; and in the end, do you know, he accepted.

"Friend of yours?" said the flat man.

"Yes," answered Mr. Linley.

It was really very nice of him.

I'll tell you why I did it. Able to

afford it? Of course not. But I heard him tell the flat man that he had just come down from Oxford and wanted to live for a few months in London. It turned out he wanted just to be comfortable and do nothing for a bit while he looked things over and chose a job, or probably just as long as he could afford it. Well, I said to myself, what's the Oxford manner worth in business, especially a business like mine? Why, simply everything you've got. If I picked up only a quarter of it from this Mr. Linley I'd be able to double my sales, and that would soon mean I'd be given something a lot harder to push, with perhaps treble the pay. Worth it every time. And you can make a quarter of an education go twice as far again, if you're careful with it. I mean you don't have to quote the whole of the *Inferno* to show that you've read Milton; half a line may do it.

Well, about that story I have to tell. And you mightn't think that a little man like me could make you shudder. Well, I soon forgot about the Oxford manner when we settled down in our flat. I forgot it in the sheer wonder of the man himself. He had a mind like an acrobat's body, like a bird's body. It didn't want education. You didn't notice whether he was educated or not. Ideas were always leaping up in him, things you'd never have thought of. And not only that, but if any ideas were about, he'd sort of catch them. Time and again I've found him knowing just what I was going to say. Not thought reading, but what they call intuition. I used to try to learn a bit about chess, just to take my thoughts off Num-numo in the evening, when I'd done with it. But problems I never could do. Yet he'd come along and glance at my problem and say, "You probably move that piece first," and I'd say, "But where?" and he'd say, "Oh, one of those three squares." And I'd say, "But it will be taken on all of them." And the piece a queen all the time, mind you. And he'd say, "Yes, it's doing no good there: you're probably meant to lose it."

And, do you know, he'd be right.

You see, he'd been following out what the other man had been thinking. That's what he'd been doing.

Well, one day there was that ghastly murder at Unge. I don't know if you remember it. But Steeger had gone down to live with a girl in a bungalow on the North Downs, and that was the first we had heard of him.

The girl had £200, and he got every penny of it, and she utterly disappeared. And Scotland Yard couldn't find her.

Well, I'd happened to read that Steeger had bought two bottles of Num-numo; for the Otherthorpe police had found out everything about him, except what he did with the girl; and that of course attracted my attention, or I should have never thought again about the case or said a word of it to Linley. Num-numo was always on my mind, as I always spent every day pushing it, and that

kept me from forgetting the other thing. And so one day I said to Linley, "I wonder with all that knack you have for seeing through a chess problem, and thinking of one thing and another, that you don't have a go at that Otherthorpe mystery. It's a problem as much as chess," I said.

"There's not the mystery in ten murders that there is in one game of chess," he answered.

"It's beaten Scotland Yard," I said.

"Has it?" he asked.

"Knocked them endwise," I said.

"It shouldn't have done that," he said. And almost immediately after he said, "What are the facts?"

We were both sitting at supper, and I told him the facts, as I had them straight from the papers. She was a pretty blonde, she was small, she was called Nancy Elth, she had £200, they lived at the bungalow for five days. After that he stayed there for another fortnight, but nobody ever saw her alive again. Steeger said she had gone to South America, but later said he had never said South America, but South Africa. None of her money remained in the bank where she had kept it, and Steeger was shown to have come by at least £150 just at that time. Then Steeger turned out to be a vegetarian, getting all his food from the greengrocer, and that made the constable in the village of Unge suspicious of him, for a vegetarian was something new to the constable. He watched Steeger after that, and it's well he did, for there was nothing that Scotland Yard asked him that he couldn't tell them about him, except of course the one thing. And he told the police at Otherthorpe five or six miles away, and they came and took a hand at it too. They were able to say for one thing that he never went outside the bungalow and its tidy garden ever since she disappeared. You see, the more they watched him the more suspicious they got, as you naturally do if you're watching a man; so that very soon they were watching every move he made, but if it hadn't been for his being a vegetarian they'd never have started to suspect him, and there wouldn't have been enough evidence even for Linley. Not that they found out anything much against him, except that £150 dropping in from nowhere, and it was Scotland Yard that found that, not the police of Otherthorpe. No, what the constable of Unge found out was about the larch trees, and that beat Scotland Yard utterly, and beat Linley up to the very last, and of course it beat me.

There were ten larch trees in the bit of a garden, and he'd made some sort of an arrangement with the landlord, Steeger had, before he took the bungalow, by which he could do what he liked with the larch trees. And then from about the time that little Nancy Elth must have died he cut every one of them down. Three times a day he went at it for nearly a week, and when they were all down he cut them all up into logs no more than two feet long and laid them all in neat heaps. You never saw such work. And

what for? To give an excuse for the axe was one theory. But the excuse was bigger than the axe; it took him a fortnight, hard work every day. And he could have killed a little thing like Nancy Elth without an axe, and cut her up too. Another theory was that he wanted firewood, to make away with the body. But he never used it. He left it all standing there in those neat stacks. It fairly beat everybody.

Well, those are the facts I told Linley. Oh, yes, and he bought a big butcher's knife. Funny thing, they all do. And yet it isn't so funny after all; if you've got to cut a woman up, you've got to cut her up; and you can't do that without a knife. Then, there were some negative facts. He hadn't burned her. Only had a fire in the small stove now and then, and only used it for cooking. They got on to that pretty smartly, the Unge constable did, and the men that were lending him a hand from Otherthorpe. There were some little woody places lying round, shaws they call them in that part of the country, the country people do, and they could climb a tree handy and unobserved and get a sniff at the smoke in almost any direction it might be blowing. They did that now and then, and there was no smell of flesh burning, just ordinary cooking. Pretty smart of the Otherthorpe police that was, though of course it didn't help to hang Steeger. Then later on the Scotland Yard men went down and got another fact—negative, but narrowing things down all the while. And that was that the chalk under the bungalow and under the little garden had none of it been disturbed. And he'd never been outside it since Nancy disappeared. Oh, yes, and he had a big file besides the knife. But there was no sign of any ground bones found on the file, or any blood on the knife. He'd washed them of course. I told all that to Linley.

Now I ought to warn you before I go any further. I am a small man myself and you probably don't expect anything horrible from me. But I ought to warn you this man was a murderer, or at any rate somebody was; the woman had been made away with, a nice pretty little girl too, and the man that had done that wasn't necessarily going to stop at things you might think he'd stop at. With the mind to do a thing like that, and with the long thin shadow of the rope to drive him further, you can't say what he'll stop at. Murder tales seem nice things sometimes for a lady to sit and read all by herself by the fire. But murder isn't a nice thing, and when a murderer's desperate and trying to hide his tracks he isn't even as nice as he was before. I'll ask you to bear that in mind. Well, I've warned you.

So I says to Linley, "And what do you make of it?"

"Drains?" said Linley.

"No," I says, "you're wrong there. Scotland Yard has been into that. And the Otherthorpe people before them. They've had a look in the drains, such as they are, a little thing

running into a cesspool beyond the garden; and nothing has gone down it — nothing that oughtn't to have, I mean."

He made one or two other suggestions, but Scotland Yard had been before him in every case. That's really the crab of my story, if you'll excuse the expression. You want a man who sets out to be a detective to take his magnifying glass and go down to the spot; to go to the spot before everything; and then to measure the footmarks and pick up the clues and find the knife that the police have overlooked. But Linley never even went near the place, and he hadn't got a magnifying glass, not as I ever saw, and Scotland Yard were before him every time.

In fact, they had more clues than anybody could make head or tail of. Every kind of clue to show that he'd murdered the poor little girl; every kind of clue to show that he hadn't disposed of the body; and yet the body wasn't there. It wasn't in South America either, and not much more likely in South Africa. And all the time, mind you, that enormous bunch of chopped larchwood, a clue that was staring everyone in the face and leading nowhere. No, we didn't seem to want any more clues, and Linley never went near the place. The trouble was to deal with the clues we'd got. I was completely mystified; so was Scotland Yard; and Linley seemed to be getting no forwarder; and all the while the mystery was hanging on me. I mean if it were not for the trifle I'd chanced to remember; and if it were not for one chance word I said to Linley, that mystery would have gone the way of all the other mysteries that men have made nothing of, a darkness, a little patch of night in history.

Well, the fact was Linley didn't take much interest in it at first, but I was so absolutely sure that he could do it that I kept him to the idea. "You can do chess problems," I said.

"That's ten times harder," he said.

"Then why don't you do this?" I said.

"Then go and take a look at the board for me," said Linley.

That was his way of talking. We'd been a fortnight together, and I knew it by now. He meant to go down to the bungalow at Unge. I know you'll say why didn't he go himself; but the plain truth of it is that if he'd been tearing about the countryside he'd never have been thinking, whereas sitting there in his chair by the fire in our flat there was no limit to the ground he could cover, if you follow my meaning. So down I went by train next day, and got out at Unge station. And there were the North Downs rising up before me, somehow like music.

"It's up there, isn't it?" I said to the porter.

"That's right," he said. "Up there by the lane; and mind to turn to your right when you get to the old yew tree, a very big tree, you can't mistake it; and then . . ." and he told me the way so that I couldn't go wrong. I found them all like that, very nice and helpful. You see, it was Unge's

day at last. Everyone had heard of Unge now; you could have got a letter there any time just then without putting the county or post town; and this was what Unge had to show. I daresay if you tried to find Unge now . . . well, anyway, they were making hay while the sun shone.

Well, there the hill was, going up into sunlight, going up like a song. You don't want to hear about the spring, and all the may rioting, and the color that came down over everything later on in the day, and all those birds; but I thought, "What a nice place to bring a girl to." And then when I thought that he'd killed her there, well I'm only a small man, as I said, but when I thought of her on that hill with all the birds singing, I said to myself, "Wouldn't it be odd if it turned out to be me after all that got that man killed, if he did murder her." So I soon found my way up to the bungalow and began prying about, looking over the hedge into the garden. And I didn't find much, and I found nothing at all that the police hadn't found already, but there were those heaps of larch logs staring me in the face and looking queer.

I did a lot of thinking, leaning against the hedge, breathing the smell of the may, and looking over the top of it at the larch logs, and the neat little bungalow the other side of the garden. Lots of theories I thought of, till I came to the best thought of all; and that was that if I left the thinking to Linley, with his Oxford-and-Cambridge education, and only brought him the facts, as he had told me, I should be doing more good in my way than if I tried to do any big thinking. I forgot to tell you that I had gone to Scotland Yard in the morning. Well, there wasn't really much to tell. What they asked me was what I wanted. And, not having an answer exactly ready, I didn't find out very much from them. But it was quite different at Unge; everyone was most obliging; it was their day there, as I said. The constable let me go indoors, so long as I didn't touch anything, and he gave me a look at the garden from the inside. And I saw the stumps of the ten larch trees, and I noticed one thing that Linley said was very observant of me, not that it turned out to be any use, but anyway I was doing my best: I noticed that the stumps had been all chopped anyhow. And from that I thought that the man that did it didn't know much about chopping. The constable said that was a deduction. So then I said that the axe was blunt when he used it; and that certainly made the constable think, though he didn't actually say I was right this time.

Did I tell you that Steeger never went outdoors, except to the little garden to chop wood, ever since Nancy disappeared? I think I did. Well, it was perfectly true. They'd watched him night and day, one or another of them, and the Unge constable told me that himself. That limited things a good deal. The only thing I didn't like about it was that I

felt Linley ought to have found all that out instead of ordinary policemen, and I felt that he could have too. There'd have been romance in a story like that. And they'd never have done it if the news hadn't gone round that the man was a vegetarian and only dealt at the greengrocer's. Likely as not even that was only started out of pique by the butcher. It's queer what little things may trip a man up. Best to keep straight is my motto. But perhaps I'm straying a bit away from my story. I should like to do that forever — forget that it ever was; but I can't.

Well, I picked up all sorts of information; clues I suppose I should call it in a story like this, though they none of them seemed to lead anywhere. For instance, I found out everything he ever bought at the village. I could even tell you the kind of salt he bought, quite plain with no phosphates in it, that they sometimes put in to make it tidy. And then he got ice from the fishmonger's, and plenty of vegetables, as I said, from the greengrocer, Mergin & Sons. And I had a bit of talk over it all with the constable. Slugger he said his name was. I wondered why he hadn't come in and searched the place as soon as the girl was missing. "Well, you can't do that," he said. "And besides, we didn't suspect at once, not about the girl, that is. We only suspected there was something wrong about him on account of him being a vegetarian. He stayed a good fortnight after the last that was seen of her. And then we slipped in like a knife. But, you see, no one had been inquiring about her, there was no warrant out."

"And what did you find?" I asked Slugger, "when you went in?"

"Just a big file," he said, "and the knife and the axe that he must have got to chop her up with."

"But he got the axe to chop trees with," I said.

"Well, yes," he said, but rather grudgingly.

"And what did he chop them for?" I asked.

"Well, of course, my superiors has theories about that," he said, "that they mightn't tell to everybody."

You see, it was those logs that were beating them.

"But did he cut her up at all?" I asked.

"Well, he said that she was going to South America," he answered. Which was really very fair-minded of him.

I don't remember now much else that he told me. Steeger left the plates and dishes all washed up and very neat, he said.

Well, I brought all this back to Linley, going up by the train that started just about sunset. I'd like to tell you about the late spring evening, so calm over that grim bungalow, closing in with a glory all round it as though it were blessing it; but you'll want to hear of the murder. Well, I told Linley everything, though much of it didn't seem to me to be worth the telling. The trouble was that the moment I began to leave anything out,

he'd know it, and make me drag it in. "You can't tell what may be vital," he'd say. "A tin tack swept away by a housemaid might hang a man."

All very well, but be consistent, even if you are educated at Eton and Harrow, and whenever I mentioned Num-numo, which after all was the beginning of the whole story, because he wouldn't have heard of it if it hadn't been for me, and my noticing that Steeger had bought two bottles of it, why then he said that things like that were trivial and we should keep to the main issues. I naturally talked a bit about Num-numo, because only that day I had pushed close on fifty bottles of it in Unge. A murder certainly stimulates people's minds, and Steeger's two bottles gave me an opportunity that only a fool could have failed to make something of. But of course all that was nothing at all to Linley.

You can't see a man's thoughts, and you can't look into his mind, so that all the most exciting things in the world can never be told of. But what I think happened all that evening with Linley, while I talked to him before supper, and all through supper, and sitting smoking afterwards in front of our fire, was that his thoughts were stuck at a barrier there was no getting over. And the barrier wasn't the difficulty of finding ways and means by which Steeger might have made away with the body, but the impossibility of finding why he chopped those masses of wood every day for a fortnight, and paid, as I'd just found out, £25 to his landlord to be allowed to do it. That's what was beating Linley. As for the ways by which Steeger might have hidden the body, it seemed to me that every way was blocked by the police. If you said he buried it, they said the chalk was undisturbed; if you said he carried it away, they said he never left the place; if you said he burned it, they said no smell of burning was ever noticed when the smoke blew low, and when it didn't they climbed trees after it. I'd taken to Linley wonderfully, and I didn't have to be educated to see there was something big in a mind like his, and I thought that he could have done it. When I saw the police getting in before him like that, and no way that I could see of getting past them, I felt real sorry.

Did anyone come to the house, he asked me once or twice. Did anyone take anything away from it? But we couldn't account for it that way. Then perhaps I made some suggestion that was no good, or perhaps I started talking of Num-numo again, and he interrupted me rather sharply.

"But what would you do, Smithers?" he said. "What would you do yourself?"

"If I'd murdered poor Nancy Elth?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"I can't ever imagine doing such a thing," I told him.

He sighed at that, as though it were something against me.

"I suppose I should never be a detective," I said. He just shook his head.

Then he looked broodingly into the fire for what seemed an hour. And then he shook his head again. We both went to bed after that.

I shall remember the next day all my life. I was till evening, as usual, pushing Num-numo. And we sat down to supper about nine. You couldn't get things cooked at those flats, so of course we had it cold. And Linley began with a salad. I can see it now, every bit of it. Well, I was still a bit full of what I'd done in Unge, pushing Num-numo. Only a fool, I know, would have been unable to push it there; but still, I *had* pushed it; and about fifty bottles, forty-eight to be exact, are something in a small village, whatever the circumstances. So I was talking about it a bit; and then all of a sudden I realized that Num-numo was nothing to Linley, and I pulled myself up with a jerk. It was really very kind of him; do you know what he did? He must have known at once why I stopped talking, and he just stretched out a hand and said, "Would you give me a little of your Num-numo for my salad?"

I was so touched I nearly gave it to him. But of course you don't take Num-numo with salad. Only for meats and savories. That's on the bottle.

So I just said to him, "Only for meats and savories." Though I don't know what savories are. Never had any.

I never saw a man's face go like that before.

He seemed still for a whole minute. And nothing speaking about him but that expression. Like a man that's seen a ghost, one is tempted to write. But it wasn't really at all. I'll tell you what he looked like. Like a man that's seen something that no one has ever looked at before, something he thought couldn't be.

And then he said in a voice that was all quite changed, more low and gentle and quiet it seemed, "No good for vegetables, eh?"

"Not a bit," I said.

And at that he gave a kind of sob in his throat. I hadn't thought he could feel things like that. Of course I didn't know what it was all about; but, whatever it was, I thought all that sort of thing would have been knocked out of him at Eton and Harrow, an educated man like that. There were no tears in his eyes, but he was feeling something horribly.

And then he began to speak with big spaces between his words, saying, "A man might make a mistake perhaps, and use Num-numo with vegetables."

"Not twice," I said. What else could I say?

And he repeated that after me as though I had told of the end of the world, and adding an awful emphasis to my words, till they seemed all clammy with some frightful significance, and shaking his head as he said it. Then he was quite silent.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Smithers," he said.

"Yes," I said.

"Smithers," said he.

And I said, "Well?"

"Look here, Smithers," he said, "you must phone down to the grocer at Unge and find this out from him."

"Yes?" I said.

"Whether Steeger bought those two bottles, as I expect he did, on the same day, and not a few days apart. He couldn't have done that."

I waited to see if any more was coming, and then I ran out and did what I was told. It took me some time, being after nine o'clock, and only then with the help of the police. About six days apart, they said; and so I came back and told Linley. He looked up at me so hopefully when I came in, but I saw that it was the wrong answer by his eyes.

You can't take things to heart like that without being ill, and when he didn't speak I said, "What you want is a good brandy, and go to bed early."

And he said, "No. I must see someone from Scotland Yard. Phone round to them. Say here at once."

But I said, "I can't get an inspector from Scotland Yard to call on us at this hour."

His eyes were all lit up.

"Then tell them," he said, "they'll never find Nancy Elth. Tell one of them to come here, and I'll tell him why." And he added, I think only for me, "They must watch Steeger, till one day they get him over something else."

And, do you know, he came. Inspector Ulton; he came himself.

While we were waiting I tried to talk to Linley. Partly curiosity, I admit. But I didn't want to leave him to those thoughts of his, brooding away by the fire. I tried to ask him what it was all about. But he wouldn't tell me. "Murder is horrible," is all he would say. "And as a man covers his tracks up it only gets worse."

He wouldn't tell me. "There are tales," he said, "that one never wants to hear."

That's true enough. I wish I'd never heard this one. I never did actually. But I guessed it from Linley's last words to Inspector Ulton, the only ones that I overheard. And perhaps this is the point at which to stop reading my story, so that you don't guess it too; even if you think you want murder stories. For don't you rather want a murder story with a bit of a romantic twist, and not a story about real foul murder? Well, just as you like.

In came Inspector Ulton, and Linley shook hands in silence, and pointed the way to his bedroom; and they went in there and talked in low voices, and I never heard a word.

A fairly hearty-looking man was the inspector when they went into that room.

They walked through our sitting room in silence when they came out, and together they went into the hall, and there I heard the only words they said to each other. It was the inspector that first broke that silence.

"But why," he said, "did he cut down the trees?"

"Solely," said Linley, "in order to get an appetite."

*Have we told you much in the way of personal details about Peter Godfrey, author of "The Lady and the Dragon" and creator of that deeply perceptive South African detective, Rolf le Roux? Well, Mr. Godfrey, who has a great talent and for whom we predict a bright detective-story future, is a fair-haired, blue-eyed South African, of European descent, six feet two in his stockinged feet, and a good 230 pounds, if he weighs an ounce: friends have told him that his face betrays a slightly soulful expression, which he questions, but there is no questioning the slightly cauliflower ear.*

*Peter Godfrey fought hard against being a writer — but more of that in a later issue. Once he did become a writer, he fought equally hard for the life-in-print of Rolf le Roux. When he first conceived the character, everyone except his wife discouraged him. Indeed, Mrs. Godfrey supported her husband's obstinacy even after a "world-renowned literary figure," to whom Mr. Godfrey expounded the idea, delivered the verdict: "Forget it. You'll never sell a single Rolf le Roux story." (We can't help wondering who that "world-renowned literary figure" is!)*

*Here is the very first Oom Rolf story written by Peter Godfrey. It is one-part "miracle problem," one-part "impossible crime," and one-part "locked room" — a ratiocinative recipe whose ingredients, in the proper proportions, produce a detectival dish that is always hard to beat . . .*

# A DAGGER OF THE MIND

*by PETER GODFREY*

*"Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible*
*To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but*
*A dagger of the mind, a false creation,*
*Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?"*

— MACBETH

CORDING took the automatic elevator to the fourth floor. He kept on telling himself that Snyder would give him his chance; he did not suspect him. Sometime during the interview Snyder would turn his back and then. . . .

His opportunity came earlier than he expected. Snyder was seated at his table. He looked round to see who had entered.

"Get out!" he said, and turned back to his writing.

Cording drew the blade with a practised gesture. Three swift, silent steps brought him to his victim. As he lifted Snyder's head by the hair,

the keen steel sliced through the jugular vein in an ear-to-ear cut. He let the hair go, and the face slumped down onto the blood-saturated writing pad.

There was no sound, thought Cording, and there was no blood on him. That was what he had planned. He moved to the other side of the room and calmly wiped his weapon on the window curtain.

He stayed a minute or two longer, checking his appearance before the mirror over the imitation fireplace, then turned to go. His hand, reaching for the door-knob, suddenly felt it turning beneath his fingers. A thick-set man, whom he recognized as the caretaker of the building, walked into the room.

Even in the horrible unexpectedness of the moment, Cording did not entirely lose his head. "There's been a murder here!" he said urgently. "Quick! Fetch the police!"

His stratagem did not succeed. With a surprising swiftness the thick-set man dodged through the door, slammed it, and locked it from the outside.

Cording experienced momentary panic, then his brain, ice-cold and logical, again took command. He walked to the window, looked at the window opposite and the windows on each side of the square forming the walls of the open court below. He smiled cynically at the irony of the idea that so impossible an exit would, in fact, provide him with an indirect means of escape. He sat down on the studio couch, and waited for the police.

He did not wait many minutes; it does not take long in a fast car from Caledon Square to Sea Point.

Inspector Dirk Joubert headed the police party. With him were the medical examiner, Dr. McGregor, a lizard-faced sergeant in uniform, and Johnson and Botha, photographer and fingerprint expert respectively. Each went to his appointed task with the experience born only of long practice.

On Joubert's instructions, the sergeant called in the caretaker, who was hovering outside the door of the room.

His story was simple. Snyder had asked him a week before to keep an eye open for a person of Cording's description, and not allow him access to Snyder. He had noticed Cording in the lobby, but a few minutes passed before he realized that Cording might be the man Snyder had spoken about. He went to the fourth floor, and found Cording in the room with Snyder's body.

Joubert turned and asked Cording for his name. At the answer, his eyebrows lifted. "What do you know about this affair?" he asked.

Cording smiled. "I know the circumstances may look rather suspicious, Inspector," he said, "but my story is nearly the same as the caretaker's. I came to see Snyder on business. When I arrived, I found him lying with his throat cut."

"As he is lying now?"

"Yes."

"He's not the only one," said Joubert.

Cording asked, "What do you mean?" but there was a strange lack of either anger or anxiety in his tone.

"Exactly what I said," went on Joubert. "You're another one who's lying. You see, Cording, this is not the first time I have heard your fairly uncommon name. Three weeks ago I received a message from the Sydney police, warning me to keep an eye on you."

"Oh, yes," said Cording, "the police *were* rather attentive in Australia. Bit of a coincidence, isn't it, walking into another murder here in Cape Town?"

"Not a coincidence," said Joubert. "A mistake — perhaps a fatal mistake."

Cording stood up and spoke with clear incisiveness. "Now look here, Inspector, I refuse to submit again to the same browbeating without evidence I was forced to submit to in Sydney. I will admit the circumstances are suspicious, but proof of my innocence or otherwise is easily ascertainable. There lies a man with his throat cut. I have been locked in here without any means of escape. If I am guilty, you will find the weapon either on my person or in this room. If you fail to find it, you must accept my story as correct."

He paused for a moment and then went on. "And I must tell you this, Inspector: if the police in Australia failed to inform you of the fact, I am a business man of considerable financial and social standing in at least three continents. My boat is due to sail from Cape Town in exactly three hours. I warn you, if you prevent me from taking passage, it will mean the loss of several thousands to me. In such circumstances I will certainly seek redress through legal channels, both from the South African police and from you personally."

Joubert shrugged and turned to McGregor. "Well, Doc, what was it done with?"

"A sharrp instrument," said McGregor, "a verra sharrp instrument, but no' a razor. It wasna' tapered — the blade was flat and thin. Length at least five inches — wi' the handle included, I should say eight or nine inches over all."

Johnson pointed to the blood-smear on the curtain. "This gives you the width of the blade," he said, and measured it with a pocket rule. "A fraction over half an inch wide," he told the gathering.

They waited until the camera and the insufflator had done their work, and then Joubert turned to his men.

"You all know what you're looking for," he said. "A knife, eight or nine inches long, the blade five or more inches in length and a half an inch in width. Find it."

They looked. They prodded the furniture, lifted the carpet, emptied the bookshelf. By the time the sergeant lifted his lizard nose from a close scrutiny of the last possible place

of concealment, the room and furniture held no secrets from the police.

But they did not find the knife.

Joubert had personally and vainly searched Cording. Now, with a flash of inspiration, he ran practised hands over the corpse. The glint in his eyes soon dulled into disappointment.

"It must be hidden somewhere," he said slowly.

"Unless, Inspector, my story is true," said Cording, and Joubert felt his hackles rise at the other's amused tone.

"I prefer to work on the supposition of your guilt," he said stiffly.

"What memories of Australia you bring back!" said Cording lightly, and added: "Don't worry about the passage of time, Inspector. My baggage is already on board. All I ask is, if you delay me more than another hour and a half, you give me a lift in your car direct to the docks."

He moved after Joubert to the window. "Joking apart," he said, "I am getting a bit fed up with being kept here. You've searched everything in this room and found nothing. To my mind, there is only one possibility you have left unexplored. Perhaps the murderer threw the knife out of the window. If he did, it will certainly prove very awkward for me, but if you fail to find that knife on any outside projection of the building or in the courtyard below, then I will really begin to think this has gone far enough. . . ."

Joubert turned. "Search the room again, sergeant, and make a thorough job of it this time. Botha, come outside with me to look at the courtyard."

They went downstairs. "This is a nice spot to be in," said Joubert. "The man's guilty — I know he's guilty. But he's also right. I've got no grounds to hold him unless the knife is found."

"And I take it you don't expect to find it in the courtyard?" said Botha.

"No. He was much too cocksure about his suggestion. I'll look, of course, but I haven't any hopes." Joubert paused. "It seems to me there's just one chance for us, Johnson. I want you to take the car and fetch. . . ."

"Oom Rolf!" Botha finished for him. "You're right, Dirk. Perhaps the old man may just see something —"

"And he may not. Oh, I'll admit he's got a tremendous knowledge of human nature, but this time we've got the criminal. It's his weapon we're after. But I'm ready to catch at any straw now."

Johnson left. When he returned with Oom Rolf, Joubert was waiting at the entrance to the building.

Rolf le Roux's pipe was puffing cherry-red, and seemed in imminent danger of igniting his bushy whiskers. "Good day, Dirk," he said. "Johnson has told me of your trouble. Did you find the knife in the yard?"

Joubert shook his head. They took the elevator.

As they entered the room, Cording glanced at them cynically. He put a

cigarette between his lips, and lit it with the lighter built into his exquisitely chased gold cigarette case.

Rolf walked to the body and stood over it for a moment. "What kind of a knife was it?" he asked, and McGregor told him.

"I wonder," said Rolf.

McGregor stood on his professional dignity. "What do you mean?" he asked tartly.

"Look, Doctor," said Rolf, "it is not only a knife that will make such a cut. I remember now, many years ago on my farm. The wagon was loaded and the oxen were pulling. My boss boy, Adoons, cracked the whip — and the lash caught a pickaninny on the leg. It sliced his calf like a butcher's knife. . . ."

"No," said McGregor, "that wound was made wi' a knife. A verra sharp knife. The wound shows that."

"You misunderstand me, my friend," said Rolf. "When you see a cut, a thin cut, you think of a knife. But there are other things that could have made such a cut. A piece of gut, for instance, held taut and drawn with force and speed across a man's throat. . . ."

McGregor shook his head emphatically, and pointed to the body. "There are other signs," he said. "Some of the hair has been pulled out by the roots. The murderer came up behind him, pulled up his head by the hair with his left hand and cut his throat with his right hand. He couldna' ha' used a piece of gut like that," he concluded triumphantly.

"Apart from that," interposed Johnson, "these are definite knife marks on the curtain."

Rolf bristled. "You are foolish," he said. "When is a knife not a knife? If I hid my pipe in this room, it would not take you ten minutes to find it. But you have looked for an hour, and you still cannot find a solid, rigid steel object at least nine inches long. . . ."

"We haven't found a 14-foot wagon whip either," said Johnson.

Rolf turned away from him abruptly, and walked across to Cording. He extended his hand. "Le Roux," he introduced himself, and sat down next to Cording on the studio couch. He allowed himself to tense and relax two or three times. "Too soft," he said. "It is like sitting on a feather bed. I like to feel that I am sitting."

"It is a bed of sorts," said Cording, amused. "It is not just a settee — it can be converted into two single beds or a double bed. Personally, I think it's both comfortable and useful — particularly in a flat."

"You have one of your own?"

"Yes, in my flat in London."

Rolf leaned over and tapped him on the leg. "I must tell you why I am here," he said. "The police are puzzled. Once before I was able to help them. Now they think I may be able to do it again."

Cording smiled. "Exactly what sort of an expert are you?" he asked.

Rolf puffed at his pipe and his eyes twinkled. "No expert," he said. "It is merely that I have an under-

standing of people. Will you tell me your story?" he asked.

Cording repeated what he had told Joubert. "My boat leaves in exactly one hour," he concluded, and emphasized his point by showing his wrist-watch to Uncle Rolf.

"That is a nice watch," said Rolf, "but there are things about it that are strange to me. That hand that goes round and round, and the extra knob near the winder — what are they?"

"A stop-watch attachment. It measures time in fifths of a second."

"And that other hand that does not move?"

"A compass needle." Cording rose to his feet. "Now look here, Inspector, I must really ask you to let me leave. It is quite obvious that you will never find the knife. The murderer probably took it away on his person."

"You are partially right," said Rolf. "The murderer has the knife on his person, but he is not going to take it away — oh, no!"

"What do you mean?" asked Cording.

"Sit down again and I will explain. There is only one real mystery here, my friend. We all know you are guilty of this crime. All that puzzles us is what you did with the weapon.

"No, don't speak yet. Let me go on. I know you have hidden the weapon, but I also know that you are a careful man, just because it is hidden so well. A careful man is a man who weighs alternatives — a man who reasons. Would such a man hide the weapon in the room? No. He would realize if it was ever found after he had gone, he could be sent for again — yes, even from England. He must at all costs take the weapon with him. That is why I know you have it hidden on your person. . . .

"Now I will tell you why, even when you were searched, the weapon was not found. The doctor is certain the dead man was killed with a knife. When he and the others think of a knife, they think of something rigid and sharp — that is their experience with knives. But I think of other things. I say to myself, 'rigid and sharp, yes, that is the perfect description of a stabbing weapon, a dagger. But a cutting weapon need not necessarily be rigid, it need only be sharp' . . . .

"So it is that when I came to sit next to you, my mind was open. I spoke to you to find a way in which your mind worked, a pattern, that would show me where the weapon was hidden. The pattern was not hard to find.

"When I came into the room, you used a cigarette case that was also a lighter, your watch also measures time in fractions and is a compass, and you like a couch which can be made into two beds at night. That is the main pattern of your mind, my friend — you prefer objects which have *more than one use.*"

Rolf leaned forward confidentially to Cording. "You are a clever man," he said, "and I think you realize the game is up. You will also see that vio-

lence will not help you now," he added.

He applied another match to his pipe before he went on. "It is therefore obvious to me the knife is concealed on your person in an object which normally serves another purpose. Is there anything you wear which could conceal the kind of knife the police think of? No. But there is one object that could conceal the kind of knife I think of."

He reached forward, ignored Cording's movement of protest, and removed the latter's belt. His stubby finger indicated to Joubert the fact that the buckle was not stitched to the leather. Under the pressure of his thumbnail, the snap fasteners which took the place of stitches opened, and he pulled the buckle away from the belt.

Then they saw the buckle was not only a buckle, but the haft of 16 inches of thin shining steel that slid easily from the slit in the sheath which was also a leather belt.

For a second the scene was a tableau, then Joubert moved. Handcuffs snapped on Cording's wrists.

Rolf picked a shred of tobacco from his well-worn pouch, and neatly cut it in half by running it lightly over the edge of the blade.

"For cutting," he said conversationally to Johnson. "It is like a razor — as hard and as sharp as a razor. But as a stabbing weapon — oh, no!" With his forefinger he easily bent the point over until it touched the buckle. "Much too flexible," he said, and pulled his forefinger away.

The thin steel shot straight with a twang that subsided into a faint vibrational humming.

"The crack of the whip," said Rolf.

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*Did you know that every year the Hospitalized Veterans Writing Project — a volunteer organization in Chicago, working with VA's Special Services — sponsors a writing contest for patients in Veterans Administration hospitals throughout the country? The fourth annual contest has just had its winners announced, and we are thrilled to report that EQMM helped in a small way to make this fourth contest an outstanding success.*

*Last year the HVWP asked EQMM to sponsor a mystery-story department. We were happy and honored, and arranged to give five cash prizes and three honorable mentions of subscriptions to EQMM. The mystery-story department was only one of twelve different categories in which the hospitalized veterans competed; other categories included the Short Story and the Article (David C. Cook III, donor and judge), Story or Cartoon Book (Rand McNally and Viking Press, donors), Serious Poetry (Louise R. Parker, donor, and the late Clement Wood, judge), and Humorous Poetry (American Legion Auxiliary No. 299 of Yonkers, N. Y., donor, and Ogden Nash, judge).*

*In our opinion the best mystery-crime short story submitted was "The Miracle," by Charles A. Shea. Mr. Shea sent his story from Ward 1-B, Room 233, VA Hospital, Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he has been hospitalized since 1947; his home is in Hartford, Conn. Mr. Shea served in the U. S. Navy, on destroyer duty in the Pacific. His current interest is writing, and while he has published an article, titled "Operation Comeback," in the New Mexico Western College Magazine, his prize-winning story is the first fiction he has ever had published. Good luck, Charlie, and congratulations! — and double-good-luck to all the others! Keep punching, fellows — you'll get there; and if the HVWP wants EQMM to participate in future annual contests, we are ready, willing, and able.*

# THE MIRACLE

*by CHARLES A. SHEA*

THERE'S liable to be a brawl any Saturday night in the El Sombrero Cafe. More times than not there'll be a lot of knife-play thrown in, too. That's kind of a favorite sport with the natives down this way. But it was a Tuesday night that I looked up from a table near the office, in the

rear of the half-filled joint, and knew we were in for something that would make any Saturday night riot look like a dancing-school recital. For coming through the front door, dressed in a T-shirt and black trousers, was a guy the local folks called "The Padre." And when a guy like that comes into a dive like this, you have the perfect recipe for trouble.

The Padre pulled into town a couple of weeks before and was living in an old ruin, known as the San Vincente Mission. There was some talk going around that he was here to restore it. For my dough that was a job that would make putting Humpty Dumpty together again look like a cinch. The odds around town were three to one he wouldn't last six weeks. In the sun-baked Southwest guys who worked alone seldom did.

Red-haired and sunburned, The Padre was heading for the office. As he cut his way through the smoke haze toward my table, I put out a hand and said, "Just a minute." He stopped and looked me over. "Who are you?" he wanted to know in a voice that wasn't kidding.

"My name is Thompson," I said, and when I stood up to shake hands with him, I realized he topped my five-nine by a neat four inches. Then I told him I was the general factotum around the place.

"I'm Father Quinn," he introduced himself.

"Have a seat."

"Thank you."

As we sat down, Manuel the waiter eased over to the table. I ordered a beer and The Padre took the same. Then he told me he wanted to see the boss.

"He's not in just now. Is there anything I can do for you?" These kind of people always wanted something, and I was trying to find out how much.

"I'd rather see him," he said, and his sea-green eyes looked questioningly at the office door.

"He should be here any time now," I stalled.

The beers came, and for a while we talked about the weather. (The natives said it was the driest July they'd had in 30 years. But they said that every year.)

Then he asked, "Been out here long?"

"About two years."

"You must like this country."

"Yeah." I thought maybe I should tell him about my fresh-air mania — how I like fresh air, even if it is cow-town air, much better than the musty old air of any prison they've got back that side of the Mississippi. But instead I asked him if this was his first junket west.

"Yes, except for the Pacific, when I was in the service."

That's probably where he learned the trick of making an ordinary pair of shoulders look like something that got loose from a pro-grid squad. "Oh, were you in the Army?"

"No, the Navy. I was Chaplain aboard the *U. S. S. Dearborn*."

That name lit a light on my mental switchboard, but just then I couldn't

plug in the connection, because then The Padre threw a slow curve.

"How's business?" he asked.

I was just about to tell him when a level voice murmured, "Why don't you ask me?"

We looked up to see Duke Barton smiling down at us. He had a smile that would make an angel sing and it also made many fall-guys believe he was the nicest sharpster that ever fleeced them. "Don't get up," he said, sliding into a chair. Noticing the empty glasses, he signaled Manuel to bring another round. "This July heat is good for business," Duke said, nodding to the tables, nearly all of which were full.

Manuel hustled over with the drinks and as he was putting them on the table, he said something to Duke, and shoved off.

"Four poker games and seven blackjack — we might break even this week," Duke remarked. Then he asked The Padre, "You on the town tonight?"

And that's when the fire hit the powder-keg.

For The Padre answered, "Not exactly. You see — I came down to get your donation. I'm here to rebuild the old Mission. The estimate shows it'll cost around ten thousand dollars. I'm counting on you for about half." And he said it like he was reading the Gospel.

I figured he must have escaped from some place where they keep guys whose heads aren't working right.

Duke mumbled, "Oh," and pushed his black hair into place, like he was in Boston and hadn't heard what was said. It was as if somebody nudged him with a sledge-hammer, and I didn't blame him for being groggy. Even in Chicago, where the shake-down was a major industry, nobody walked into one of Duke's places and *told* him he should donate. True, somebody did tell the cops back there that our roulette wheels had brakes on them, and so we left West Madison Street in a hurry. Still that wasn't a good reason for a character to breeze in as cool as an April Morn and think he could touch the boss for five grand.

When I came to, The Padre was saying, "We could even put your name on one of the Chapel windows in remembrance of your gift."

The fog must have lifted from Duke about that time, because he spit out the words like a tommy-gun. "What makes you think that all of a sudden I'm going to start building churches?"

"Well, I think that it's only the fair thing for you to do. My people come here to drink and gamble. They're the mainstay of your business. Now next Sunday, if I should tell them not to come here, where would you be?"

Duke banged his fist on the table and shouted, "I could run you out of town by sunrise!"

The jabbering in the room suddenly ceased. The customers knew something was brewing, and they had a bad habit of being too curious. They

started edging toward our table in time to hear The Padre say soft-like, "You're a gambler, Duke. Why don't you give me a gambler's chance?"

"Are you willing to take one?"

"Yes."

Duke thought a bit. Then he said, "Tell you what, Padre. We'll play a hand of poker. If you win, I'll donate a hundred bucks a week for a year. That'll pay half your expenses. If you lose, you hit the trail tomorrow. Is that all right with you?"

"It's all right with me, if it's all right with you."

To the boss, who knew what the ace of spades was before he learned the alphabet, this was duck soup. He operated on the old platitude, "Never cheat a friend, but never give a sucker an even break."

"Let's go," said Duke.

When Manuel brought over a new deck, I opened and shuffled it. Then Duke and The Padre cut for the deal, and The Padre drew high. So he riffled the cards, gave the boss a cut, and let them fly like he'd just graduated with honors from a Reno Card House.

By now there was a whole mob gathered around the table.

Duke looked at his hand, and asked for one card. He glanced at it, smiled, and turned over a nine-high straight flush in spades. "So long, Padre, I hope we run into each other again sometime."

The Padre stood up and said, "We will, Duke — at least once a week for a year." Then he turned up his hand.

*It was a royal flush in spades!*

He said something about the Lord being his Shepherd and he should not want, and he pushed his way out through the crowd.

I figure that's the sort of thing that could happen by accident just about once in a lifetime. But this was the *second* time I'd seen it come up. A guy named Hylo McCarthy pulled it out of the hat one night when he got behind with a big shot from St. Louis. The last I heard of him was in '42. It seems he ran out of funds just when he was supposed to pay off a debt of honor to Nick Marino. When Hylo heard Nick was feeling unhappy about it, he joined the Navy.

The more I think about it, the surer I am that The Padre's flush wasn't quite the miracle it seemed. It took me nearly two weeks to get the hook-up, but then I remembered. Hylo McCarthy, past-master of the pasteboards, wound up as Chaplain's Assistant, aboard the *U. S. S. Dearborn*. . . .

*The late Sinclair Lewis, first American winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, author of* MAIN STREET, BABBITT, ARROWSMITH, *and* DODSWORTH, *and one of the most famous writers in the world, needs no introduction to the readers of any magazine. Nevertheless, the Sinclair Lewis short story which we now bring to you will come as a startling surprise, even to Mr. Lewis's most devoted followers. The story first appeared in "The Century Magazine," one year after the publication of* MAIN STREET, *and for nearly thirty years it has been gathering the dust of obscurity.*

*It is a curious experience to thumb through the issue of "Century" in which this unknown story by Sinclair Lewis first saw the light of print. Glenn Frank was the editor in those forgotten days, and the issue containing the Lewis story also contained a serial-installment by Phyllis Bottome, a short story by Anzia Yezierska, verse by Conrad Aiken and William Rose Benét, and travel memoirs by Charles Hanson Towne. Perhaps those were the good old days. . . .*

*You will find the Sinclair Lewis story both provocative and disturbing. The first half is serious satire — in 1921 Blanche Colton Williams commented that in "The Post-Mortem Murder" the "doctorate degree method is satirized so bitterly as to challenge wonder"; the second half of the story is almost slapstick satire. But surely, for our purposes, the narrator is a detective — in a curiously literary way — and the crime is that of murder — in a curiously literary way . . .*

# THE POST-MORTEM MURDER

*by SINCLAIR LEWIS*

I WENT to Kennuit to be quiet through the summer vacation. I was tired after my first year as associate professor, and I had to finish my "Life of Ben Jonson." Certainly the last thing I desired was that dying man in the hot room and the pile of scrawled booklets.

I boarded with Mrs. Nickerson in a cottage of silver-gray shingles under silver-gray poplars, heard only the harsh fiddling of locusts and the distant rage of the surf, looked out on a yard of bright wild grass and a jolly windmill weather-vane, and made notes about Ben Jonson. I was as secluded and happy as old Thoreau raising beans and feeling superior at Walden.

My fiancée — Quinta Gates, sister

of Professor Gates, and lovelier than ever in the delicate culture she had attained at thirty-seven — Quinta urged me to join them at Fleet Harbor. It is agreeable to be with Quinta. While I cannot say that we are stirred to such absurd manifestations as kissing and hand-holding — why any sensible person should care to hold a damp female hand is beyond me — we do find each other inspiriting. But Fleet Harbor would be full of "summerites," dreadful young people in white flannels, singing their jazz ballads.

No, at thought of my spacious, leafy freedom I wriggled with luxury and settled down to an absorbed period when night and day glided into one ecstasy of dreaming study. Naturally, then, I was angry when I heard a puckery voice outside in the tiny hallway:

"Well, if he's a professor, I got to see him."

A knock. I affected to ignore it. It was irritatingly repeated until I roared, "Well, well, well?" I am normally, I trust, a gentle person, but I desired to give them the impression of annoyance.

Mrs. Nickerson billowed in, squeaking:

"Mis' White from Lobster Pot Neck wants to see you."

Past her wriggled a pinch-faced, humorless-looking woman. She glared at Mrs. Nickerson, thrust her out, and shut the door. I could hear Mrs. Nickerson protesting, "Well, upon my word!"

I believe I rose and did the usual civilities. I remember this woman, Miss or Mrs. White, immediately asking me, with extraordinary earnestness:

"Are you a professor?"

"I teach English."

"You write books?"

I pointed to a box of manuscript.

"Then, please, you got to help us. Byron Sanders is dying. He says he's got to see a learned man to give him some important papers." Doubtless I betrayed hesitation, for I can remember her voice rising in creepy ululation: "Please! He's dying — that good old man that never hurt nobody!"

I fluttered about the room to find my cap. I fretted that her silly phrase of "important papers" sounded like a melodrama, with maps of buried treasure, or with long-lost proofs that the chore boy is really the kidnaped son of royalty. But these unconscious defenses against the compulsion expressed in her face, with its taut and terrified oval of open mouth, were in vain. She mooned at me, she impatiently waited. I dabbled at my collar and lapels with my fingers, instead of decently brushing off the stains of smoking and scribbling. I came stumbling and breathless after her.

She walked rapidly, unspeaking, intense, and I followed six inches behind, bespelled by her red-and-black gingham waist and her chip of a brown hat. We slipped among the gray houses of the town, stumped into country stilly and shimmering with late afternoon.

By a trail among long salty grasses we passed an inlet where sandpipers sprinted and horseshoe-crabs bobbed on the crisping ripples. We crossed a moorland to a glorious point of blowing grasses and sharp salt odor, with the waves of the harbor flickering beyond. In that resolute place my embarrassed awe was diluted, and I almost laughed as I wondered:

"What is this story-book errand? Ho, for the buried treasure! I'll fit up a fleet, out of the six hundred dollars I have in the savings bank, and find the pirates' skellingtons. 'Important papers!' I'll comfort the poor dying gentleman, and be back in time for another page before supper. The harbor is enchanting. I really must have a sail this summer or go swimming."

My liveliness, uneasy at best in the presence of that frightened, fleeing woman, wavered when we had dipped down through a cranberry-bog and entered a still, hot woods of dying pines. They were dying, I tell you, as that old man in there was dying. The leaves were of a dry color of brick dust; they had fallen in heaps that crunched beneath my feet; the trunks were lean and black, with an irritation of branches; and all the dim alleys were choking with a dusty odor of decay. It was hot and hushed, and my throat tickled, my limbs dragged in a hopeless languor.

Through ugly trunks and red needles we came to a restrained dooryard and an ancient, irregular house, a dark house, very sullen. No one had laughed there these many years. The windows were draped. The low porch between the main structure and a sagging ell was drifted with the pine-needles. My companion's tread was startling and indecent on the flapping planks. She held open the door. I hesitated. I was not annoyed now; I was afraid, and I knew not of what I was afraid.

Prickly with unknown disquietude, I entered. We traversed a hall choked with relics of the old shipping days of Kennuit: a whale's vertebra, a cribbage-board carved in a walrus-tusk, a Chinese screen of washed-out gold pagodas on faded, weary black. We climbed a narrow stair over which jutted, like a secret trap-door, the corner of a mysterious chamber above. My companion opened a door in the upper hall and croaked, "In there."

I went in slowly. I am not sure now, after two years, but I think I planned to run out again, to flee downstairs, to defend myself with that ivory tusk if I should be attacked by — whatever was lurking in that shadowy, silent place. As I edged in, about me crept an odor of stale air and vile medicines and ancient linen. The shutters were fast; the light was grudging. I was actually relieved when I saw in the four-poster bed a pitiful, vellum-faced old man, and the worst monster I had to face was normal illness.

I have learned that Byron Sanders was only seventy-one then, but he seemed ninety. He was enormous. He must have been hard to care for. His shoulders, in the mended linen

nightgown thrust up above the patchwork comforter, were bulky; his neck was thick; his head a shiny dome — an Olympian, majestic even in dissolution.

The room had been lived in too long. It was a whirl of useless things: staggering chairs, clothes in piles, greasy medicine-bottles, and a vast writing-desk pouring out papers, and dingy books with bindings of speckled brown. Amid the litter, so still that she seemed part of it, I was startled to discern another woman. Who she may have been I have never learned.

The man was ponderously turning in bed, peering at me through the shaky light.

"You are a professor?" he wheezed.

"That depends upon what you mean, sir. I teach English. I am not —"

"You understand poetry, essays, literary history?"

"I am supposed to."

"I'm kind of a colleague of yours. Byron —" He stopped, choked frightfully. The repressed woman beside the bed, moving with stingy patience, wiped his lips. "My name is Byron Sanders. For forty years, till a year ago, I edited the 'Kennuit Beacon.'"

The nauseating vanity of man! In that reverent hour, listening to the entreaties of a dying man, I was yet piqued at having my stripped athletic scholarship compared to editing the "Beacon," with its patent-medicine advertisements, its two straggly columns of news about John Brown's cow and Jim White's dory.

His eyes trusting me, Byron Sanders went on:

"Can't last long. It's come quicker — no time to plan. I want you to take the literary remains of my father. He was not a good man, but he was a genius. I have his poetry here, and the letters. I haven't read them for years, and — too late — give them to world. You must —"

He was desperately choking. The still woman crept up, thrust into my hands a box of papers and a pile of notebooks which had been lying on the bed.

"You must go," she muttered. "Say, 'Yes', and go. He can't stand any more."

"Will you?" the broken giant wailed to me, a stranger!

"Yes, yes, indeed; I'll give them to the world," I mumbled, while the woman pushed me toward the door.

I fled down the stairs, through the coppery pine-woods, up to the blithe headland that was swept by the sea-breeze.

I knew, of course, what the "poetry" of that poor "genius" his father would be — Christmas doggerel and ditties about "love" and "dove," "heart" and "must part." I was, to be honest, irritated. I wanted to take this debris back to Mr. Sanders, and that was the one thing I could not do. For once I was sensible: I took it home and tried to forget it.

In the next week's "Kennuit Beacon," discovered on Mrs. Nickerson's parlor-table, crowning a plush album,

I read that Byron Sanders, "the founder and for many years the highly esteemed editor of this paper," had died.

I sought relatives to whom I could turn over his father's oddments. There was no one; he was a widower and childless. For months the bothersome papers were lost in my desk, back at the university. On the opening day of the Christmas vacation I remembered that I had not read a word of them. I was to go to Quinta Gates's for tea at a quarter to five, and to her serene companionship I looked forward as, in a tired, after-term desultoriness, I sat down to glance at Jason Sanders's caterwaulings. That was at four. It was after nine when the flabby sensation of hunger brought me back to my room and the dead fire.

In those five hours I had discovered a genius. The poetry at which I had so abominably sneered was minted glory.

I stood up, and in that deserted dormitory I shouted, and listened to the tremor of the lone sound and defiantly shouted again. That I was "excited" is too pallid a word. My life of Jonson could go hang! I was selfish about it: it meant fame for me. But I think something higher than selfishness had already come into my devotion to Jason Sanders; something of the creator's passion and the father's pride.

I was hungry enough, but I walked the room contemptuous of it. I felt unreal. 1918 was fantastically unreal. I had for hours been veritably back in 1850. It was all there; manuscripts which had not been touched since 1850, which still held in their wrinkles the very air of seventy years ago: a diary; daguerreotypes; and letters, preserved like new in the darkness, from Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and the young Tennyson!

The diary had been intermittently kept for fifteen years. It was outline enough for me to reconstruct the story of Jason Sanders, born at Kennuit in 1825, probably died in Greece in 1853.

Between Cape Cod and the ocean is a war sinister and incessant. Here and there the ocean has gulped a farm, or a lighthouse reared on a cliff, but at Kennuit the land has been the victor. Today there are sandy flats and tepid channels where a hundred years ago was an open harbor brilliant with a hundred sails, crackling with tidings from the Banks, proud of whalers back from years of cruising off Siberia and of West Indiamen pompous with rum and sugar and the pest.

Captain Bethuel Sanders, master and owner of the *Sally S.*, was on a voyage out of Kennuit to Pernambuco when his only child, Jason Sanders, was born. He never came back. In every Cape Cod burying-ground, beside the meeting-house, there are a score of headstones with "Lost at sea." There is one, I know now, at Kennuit for Bethuel Sanders.

His widow, daughter of a man of God who for many years had been pastor at Truro, was a tight, tidy, capable woman. Bethuel left her a competence. She devoted herself to

keeping house and to keeping her son from going to sea. He was not to die as his father had, perhaps alone, last man on a wave-smashed brig. Theirs was a neat, unkindly cottage with no windows on the harbor side. The sailors' women-folks did not greatly esteem the view to sea, for thither went the strong sons who would never return. In a cottage with a low wall blank toward the harbor lived Mrs. Sanders, ardently loving her son, bitterly restraining him. Jason was obsessed by her. She was mother, father, sweetheart, teacher, tyrant. He stroked her cheeks, and he feared her eye, which was a frozen coal when she caught him lying.

In the first pages of Jason's diary, when he was only thirteen, he raged that while his schoolmates were already off to the Banks or beholding, as cabin-boys, the shining Azores, he was kept at his lessons, unmanned, in apron-strings. Resources of books he had from his parson grandsire: Milton, Jeremy Taylor, Pope. If the returned adventurers sneered at him, he dusted their jackets. He must have been hardy and reasonably vicious. He curtly records that he beat Peter Williams, son of the Reverend Abner Williams, "till he could scarce move," and that for this ferocity he was read out of meeting. He became a hermit, the village "bad boy."

He was at once scorned as a "softy" by his mates because he did not go to sea, dreaded by their kin because he was a marking fighter, bombarded by his Uncle Ira because he would not become a grocer, and chided by his mother because he had no calling to the ministry. Nobody, apparently, took the trouble to understand him. The combination of reading and solitude led him inevitably to scribbling. On new-washed Cape Cod afternoons, when grasses rustled on the cream-shadowed dunes, he sat looking out to sea, chin in hand, staring at ardent little waves and lovely sails that bloomed and vanished as the schooners tacked; and through evenings rhythmic with the surf he sought with words which should make him enviable to justify himself and his mocked courage.

At twenty he ran off to sea on a fishing schooner.

Twenty he was and strong, but when he returned his mother larruped him. Apparently he submitted; his comment in the famous diary is: "Mother kissed me in welcome, then, being a woman of whimsies somewhat distasteful to a man of my sober nature, she stripped off my jacket and lashed me with a strip of whalebone long and surprisingly fanged. I shall never go a-whaling if so very little of a whale can be so very unamiable."

This process neatly finished, Mrs. Sanders — she was a swift and diligent woman — immediately married the young bandit off to a neighbor woman four years his senior, a comely woman, pious, and gifted with dullness. Within the year was born a son, the Byron Sanders whom I saw dying as a corpulent elder.

That was in 1847, and Jason was twenty-two.

He went to work — dreaming and the painful carving of beautiful words not being work — in the Mammoth Store and Seamen's Outfitters. He was discharged for, imprimis, being drunk and abusive; further, stealing a knife of the value of two shillings. For five or six years he toiled in a sail-loft. I fancy that between stitchings of thick canvas he read poetry, a small book hidden in the folds of a topsail, and with a four-inch needle he scratched on shingles a plan of Troy. He was discharged now and then for roistering, and now and then was grudgingly hired again.

I hope that nothing I have said implies that I consider Jason a young man of virtue. I do not. He drank Jamaica rum, he stole strawberries, his ways with the village girls were neither commendable nor in the least commended, and his temper was such that he occasionally helped himself to a fight with sailors, and regularly, with or without purpose, thrashed the unfortunate Peter Williams, son of the Reverend Abner.

Once he betrayed a vice far meaner. A certain Boston matron, consort of a highly esteemed merchant, came summering to Kennuit, first of the tennis-yelping hordes who now infest the cape and interrupt the meditations of associate professors. This worthy lady was literary, and doubtless musical and artistic. She discovered that Jason was a poet. She tried to patronize him; in a highfalutin way she commanded him to appear next Sunday, to read aloud and divert her cousins from Boston. For this she would give him a shilling and what was left of the baked chicken. He gravely notes: "I told her to go to the devil. She seemed put out." The joke is that three weeks later he approached the good matron with a petition to be permitted to do what he had scorned. She rightly, he records, without comment, "showed me the door."

No, he was virtuous save in bellicose courage, and he was altogether casual about deserting his wife and child when, the year after his mother died, he ran away to the Crimean War. But I think one understands that better in examining, as I have examined with microscope and aching eye, the daguerreotypes of Jason and his wife and boy.

Straight-nosed and strong-lipped was Jason at twenty-six or -seven. Over his right temple hung an impatient lock. He wore the high, but open and flaring, collar of the day, the space in front filled with the soft folds of a stock. A fluff of side-whiskers along the jaw set off his resoluteness of chin and brow. His coat was long-skirted and heavy, with great collar and wide lapels, a cumbrous garment, yet on him as graceful as a cloak. But his wife! Her eyes stared, and her lips, though for misery and passionate prayer they had dark power, seem in the mirrory old picture to have had no trace of smiles. Their son was dumpy. As I saw him dying there in the pine woods, Byron Sanders ap-

peared a godly man and intelligent; but at six or seven he was pudding-faced, probably with a trick of howling. In any case, with or without reason, Jason foully deserted them.

In 1853, at the beginning of the struggle between Russia and Turkey that was to develop into the Crimean War, Greece planned to invade Turkey. Later, to prevent alliance between Greece and Russia, the French and English forces held Piræus; but for a time Greece seemed liberated.

Jason's diary closes with a note:

> Tomorrow I leave this place of sand and sandy brains; make by friend Bearse's porgy boat for Long Island, thence to New York and ship for Piræus, for the glory of Greece and the memory of Byron. How better can a man die? And perhaps some person of intelligence there will comprehend me. Thank fortune my amiable spouse knows naught. If ever she finds this, may she grant forgiveness, as I grant it to her!

That is all — all save a clipping from the "Lynmouth News Letter" of seven years later announcing that as no word of Mr. Jason Sanders had come since his evanishment, his widow was petitioning the court to declare him legally dead.

This is the pinchbeck life of Jason Sanders. He lived not in life, but in his writing, and that is tinct with genius. Five years before Whitman was known he was composing what today we call "free verse." There are in it impressions astoundingly like Amy Lowell. The beauty of a bitter tide-scourged garden and of a bitter sea-scourged woman who walks daily in that sterile daintiness is one of his themes, and the poem is as radiant and as hard as ice.

Then the letters.

Jason had sent his manuscripts to the great men of the day. From most of them he had noncommittal acknowledgments. His only encouragement came from Edgar Allan Poe, who in 1849, out of the depths of his own last discouragement, wrote with sympathy:

> I pledge you my heart that you can have talent. You will go far if you can endure hatred and disgust, forgetfulness and bitter bread, blame for your most valorous and for your weakness and meekness, the praise of matrons and the ladylike.

That letter was the last thing I read before dawn on Christmas day.

On the first train after Christmas I hastened down to the winter-clutched cape.

As Jason had died sixty-five years before, none but persons of eighty or more would remember him. One woman of eighty-six I found, but beyond, "Heh? Whas sat?" she confided only: "Jassy Sanders was a terror to snakes. Run away from his family, that's what he done! Poetry? Him write poetry? Why, he was a sail-maker!"

I heard then of Abiathar Gould, eighty-seven years old, and already become a myth streaked with blood and the rust of copper bottoms. He had been a wrecker, suspected of luring ships ashore with false lights in order that he might plunder them

with his roaring mates. He had had courage enough, plunging in his whale-boat through the long swells after a storm, but mercy he had not known. He was not in Kennuit itself; he lived down by the Judas Shoals, on a lean spit of sand running seven miles below Lobster Pot Neck.

How could one reach him? I asked Mrs. Nickerson.

Oh, that was easy enough: one could walk! Yes, and one did walk, five miles against a blast whirling with snow, grinding with teeth of sand. I cursed with surprising bitterness, and planned to give up cigarettes and to do patent chest exercises. I wore Mr. Aaron Bloomer's coonskin coat, Mrs. Nickerson's gray flannel muffler, David Dill's fishing-boots, and Mrs. Antonia Sparrow's red flannel mittens; but, by the gods, the spectacles were my own, and mine the puffing, the cramped calves, and the breath that froze white on that itchy collar! Past an inlet with grasses caught in the snow-drifted ice; along the frozen beach, which stung my feet at every pounding step; among sand-dunes, which for a moment gave blessed shelter; out again into the sweep of foam-slavering wind, the bellow of the surf, I went.

I sank all winded on the icy step of Captain Abiathar Gould's bachelor shack.

He was not deaf and he was not dull at eighty-seven. He came to the door, looked down on me, and grunted:

"What do you want? D' yuh bring me any hootch?"

I hadn't. There was much conversation bearing on that point while I broiled and discovered new muscles by his stove. He had only one bunk, a swirl of coiled blankets and comforters and strips of gunny-sacking. I did not care to spend the night; I had to be back. I opened:

"Cap'n, you knew Jason Sanders?"

"Sanders? I knew Byron Sanders, and Gideon Sanders of Wellfleet and Cephas Sanders of Falmouth and Bessie Sanders, but I never knew no Jason — oh, wa'n't he Byron's pa? Sure I remember him. Eight or nine years old 'n I was. Died in foreign parts. I was a boy on the *Dancing Jig* when he went fishing. Only time he ever went. Wa'n't much of a fisherman."

"Yes, but what do you remember —"

"Don't remember nothing. Jassy never went with us fellows; had his nose in a book. Some said he was a good fighter; I dunno."

"But didn't you — how did he talk, for instance?"

"Talk? Talked like other folks, I suppose. But he wa'n't a fisherman, like the rest of us. Oh, one time he tanned my hide for tearing up some papers with writin' on 'em that I swiped for gun-wadding."

"What did he say then?"

"He said —"

On second thought it may not be discreet to report what Jason said.

Beyond that Captain Gould testified only:

"Guess I kind of get him mixed up

with the other fellows, good many years ago. But" — he brightened — "I recollect he wa'n't handy round a schooner. No, he wa'n't much of a fisherman."

When I got back to Kennuit my nose was frozen.

No newspaper had been published in Kennuit before 1877, and I unearthed nothing more. Yet this very blankness made Jason Sanders my own province. I knew incomparably more about him than any other living soul. He was at once my work, my spiritual ancestor, and my beloved son. I had a sense of the importance and nobility of all human life such as — I acknowledge sadly — I had never acquired in dealing with cubbish undergraduates. I wondered how many Jasons might be lost in the routine of my own classes. I forgot my studies of Ben Jonson. I was obsessed by Jason.

Quinta Gates — I don't know — when I met her at the president's reception in February, she said I had been neglecting her. At the time I supposed that she was merely teasing; but I wonder now. She was — oh, too cool; she hadn't quite the frankness I had come to depend on in her. I don't care. Striding the dunes with Jason, I couldn't return to Quinta and the discussion of sonatas in a lavender twilight over thin tea-cups.

I gave Jason Sanders to the world in a thumping article in "The Weekly Gonfalon."

Much of it was reprinted in the New York "Courier's" Sunday literary section, with Jason's picture, and — I note it modestly — with mine, the rather interesting picture of me in knickers sitting beside Quinta's tennis court. Then the New York "Gem" took him up. It did not mention me or my article. It took Jason under its own saffron wing and crowed, at the head of a full-page Sunday article:

*VICIOUS EUROPEAN CONSPIRACY HIDES DEATH OF GREATEST AMERICAN BARD*

I was piqued by their theft, but I was also amused to see the creation of a new mythical national hero. "The Gem" had Jason sailing nine of the seven seas, and leading his crew to rescue a most unfortunate Christian maiden who had been kidnaped by the Turks — at Tangier! About the little matter of deserting his wife and son "The Gem" was absent-minded. According to them, Jason's weeping helpmate bade him, "Go where duty calls you," whereupon he kissed her, left her an agreeable fortune, and departed with banners and bands. But "The Gem's" masterpiece was the interview with Captain Abiathar Gould, whose conversational graces I have portrayed. In "The Gem" Captain Gould rhapsodizes:

> We boys was a wild lot, sailing on them reckless ships. But Captain Jason Sanders was; well, sir, he was like a god to us. Not one of the crew would have dared, like he done, to spring overboard in a wintry blast to rescue the poor devils capsized in a dory, and yet he was so quiet and scholarly, always a-reading at his poetry

books between watches. Oh, them was wonderful days on the barkantine *Dancing Jig!*

"The Gem" reporter must have taken down to Abiathar some of the "hootch" I failed to bring with me.

I was — to be honest, I was unacademically peeved. My hero was going out of my hands, and I wanted him back. I got him back. No one knew what had happened to Jason after he went to Greece, but I found out. With a friend in the European history department I searched all available records of Greek history in 1853–54. I had faith that the wild youngster would tear his way through the dryest pages of reports.

We discovered that in '54, when the French and English occupied Piræus, a mysterious Lieutenant Jasmin Sandec appeared as a popular hero in Athens. Do you see the resemblance? Jasmin Sandec — Jason Sanders. The romantic boy had colored his drab Yankee name. Nobody quite knew who Lieutenant Sandec was. He was not Greek. The French said he was English; the English said he was French. He led a foray of rollicking young Athenians against the French lines; he was captured and incontinently shot. After his death an American sea captain identified Lieutenant Sandec as a cousin of his! He testified that Sandec was not his name, though what his name was the skipper did not declare. He ended with:

"My cousin comes from the town of Kennebunkport, and has by many people been thought to be insane."

Need I point out how easily the Greek scribe confused Kennebunkport with Kennuit? As easily as the miserable cousinly captain confused insanity with genius.

Do you see the picture of Jason's death? Was it not an end more fitting than molding away in a sail-loft, or becoming a grocer, a parson, an associate professor? The Grecian afternoon sun glaring on whitewashed wall, the wine-dark sea, the marble-studded hills of Sappho, and a youth, perhaps in a crazy uniform, French shako and crimson British coat, Cape Cod breeches and Grecian boots, lounging dreamily, not quite understanding; a line of soldiers with long muskets; a volley, and that fiery flesh united to kindred dust from the bright body of Helen and the thews of Ajax.

The report of these facts about Jason's fate I gave in my second article in "The Gonfalon." By this time people were everywhere discussing Jason.

It was time for my book.

Briefly, it was a year's work. It contained all his writing and the lives of three generations of Sanderses. It had a reasonable success, and it made of Jason's notoriety a solid fame. So, in 1919, sixty-five years after his death, he began to live.

An enterprising company published his picture in a large carbon print which appeared on school-room walls beside portraits of Longfellow, Lowell, and Washington. So veritably was he living that I saw him! In New

York, at a pageant representing the great men of America, he was enacted by a clever young man made up to the life, and shown as talking to Poe. That, of course, was inaccurate. Then he appeared as a character in a novel; he was condescendingly mentioned by a celebrated visiting English poet; his death was made the subject of a painting; a motion-picture person inquired as to the possibilities of "filming" him, and he was, in that surging tide of new living, suddenly murdered!

The poison which killed Jason the second time was in a letter to "The Gonfalon" from Whitney A. Edgerton, Ph.D., adjunct professor of English literature in Melanchthon College.

Though I had never met Edgerton, we were old combatants. The dislike had started with my stern, but just, review of his edition of Herrick. Edgerton had been the only man who had dared to sneer at Jason. In a previous letter in "The Gonfalon" he had hinted that Jason had stolen his imagery from Chinese lyrics, a pretty notion, since Jason probably never knew that the Chinese had any literature save laundry checks. But now I quote his letter:

> I have seen reproductions of a very bad painting called "The Death of Jason Sanders," portraying that admirable young person as being shot in Greece. It happens that Mr. Sanders was not shot in Greece. He deserved to be, but he wasn't. Jason Sanders was not Jasmin Sandec. The changing of his own honest name to such sugar-candy was the sort of thing he would have done. But he didn't do it. What kept Jason from heroically dying in Greece in 1854 was the misfortune that from December, '53, to April, '58, he was doing time in the Delaware State Penitentiary for the proved crimes of arson and assault with intent to kill. His poetic cell in Delaware was the nearest he ever, in his entire life, came to Greece. Yours, etc.
>
> WHITNEY EDGERTON.

The editor of "The Gonfalon" telegraphed me the contents of the letter just too late for me to prevent its printing, and one hour later I was bound for Delaware, forgetting, I am afraid, that Quinta had invited me to dinner. I knew that I would "show up" this Edgerton.

The warden of the penitentiary was interested. He helped me. He brought out old registers. We were thorough. We were too thorough. We read that Jason Sanders of Kennuit, Massachusetts, married, profession sailmaker, was committed to the penitentiary in December, 1853, for arson and murderous assault, and that he was incarcerated for over four years.

In the Wilmington library, in the files of a newspaper long defunct, I found an item dated, November, 1853:

> What appears to have been a piece of wretched scoundrelism was perpetrated at the house of Mr. Palatinus, a highly esteemed farmer residing near Christiansburg, last Thursday. Mr. Palatinus gave food and shelter to a tramp calling himself Sanders, in return for some slight labor. The second evening the fellow found some spirits concealed in the barn, became intoxicated, demanded money from Mr. Palatinus, struck him, cast the lamp upon

the floor, and set fire to the dwelling. He has been arrested and is held for trial. He is believed to have been a sailor on Cape Cod.

I did not make any especial haste to communicate my discoveries.

It was a New York "Gem" correspondent who did that. His account was copied rather widely.

The pictures of Jason were taken down from school-room walls.

I returned to the university. I was sustained only by Quinta's faith. As she sat by the fire, chin resting against fragile fingers, she asserted, "Perhaps there has been some mistake." That inspired me. I left her, too hastily, it may be, but she is ever one to understand and forgive. I fled to my rooms, stopping only to telephone to my friend of the history department. He assured me that there was a common Greek family name, Palatainos. You will note its resemblance to Palatinus! At this I jigged in the drug-store telephone-booth and joyfully beat on the resounding walls, and looked out to see one of my own students, purchasing a bar of chocolate, indecently grinning at me. I sought to stalk out, but I could not quiet my rejoicing feet.

I began my new letter to "The Gonfalon" at ten in the evening. I finished it at five of a cold morning. I remember myself as prowling through the room with no dignity, balancing myself ridiculously on the brass bar at the foot of my bed, beating my desk with my fists, lighting and hurling down cigarettes.

In my letter I pointed out — I virtually proved — that the Delaware farmer's name was not Palatinus, but Palatainos. He was a Greek. He could not have sheltered Jason "in return for some slight labor," because this was December, when farm-work was slackest. No, this Palatainos was an agent of the Greek revolutionists. Jason was sent from New York to see him. Can you not visualize it?

The ardent youngster arrives, is willing to take from Palatainos any orders, however desperate. And he finds that Palatainos is a traitor, is in the pay of the Turks! Sitting in the kitchen, by a fireplace of whitewashed bricks, Palatainos leers upon the horrified Yankee lad with the poisonous sophistication of an international spy. He bids Jason spy upon the Greeks in America. Staggered, Jason goes feebly up to bed. All next day he resists the traitor's beguilement. Palatainos plies him with brandy. The poet sits brooding; suddenly he springs up, righteously attacks Palatainos, the lamp is upset, the house partly burned, and Jason, a stranger and friendless, is arrested by the besotted country constable. He was, in prison, as truly a martyr to freedom as if he had veritably been shot in a tender-colored Grecian afternoon!

My reconstruction of the history was — though now I was so distressed that I could take but little pride in it — much quoted from "The Gonfalon" not only in America, but abroad. The "Mercure de France" mentioned it, inexcusably misspelling

my name. I turned to the tracing of Jason's history after his release from the penitentiary, since now I did not know when and where he actually had died. I was making plans when there appeared another letter from Whitney Edgerton, the secret assassin of Jason. He snarled that Palatinus's name was not Palatainos. It was Palatinus. He was not a Greek; he was a Swede.

I wrote to Edgerton, demanded his proofs, his sources for all this information. He did not answer. He answered none of my half-dozen letters.

"The Gonfalon" announced that it had been deceived in regard to Jason, that it would publish nothing more about him. So for the third time Jason Sanders was killed, and this time he seemed likely to remain dead.

Shaky, impoverished by my explorations on Cape Cod and in Delaware, warned by the dean that I should do well to stick to my teaching and cease "these unfortunate attempts to gain notoriety," I slunk into quiet classwork, seemingly defeated. Yet all the while I longed to know when and where Jason really had died. Might he not have served valorously in the American Civil War? But how was I to know? Then came my most extraordinary adventure in the service of Jason Sanders.

I went to Quinta's for tea. I have wondered sometimes if Quinta may not have become a bit weary of my speculations about Jason. I did not mean to bore her; I tried not to: but I could think of nothing else, and she alone was patient with me.

"How — how — how can I force Edgerton to tell all he knows?" I said with a sigh.

"Go see him!" Quinta was impatient.

"Why, you know I can't afford to, with all my savings gone, and Edgerton way out in Nebraska."

She shocked me by quitting the room. She came back holding out a check — for three hundred dollars! The Gateses are wealthy, but naturally I could not take this. I shook my head.

"Please!" she said sharply. "Let's get it over."

I was suddenly hopeful.

"Then you do believe in Jason? I'd thought you were almost indifferent to him."

"I —" It flared out, that sound. She went on compactly: "Let's not talk about it, please. Now tell me, didn't you think they made a mistake at the symphony —"

I had a not at all pleasant conference with the dean before I took my train for Melanchthon, Nebraska.

I had a plan. This was toward the end of the academic year 1919–20. I would pretend to be a chap who, after working in offices, that sort of thing, desired to begin graduate work in English, but had first to make up for the courses he had forgotten since college. I wanted the celebrated Dr. Whitney Edgerton to tutor me. I would lure him into boarding me at his house; a young professor like

Edgerton would be able to use the money. Once dwelling there, it would be easy enough to search his study, to find what histories or letters had furnished his secret knowledge of Jason.

I adopted as *nom de guerre* the name Smith. That was, perhaps, rather ingenious, since it is a common name, and therefore unlikely to arouse attention. It was all reasonable, and should have been easy.

But when, in Melanchthon, I was directed to Edgerton's house, I perceived that, instead of being a poor devil, he was uncomfortably rich. His was a monstrous Georgian house, all white columns and dormers and iron window-railings and brick terrace and formal gardens. Reluctantly, I gained entrance, and addressed myself to Edgerton.

He was a square-built, pompous, rimless-eyeglassed, youngish man. His study was luxurious, with velvet curtains at the windows, with a vast desk, with built-in cases containing books I yearned to possess; a vast apartment, all white and tender blue, against which my two patchy rooms in Hendrik Hall seemed beggary. I had expected to have to conceal hatred, but instead I was embarrassed. Yet by the gods it was I, the shabby scholar, who had created Jason, and this silken, sulky dilettante who without reason had stabbed him!

While I peeped about, I was telling Edgerton, perhaps less deftly than I had planned, of my desire to be tutored.

He answered:

"You're very complimentary, I'm sure, but I'm afraid it's impossible. I'll recommend you to someone — By the way, what was your college?"

Heaven knows how it popped into my head, but I recalled an obscure and provincial school, Titus College, of which I knew nothing.

He lightened.

"Oh, really? Did you know I had my first instructorship in Titus? Haven't had any news from there for years. How is President Dolson, and Mrs. Siebel? Oh, and how is dear old Cassaworthy?"

May the trustees of Titus College forgive me! I had President Dolson sick of a fever, and Cassaworthy — professor, janitor, village undertaker, or whatever he was — taking to golf. As for Mrs. Siebel, she'd given me a cup of tea only a few months ago. Edgerton seemed astonished. I have often wondered whether Mrs. Siebel would actually be most likely to serve tea, gin, or vitriol.

Edgerton got rid of me. He amiably kicked me out. He smiled, gave me the name of a "suitable tutor," mesmerized me toward the door, and did not invite me to return. I sat on a bench in the Melanchthon station. Apparently I had come from the Atlantic seaboard to Nebraska to sit on this broken bench and watch an undesirable citizen spit at a box of sawdust.

I spent the night at a not agreeable tavern or hotel, and next day I again called on Edgerton. I had surmised

that he would be bored by the sight of me. He was. I begged him to permit me to look over his library. Impatiently, he left me alone, hinting, "When you go out, be sure and close the front door."

With the chance of someone entering, it would not have been safe to scurry through his desk and his ingenious cabinets in search of data regarding Jason. But while I stood apparently reading, with a pen-knife I so loosened the screws in a window-catch that the window could be thrust up from outside.

I was going to burglarize the study.

That night, somewhat after twelve, I left my room in the hotel, yawned about the office, pretended to glance at the ragged magazines, sighed to the drowsy night clerk, "I think I'll have some fresh air before I retire," and sauntered out. In my inner pocket were a screw-driver and a small electric torch which I had that afternoon purchased at a hardware shop. I knew from the fiction into which I had sometimes dipped that burglars find these torches and screw-drivers, or "jimmies," of value in their work.

I endeavored, as I stole about the streets, to assume an expression of ferocity, to intimidate whoever might endeavor to interrupt me. For this purpose I placed my spectacles in my pocket and disarrayed my bow-tie.

I was, perhaps, thrown off my normal balance. For the good name of Jason Sanders I would risk all of serene repute that had been precious to me. So I, who had been a lecturer to respectful students, edged beneath the cottonwoods, slipped across a lawn, crawled over a wire fence, and stood in the garden of Whitney Edgerton. It was fenced and walled on all sides save toward the street. That way, then, I should have to run in case of eruption — out into the illumination of a street lamp. I might be very prettily trapped. Suddenly I was a-tremble, utterly incredulous that I should be here.

I couldn't do it.

I was menaced from every side. Wasn't that someone peering from an upper window of the house? Didn't a curtain move in the study? What was that creak behind me? I, who had never in my life spoken to a policeman save to ask a direction, had thrust myself in here, an intruder, to be treated like a common vagrant, to be shamed and roughly handled. As I grudgingly swayed toward the study windows I was uneasy before imaginary eyes. I do not remember a fear of being shot. It was something vaguer and more enfeebling: it was the staring disapproval of all my civilization, schools, churches, banks, the courts, and Quinta. But I came to the central window of the study, the window whose catch I had loosened.

I couldn't do it.

It had seemed so easy in fiction; but crawl in there? Into the darkness? Face the unknown? Shin over the sill like a freshman? Sneak and pilfer like a mucker?

I touched the window; I think I tried to push it up. It was beyond my strength.

Disgust galvanized me. I to thieve from the thief who had slain Jason Sanders? Never! I had a right to know his information; I had a right. By heavens! I'd shake it out of him; I'd face, beat, kill that snobbish hound. I remember running about the corner of the house, jabbing the button of the bell, bumping the door panels with sore palms.

A light, and Edgerton's voice:

"What is it? What is it?"

"Quick! A man hurt! Motor accident!" I bellowed.

He opened the door. I was on him, pushing him back into the hall, demanding:

"I want everything you have about Jason Sanders!" I noticed then that he had a revolver. I am afraid I hurt his wrist. Somewhat after, when I had placed him in a chair in the study, I said: "Where did you get your data? And where did Sanders die?"

"You must be this idiot that's been responsible for the Sanders folderol," he was gasping.

"Will you be so good as to listen? I am going to kill you unless you give me what I wish, and immediately."

"Wh-what! See here!"

I don't remember. It's curious; my head aches when I try to recall that part. I think I must have struck him, yet that seems strange, for certainly he was larger than I and better fed. But I can hear him piping:

"This is an outrage! You're insane! But if you insist, I had all my facts about Sanders from Peter Williams, a clergyman out in Yancey, Colorado."

"Let me see your letters from him."

"Is that necessary?"

"Do you think I'd trust you?"

"Well, I have only one letter here. The others are in my safe-deposit vault. Williams first wrote to me when he read my letter criticizing your articles. He has given me a good many details. He apparently has some reason to hate the memory of Sanders. Here's his latest epistle, some more facts about Sanders's delightful poetic career."

One glance showed me that this was indeed the case. The sheet which Edgerton handed me had inartistically printed at the top, "Rev. Peter F. Williams, Renewalist Brotherhood Congregation, Yancey, Colo.," and one sentence was, "Before this, Sanders's treatment of women in Kennuit was disgraceful — can't be too strongly condem'd."

I had the serpent of whose venom Edgerton was but the bearer!

I backed out, left Edgerton. He said a silly thing, which shows that he was at least as flustered as I was:

"Goodbye, Lieutenant Sandec!"

I was certain that he would have me apprehended if I returned to my hotel, even for so long as would be needed to gather my effects. Instantly, I decided to abandon my luggage, hasten out of town. Fortunately, I had with me neither my other suit nor the fitted bag which Quinta had given me. Traversing only side streets, I sped out of town by the railway track. Then I was glad of the pocket flashlight which, outside the study window, had

seemed absurd. I sat on the railway embankment. I can still feel the grittiness of sharp-cornered cinders and cracked rock, still see the soggy pile of rotting logs beside the embankment upon which my flashlight cast a milky beam as I switched it on in order that I might study Peter Williams's letter.

Already I had a clue.

Peter Williams was also the name of that son of the Reverend Abner Williams of Kennuit whom Jason had often trounced. I wished that he had trounced him oftener and more roundly. The Reverend Abner had hurled Jason out of his church. All this would naturally institute a feud between Jason and the Williamses. There might have been additional causes, perchance rivalry for a girl.

Well! The Reverend Peter Williams's letter to Edgerton was typewritten. That modernity would indicate, in a village parson, a man not over forty years old. Was it not logical to guess that Peter Williams of Colorado was the grandson of Peter Williams of Kennuit, and that he had utilized information long possessed by the whole tribe of the Williamses to destroy his grandsire's enemy, Jason?

By dawn I was on a way-train; in the afternoon of the next day I was in Yancey, Colorado.

I found the Renewalist parsonage, residence of the Reverend Peter Williams, to be a small, dun-colored cottage on a hill-crest. I strode thither, vigorous with rage. I knocked. I faced a blank Teutonic maid. I demanded to see Mr. Williams.

I was admitted to his rustic study. I saw a man not of forty, as his letter had suggested, but astoundingly old, an ancient dominie, as sturdy as a bison, with a bursting immensity of white beard. He was sitting in a hollowed rocker close by the stove.

"Well?" said he.

"Is this the Reverend Peter Williams?"

"It be."

"May I sit down?"

"You can."

I sat calmly in a small, mean chair. My rage was sated by perceiving that I had to deal not with any grandson of Jason's foe, but with the actual original Peter Williams himself! I was beholding one who had been honored by the fists of Jason Sanders. He was too precious a serpent not to draw him with cunning. Filially, I pursued:

"I was told — I once spent a summer on Cape Cod — "

"Who are you, young man?"

"Smith, William Smith."

"Well, well, let's have it."

"I was told you came from the Cape — from Kennuit."

"Well, what of it?"

"I just wondered if you weren't the son of the Reverend Abner Williams who used to be pastor in Kennuit."

"I be. I am the son in the spirit of that man of holiness."

Cautiously, oh, so cautiously, simulating veneration, I hinted:

"Then you must have known this fellow I've been reading about; this

Jason — what was it? — Sandwich?"

"Jason Sanders. Yes, sir, I knew him well, too well. A viler wretch never lived. A wine-bibber, a man of wrath, blind to the inner grace, he was all that I seek to destroy." Williams's voice loomed like a cathedral service. I hated him, yet I was impressed. I ventured:

"One thing I've often wondered. They say this Sanders fellow didn't really die in Greece. I wonder when and where he did die."

The old man was laughing; he was wrinkling his eyes at me; he was shaking.

"You're daft, but you have grit. I know who you be. Edgerton telegraphed me you were coming. So you like Jason, eh?"

"I do."

"He was a thief, a drunkard — "

"And I tell you he was a genius!"

"You tell me! Huh!"

"See here, what reason has there been for your dogging Jason? It wasn't just your boyish fighting and — how did you find out what became of him after he left Kennuit?"

The old man looked at me as though I were a bug. He answered slowly, with a drawl maddening to my impatience.

"I know it because in his prison —" he stopped, yawned, rubbed his jaw — "in his cell I wrestled with the evil spirit in him."

"You won?"

"I did."

"But after that — when did he die?" I asked.

"He didn't."

"You mean Jason is alive now —"

"He's ninety-five years old. You see, I'm — I was till I rechristened myself Williams — I'm Jason Sanders," he replied.

Then for two thousand miles, by village street and way-train and limited, sitting unmoving in berths and silent in smoking-rooms, I fled to the cool solace of Quinta Gates.

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## THE BLUE WASH MYSTERY

*by ?*

In its January issue, *EQMM* offered ten dollars to the first reader correctly to identify the author of *The Blue Wash Mystery*. Answers poured in, suggesting a bewildering variety of possibilities. Among other authors named were Frank R. Stockton, O. Henry, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, and Charles Dickens — not to mention such startling nominations as Horatio Alger, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. A few readers, too, sent in the right answer, and the one with the earliest postmark was from Mrs. Mabel Lovett, of Boston, Mass. Congratulations, Mrs. Lovett, and to the rest of you who knew that *The Blue Wash Mystery* was written by — *Anna Katharine Green!*

*Remember Edmund Crispin's "Lacrimae Rerum"? — that brilliant adventure in deduction which won a Third Prize in EQMM's Fourth Annual Contest — that masterly medley of music and murder, featuring detective Gervase Fen, Professor of English Language and Literature at the University of Oxford? Here is another exploit of the acute and ironic Oxford Don, and again you will find Gervase Fen at the top of his form. Nothing erudite or academic this time — just the little matter of a train engineer who simply vanished into thin air while the train itself stood in the station at Clough, impatient to move on — just the little matter of Fate performing a conjuring trick in the shape of an outdoor locked-room. But Professor Fen knew a strange sort of mathematics. . . .*

# NINE MINUS NINE EQUALS ONE

*by EDMUND CRISPIN*

A WHISTLE blew, and with the swift, unobtrusive deference of an expert lackey, the electric train moved out of Borleston Junction, past the blurred radiance of the tall lamps in the marshaling-yard, past the diminishing constellations of the town's domestic lighting, and so out into the eight-mile wedge of darkness which lay between Borleston and Clough. At Borleston there had been the usual substantial exodus, and the few remaining passengers — whom chance had left oddly, and, as it turned out, significantly distributed — were able at long last to stretch their legs, to transfer hats, newspapers, and other impedimenta from their laps to the vacated seats beside them, and for the first time since leaving Victoria Station to relax and be completely comfortable. Mostly they were somnolent at the approach of midnight, but between Borleston and Clough none of them actually slept. Fate had a conjuring trick in preparation, and they were needed as witnesses to it.

The station at Clough was not large, nor prepossessing, nor, it appeared, much frequented; but in spite of this the train, once having stopped there, evinced an unexpected reluctance to move on. The whistle's first confident blast having failed to shift it, there ensued a moment's offended silence; then more whistling, and when that also failed, a peremptory, unintelligible shouting. The train remained inanimate, however. And presently Gervase Fen, Professor of English Language and Literature in the University of Oxford, lowered the window of his compartment and put his head out, curious to know what was amiss.

Rain was falling indecisively. It tattooed in weak, petulant spasms against the station roof, and the wind on which it rode had a cutting edge. Wan bulbs shone impartially on slot-machines, timetables, a shuttered newspaper-kiosk, on peeling green paint and rust-stained iron. And near the clock a small group of men stood engrossed in peevish altercation.

Gervase Fen eyed them with disapproval for a moment, and then spoke. "Broken down?" he inquired unpleasantly. They swiveled round to stare at him. "Lost the driver?" he asked.

This second query was instantly effective. They hastened up to him in a bunch, and one of them — a massive, wall-eyed man who appeared to be the station master — said: "For God's sake, sir, *you* 'aven't seen 'im, 'ave you?"

"Seen whom?" Fen demanded mistrustfully.

"The engineer, sir. The driver."

"No, of course I haven't," said Fen. "What's happened to him?"

"'E's gorn, sir. 'Ooked it, some'ow or other. 'E's not in 'is cabin, nor we can't find 'im anywhere on the station, neither."

"Then he has absconded," said Fen, "with valuables of some description, or with some other engineer's wife."

The station master shook his head — less, it appeared, by way of contesting this hypothesis than as an indication of his general perplexity — and stared helplessly up and down the deserted platform. "It's a rum go, sir," he said, "and that's a fact."

"Well, there's one good thing about it, Mr. Maycock," said the younger of the two porters who were with him. "'E can't 'ave got clear of the station, not without having been seen."

The station master took some time to assimilate this, and even when he had succeeded in doing so, did not seem much enlightened by it. "'Ow d'you make that out, Wally?" he inquired.

"Well, after all, Mr. Maycock, the place is surrounded, isn't it?"

"Surrounded, Wally?" Mr. Maycock reiterated feebly. "What d'you mean, surrounded?"

Wally gaped at him. "Lord, Mr. Maycock, didn't you know? I thought you'd 'a' met the Inspector when you came back from your supper."

"Inspector, Wally?" Mr. Maycock could scarcely have been more bewildered if his underling had announced the presence of a gremlin or a ghost. "What Inspector?"

"Scotland Yard chap," said Wally importantly. "And 'alf a dozen men with 'im. They're after a burglar they thought 'd be on this train."

Mr. Maycock, clearly dazed by this melodramatic intelligence, took refuge from his confusion behind a hastily contrived breastwork of outraged dignity. "And why," he demanded in awful tones, "was I not *him*formed of this 'ere?"

"You 'ave bin informed," snapped the second porter, who was very old indeed, and who appeared to be tem-

peramentally subject to that vehement, unfocused rage which one associates with men who are trying to give up smoking. "You 'ave bin informed. We've just informed yer."

Mr. Maycock ignored this. "*If* you would be so kind," he said in a lofty manner, "it would be 'elpful for me to know at what time these persons of 'oom you are speaking put in an appearance 'ere."

"About twenty to twelve, it'd be," said Wally sulkily. "Ten minutes before this lot was due in."

"And it wouldn't 'ave occurred to you, would it" — here Mr. Maycock bent slightly at the knees, as though the weight of his sarcasm was altogether too much for his large frame to support comfortably — "to 'ave a dekko in my room and see if I was 'ere? *Ho* no. I'm only the station master, that's all I am."

"Well, I'm very sorry, Mr. Maycock," said Wally, in a tone of voice which effectively canceled the apology out, "but I wasn't to know you was back, was I? I told the Inspector you was still at your supper in the village."

At this explanation Mr. Maycock, choosing to overlook the decided resentment with which it had been delivered, became magnanimous. "Ah, well, there's no great 'arm done, I daresay," he pronounced; and the dignity of his office having by now been adequately paraded, he relapsed to the level of common humanity again. "Burglar, eh? Was 'e on the train? Did they get 'im?"

Wally shook his head. "Not them. False alarm, most likely. They're still 'angin' about, though." He jerked a grimy thumb towards the exit barrier. "That's the Inspector, there."

Hitherto, no one had been visible in the direction indicated. But now there appeared, beyond the barrier, a round, benign, clean-shaven face surmounted by a gray Homburg hat, at which Gervase Fen bawled, "Humbleby!" in immediate recognition. And the person thus addressed, having delivered the injunction, "Don't *move* from here, Millican," to someone in the gloom of the waiting room behind him, came onto the platform and in another moment had joined them.

"My dear Professor Fen," he said, "this *is* a pleasure. . . And you, sir" — he turned to Mr. Maycock — "will be the station master."

"Ah," said Mr. Maycock affirmatively. "I've 'eard why you're 'ere, Inspector. These lads of mine 'ave just told me."

"Yes," said Detective-Inspector Humbleby with native affability. "You were away when I arrived, so I took the liberty —"

"*That* I wasn't, sir," Mr. Maycock interrupted, anxious to vindicate himself. "I was in me office all the time, only these lads didn't think to look there. . . .'Ullo, Mr. Foster." This last greeting was directed to the harassed conductor, who had clearly been searching for the missing engineer. "Any luck?"

"Not a sign of 'im," said the conductor sombrely. "Nothing like this

'ere 'as ever 'appened on one of *my* trains before."

"It is 'Inkson, isn't it?"

The conductor shook his head: "No, Phil Bailey."

"Bailey?"

"Ah. Bailey sometimes took over from 'Inkson on this run." Here the conductor glanced uneasily at Fen and Humbleby. "It's irregular, o' course, but it don't do no 'arm as I can see. Bailey's 'ome's at Bramber, at the end o' this line, and 'e'd 'ave to catch this train any'ow to get to it, so 'e took over sometimes when 'Inkson wanted to stop in Town. . . . And now this 'as to 'appen. There'll be trouble, you mark my words." Evidently the unfortunate conductor expected to be visited with a substantial share of it.

"Well, I can't 'old out no longer," said Mr. Maycock. "I'll 'ave to ring 'Eadquarters straight away."

He departed in order to do this, and Humbleby, who had only the vaguest idea of what was going on, asked the others to enlighten him. When they had done this: "One thing's certain," he said, "and that is that the missing engineer hasn't left the station. My men are all round it, and they had orders to detain anyone who tried to get past them."

At this stage an elderly business man, who was sharing the same compartment with Fen and with a dotty-looking girl of the sort commonly found in Food Offices, irritably inquired if Fen proposed keeping the compartment window open all night. And Fen, acting on this hint, closed the window and went out to the platform.

"None the less," he said to Humbleby, "it'll be as well to interview your people and confirm that Bailey *hasn't* left. I'll go the rounds with you, and you can tell me about your burglar."

They left the conductor and the two porters exchanging theories about Bailey's disappearance, and walked along the platform. "Goggett is the burglar's name," said Humbleby. "Alfred Goggett. He's wanted for quite a series of jobs, but for the last few months he's been lying low, and we haven't been able to put our hands on him. Earlier this evening, however, he was spotted in Soho by a plainclothesman named, incongruously enough, Diggett. . . ."

"Really, Humbleby. . . ."

". . . and Diggett chased him to Victoria Station. Well, you know what Victoria's like. It's rather a rambling terminus, and apt to be full of people. Anyway, Diggett lost his man there. . . . Now, about midday today one of our more reliable narks brought us the news that Goggett had a hide-out here in Clough, so this afternoon Millican and I drove down here to look the place over. Of course, the Yard rang up the police here when they heard Goggett had vanished at Victoria; and the police here got hold of me; and here we all are. There was obviously a very good chance that Goggett would catch this train. Only unluckily he didn't."

"No one got off here?"

"No one got off or on. And I understand this is the last train of the day, so for the time being there's nothing more we can do. But sooner or later, of course, he'll turn up at his cottage here, and then we'll have him."

"And in the meantime," said Fen thoughtfully, "there's the problem of Bailey."

"In the meantime there's that. Now, let's see. . . ."

It proved that the six damp but determined men whom Humbleby had culled from the local constabulary had been so placed about the station precincts as to make it impossible for even a mouse to have left without their observing it; and not even a mouse, they stoutly asserted, had done so. Humbleby told them to stay where they were until further orders, and returned with Fen to the down platform.

"No loophole there," he pronounced. "And it's an easy station to — um — invest. If it had been a great sprawling place like Borleston, now, I could have put a hundred men round it, and Goggett might still have got clear. Of course, it's quite possible that Borleston's where he did leave the train."

"But in spite of you and your men," said Fen, "this engineer must at least have been able to leave his cabin unobserved." They were passing the cabin as he spoke, and he stopped to peer at its vacant interior. "As you see, there's no way through it into the remainder of the train."

Humbleby considered the disposition of his forces, and having done so: "Yes," he admitted, "he could have left the cabin without being seen; and for that matter, got to shelter somewhere in the station buildings."

"Weren't the porters on the platform when the train came in?"

"No, I don't think they were. We'd better make sure of it, though."

It turned out that the porters, having been enjoined by Humbleby to keep out of the way, had retired immediately after the arrival of the police to the Porters' Room; and that it was not until at least half a minute after the train had stopped that Wally had ventured out onto the platform in pursuance of his duties. As for Mr. Maycock, he had remained in his office until the conductor had haled him forth to take part in the search for Bailey.

"Well, Bailey's got to be in the station somewhere," said Humbleby, "so we'll have another look — a systematic one, this time."

Systematic or not, it turned out to be singularly barren of results. It established one thing only, and that was, that beyond any shadow of doubt, the missing engineer was not anywhere in, on, or under the station, nor anywhere in, on, or under his abandoned train.

And, unfortunately, it was also established that he could not, in the nature of things, be anywhere else.

Fen took no part in this investigation, having already foreseen its

inevitable issue. Instead, he retired to the ticket office, and there telephoned the station master at Borleston, representing himself, to that official's great alarm, to be Sir Eustace Missenden. With the aid of this gratuitous imposture he elicited the information that Bailey, and no one but Bailey, had been driving the train when it left Borleston. The station master's personal testimony to that fact could be, and was, independently corroborated by two porters. Moreover, the train had not, Fen remembered, either stopped or slowed down at any time between Borleston and Clough.

When Humbleby appeared to him, twenty minutes later, he was dozing by the ticket office fire; and Humbleby was not at all mollified by his news.

"The thing's impossible," he said glumly. "Nothing short of impossible! I can't imagine what to do next."

"Not impossible," said Fen through a yawn. "Rather a simple device, really. . . ." Then, more soberly: "But I'm afraid that what we have to deal with is something much more serious than a mere vanishing. In fact . . ."

The telephone rang, and after a moment's hesitation Humbleby answered it. The call was for him, and when, several minutes later, he put the receiver back on its hook, his face was grave.

"They've found a dead man," he said, "three miles along the line towards Borleston. He's got a knife in his back and has obviously been thrown out of a train. From their description of the face and clothes, it's quite certainly Goggett. And equally certainly, *that*" — he nodded towards the platform — "is the train he fell out of. . . . Well, my first and most important job is to interview the passengers. And anyone who was alone in a compartment will have a lot of explaining to do."

Most of the passengers had by now disembarked, and were standing about in various stages of bewilderment, annoyance, and futile inquiry. At Humbleby's command, and along with the conductor, the porters, and Mr. Maycock, they shuffled, feebly protesting, into the waiting room. And there, with Fen as an interested onlooker, a Grand Inquisition was set in motion.

Its results were both baffling and remarkable. Apart from the engineer, there had been nine people on the train when it left Borleston and there still were nine people on the train when it arrived at Clough; and each of them had two others to attest to the fact that during the whole crucial period he (or she) had behaved as innocently as a newborn infant. With Fen, there had been the elderly business man and the dotty girl; in another compartment there had likewise been three people, none of them connected with the others by blood, acquaintance, or avocation; and even the conductor had witnesses to his harmlessness, since from Victoria Station onwards he had been accompa-

nied in the baggage car by two melancholy men in cloth caps, whose mode of travel was explained by their being in unremitting personal charge of several doped-looking whippets. None of these nine, until the first search for Bailey was set on foot, had seen or heard anything amiss. None of them had had any opportunity of moving out of sight of his or her two companions. None of them had slept. And unless some unknown, traveling in one of the many empty compartments, had disappeared in the same fashion as Bailey — a supposition which Humbleby was by no means prepared to entertain — it seemed evident that Goggett must have launched himself into eternity unaided.

It was at about this point in the proceedings that Humbleby's self-possession began to wear thin, and his questions to become merely repetitive; and Fen, perceiving this, slipped out alone onto the platform. When he returned, ten minutes later, he was carrying a battered suitcase; and regardless of Humbleby, who seemed to be making some sort of speech, he carried this impressively to the centre table and put it down there.

"In this suitcase," he announced pleasantly, as Humbleby's flow of words petered out, "we shall find, I think, the engineer's uniform belonging to the luckless Bailey." He undid the catches. "And in addition, no doubt . . . *Stop him, Humbleby.*"

The scuffle that followed was brief and inglorious. Its protagonist, tackled round the knees by Humbleby, fell, struck his head against the fender, and lay still, the blood welling from a cut above his left eye.

"Yes, that's the culprit," said Fen. "And it will take a better lawyer than there is alive to save *him* from a rope's end."

Later, as Humbleby drove him to his destination through the December night, he said: "Yes, it had to be Maycock. And Goggett and Bailey had, of course, to be one and the same person. But what about motive?"

Humbleby shrugged. "Obviously, the money in that suitcase of Goggett's. There's a lot of it, you know. It's a pretty clear case of thieves falling out. We've known for a long time that Goggett had an accomplice, and it's now certain that that accomplice was Maycock. Whereabouts in his office did you find the suitcase?"

"Stuffed behind some lockers — not a very good hiding place, I'm afraid. Well, well, it can't be said to have been a specially difficult problem. Since Bailey wasn't in the station, and hadn't left it, it was clear *he'd never entered it.* But *someone* had driven the train in — and who could it have been *but* Maycock? The two porters were accounted for — by you; so were the conductor and all the passengers — by one another; and there just wasn't anyone else.

"And then, of course, the finding of Goggett's body clinched it. He hadn't been thrown out of either the occupied compartments, or the bag-

gage car; he hadn't been thrown out of any of the *un*occupied compartments, for the simple reason that there was nobody to throw him. *Therefore*, he was thrown out of the engineer's cabin. And since, as I've demonstrated, Maycock was unquestionably *in* the engineer's cabin, it was scarcely conceivable that Maycock had not been the one to do the throwing.

"Plainly, Maycock rode or drove into Borleston while he was supposed to be having his supper, and boarded the train — that is, the engineer's cabin — there. He kept hidden till the train was under way, and then took over from Goggett-Bailey while Goggett-Bailey changed into the civilian clothes he had with him. By the way, I rather guess that Maycock, to account for his presence, spun some fictional (as far as he knew) tale about the police being on Goggett-Bailey's track, and that the change was Goggett-Bailey's idea; I mean, that he had some notion of its assisting his escape."

Humbleby nodded. "That's it, approximately. I'll send you a copy of Maycock's confession as soon as I can get one made. It seems he wedged the safety-handle which operates these trains, knifed Goggett-Bailey, and chucked him out, and then drove the train into Clough and there simply disappeared, with the suitcase, into his own office. It must have given him a nasty turn to hear that the station was surrounded."

"It did," said Fen. "If your people hadn't been there, it would have looked, of course, as if Bailey had just walked off into the night. But chance was against Maycock all along. Your siege, and the queer grouping of the passengers, and the cloth-capped men in the baggage car — they were all part of an accidental conspiracy — if you can talk of such a thing — to defeat him; all part of a sort of fortuitous conjuring trick. . . ." He yawned prodigiously, and gazed out of the car window. "Do you know, I believe it's the dawn. . . . Next time I want to arrive anywhere, I'll travel by bus."

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*"Roy Vickers is one of the masters of the detective short story . . . even more notably in the soberly ironic accounts of the Department of Dead Ends, he has produced stories that rank with the finest contemporary crime writing."*

— ANTHONY BOUCHER
in "The New York Times"

# THE MAN WITH THE SNEER

*by ROY VICKERS*

RHODE GRENWOOD knew as well as any lawyer that motive is at best no more than a clue for the police and a clarification for the jury. Yet he took great trouble to conceal his motive for the murder of Gerald Raffen and no trouble at all to conceal the murder itself.

Grenwood was a well-to-do distributor in the newspaper trade, supplying about a thousand shopkeepers with newspapers, books, and stationery. He was thirty-five in 1930 when he murdered Raffen, who was two years younger. Grenwood was efficient and progressive but unadventurous — a large man but well contained, of athletic habits, socially a good mixer in spite of a streak of melancholy.

As boys they had been contemporaries at Charchester School and were there in the year of the fire, which caused such a scandal. Raffen was injured in the fire, and for this — as all their mutual friends knew — Grenwood had insisted on blaming himself. He had been prefect of the dormitory, responsible for the discipline and safety of twenty younger boys. The very public inquiry, courted by the school, gave Grenwood a wholly clean slate. When he persisted in his assertion that he was morally responsible, the presiding judge told him sharply that it was a form of conceit to assert that he could have done anything more to protect Raffen.

Hence, Raffen's left leg was artificial below the knee. In 1912, plastic surgery had not yet got into its stride. There was a two-inch scar on his left cheek, a lift on his lip which gave him a perpetual sneer; moreover, the left side of his face was paralyzed and vaguely out of focus. The total effect was short of being repulsive — passing him in the street you would hardly have noticed him — but one kept one's idle glance away from his face.

After Raffen's convalescence a strange friendship sprang up, intense on Grenwood's part. With something approaching condescension, Raffen accepted an invitation to spend part of the summer holidays in the house

on the Sussex Downs where Grenwood lived with his father, his mother having died some years previously. After two more such visits Raffen pleaded that he could not leave his mother so much alone. So Mrs. Raffen was invited too, and accepted — largely out of compassion for the nervous unease of Rhode Grenwood. After the inquiry she had gone out of her way to emphasize that neither she nor her son held him in the remotest degree responsible.

At her second visit Rhode subjected her — a widow — to an embarrassment of a nature that is astonishing when one remembers that he was then an intelligent undergraduate of nineteen. Gerald Raffen, as usual, had retired to the study after dinner to read. Rhode Grenwood joined the two elders in the drawing room, and solemnly — and somewhat pompously — suggested that his father should propose marriage to Mrs. Raffen and that Mrs. Raffen should accept, as this would make it so much easier all round for him to keep an eye on Gerald.

Mrs. Raffen recovered more quickly than Grenwood senior.

"At his age he thinks people of our age are so old that — that he doesn't even suspect that he might have made a fool of himself," she said, when they were alone. "I'm worried about Rhode, Mr. Grenwood. He's hysterically determined to protect Gerald. And Gerald doesn't want an older brother. Something will snap somewhere, and I'm afraid poor Rhode will be the one to suffer. I feel that something ought to be done."

The necessity for doing something was shortly removed by the Kaiser's war, which swept Rhode Grenwood into the Army. By the time the war was over both parents were dead. . . .

Rhode Grenwood had no talent for soldiering. After six months of training he received a commission, by virtue of his civil education. He could manage the routine duties of junior officer but, like many another, he was secretly worried about his nerve. He was all right the first time he went into action. The second time, it was a very near thing indeed. In those days it was called "hesitation to obey an order in the presence of the enemy." But before the papers came through he was in action again and was cited for gallantry.

The citation brought him a Military Cross and he felt as if he had stolen it. That sort of thing pertained to "the boys of the bulldog breed," to whose company he did not aspire to belong. He knew that, at the time, he had been wrestling with his own animal terror of an enemy he regarded as superior in all the relevant talents. His nerves had played tricks. A boyish voice, which he knew could not be in the trenches, was screaming his name: "Grenwood! Grenwood! *Grenwood!*" He believed he had screamed too as he rushed at the German machine-gun post, to escape from the greater fear. And the men had rushed with him — which had turned the nightmare into a success.

As commonly happens in such cases, the whole history repeated itself some months later; only, instead of a short rush, it was a five-hour job and he was awarded a D.S.O. During the five hours, whenever he began totting up the dangers, his nerves produced the impossible voice, with the same cry. He was physically exhausted when he got back to H.Q.: waves of dizziness assailed him while he was reporting to the major.

"You had twenty men with you, hadn't you, Grenwood?"

"Yes, sir. I tell you, I counted them as they came past me. How could I possibly hear a boy shouting my name — with the woodwork of the cubicles crackling like the devil!"

"Wrong war, old boy!" said the major. "Have a drink."

Every week he wrote to Raffen, who replied at long, irregular intervals. On his home leaves (96 hours beginning and ending at the railway terminus in London) he always sought him out. On one such leave he tracked him, with difficulty, to a cocktail party, where he met Jill Wensley, the grave-eyed daughter of a successful barrister, who had become a nurse. Besides the grave eyes, which looked as if she understood everything he wanted to say to her, she had the kind of voice he liked best and a physical beauty which, he assured himself, was far too individual to be defined.

Thereafter, he also wrote once a week to Jill; when time pressed, he began to write to her instead of to Raffen. Jill always wrote back. She told him, among other things, that Raffen and his mother had taken a house in the suburb of Rubington, where she also lived. This was good news, because Jill could keep him posted as to Raffen's movements, though, very soon, he was more interested in Jill's.

Jill, in fact, seemed to have pulled him out of his absorption. Jill and his own decorations, which he began to take seriously. The Army, after all, did not dish out decorations for nothing — the pose of the blushing hero who pretended it was all luck was being overworked. Why not admit to himself that he was — well, a brave man! By the time he was demobilized he had acquired a definitely appreciative view of his own character. In a sense, he had almost forgotten Raffen. He was in a great hurry to show himself to Jill in civil clothing.

When he called on Jill at her father's house, Raffen was with her in the drawing-room. Grenwood's memory had slurred the perpetual sneer, so that it seemed to have acquired a new sharpness. Raffen stayed for five minutes and then, pleading urgency, limped off. Jill was charming, but Grenwood was inexplicably deflated. Now and again, he glanced at himself in a mirror, groping for the reassurance of the ribbons that no longer decorated his chest. So he talked about mutual friends and left early.

It took him a week of muddled emotionalism to ask Jill to marry

him. When she said she would, he very nearly cried with relief. Then he braced himself.

"I'm going straight round to collect Gerald's congratulations!"

"Well, don't look so fierce about it, darling, or you'll frighten the poor boy," said Jill. And Jill laughed as she said it. An ordinary, happy laugh.

It was not ferocity at all. Twice, during the ten minutes' walk to Raffen's house, he came near to bolting to the railway station. But he plowed on, asking himself why he was making such a fuss about telling Gerald. It would not be startling news — only a friendly courtesy.

Raffen had qualified as a dentist. His artificial leg left him a normal ability to stand. He was assistant to a practitioner in Chelsea.

"You look thundering well pleased with yourself, Rhode old man!" he exclaimed — which made things no easier for Grenwood. Remarks like that were always difficult to interpret. One was likely to forget that the sneer was perpetual — and the poor chap's voice was always a bit raspy, even when he was not feeling waspish.

"Well, the fact is — that is, Jill and I —"

"Of course! But I had to wait until you'd said it. Thank God, there's still a bottle of old brandy in the sideboard!"

Coming from Raffen, it seemed a little too hearty to be true. But the strain eased with the aid of the old brandy. Raffen asked if they were to be married soon.

"As soon as we can fix things. I understand there's a sort of house shortage."

"It's difficult to get a house within fifty miles of Town, but you needn't worry. This place has eight rooms and half an acre. I live in two rooms and never go in the garden. If you think it would suit you, you can have it at a valuation. In any case, I'm going to live over the shop. Talk it over with Jill."

He talked it over with her a couple of hours later on the telephone. She seemed to hesitate, and then agreed.

They were married within a month. When asked to be best man, Raffen propounded a dental conference in Scotland. After their honeymoon they moved into the house that had been Raffen's. He did not come to the housewarming. Later, he declined invitations to dinner, with appropriate excuses. On the death of his father, Grenwood had sold the house in Sussex. For a month in the summer they took a bungalow on the coast and asked Raffen for weekends, but in vain. By Christmas, it had become obvious that he would accept no invitation.

Again Grenwood enjoyed a respite. It lasted for nearly three years of contentment and steady progress in all directions. In his eyes, Jill retained her beauty, adding a jolly comradeship. Once more he found himself able to take an appreciative view of his own character.

The respite ended one morning at breakfast. Jill was reading the paper.

"*Oh* — it's about Gerald!" she exclaimed. She read on. "Drunk and disorderly and using abusive language . . . in a public house in Theobald's Road."

"Good Lord! That's a ghastly quarter at night — for a drink. Must have been some tomfool party going slumming —"

"No, it wasn't." Jill's voice was sepulchral. "The magistrate makes an inane joke about raising the price to regular customers. 'This time, Raffen, it will cost you five pounds.' Oh, Rhode, what had we better do?"

That, he thought, was an extraordinarily silly question. She was not often silly. Perhaps it was some trick of the light, but it almost looked as if she were putting on weight. She would lose her figure if she were not careful.

"I don't see that we can do anything," he said. "I don't see how we come into it at all."

"But we must! Getting tight is one thing. But in a pub! And that magistrate's beastly joke about regular customers!"

The regular customer joke was certainly an obstacle. Grenwood gathered his forces and rushed it.

"Probably the reporter muddled one case with another. Anyhow, there's no cause for anxiety. Gerald has his head screwed on the right way. In spite of his misfortune — poor chap! but most of us have something to put up with — he's making out. He's gaining clinical experience with a well-established man. His mother left him enough to buy a decent practice when he's ready."

In short, few men enjoyed so many guarantees of a successful and happy life as did Gerald Raffen. In the middle of it all Grenwood lost his nerve and dried up.

"I'll have to start for the office now," he said. "We'll talk about it tonight."

He was not, he told himself during the day, Gerald Raffen's keeper. Gerald would justifiably resent any comment on his conduct as grossly impertinent. He would explain all that to Jill.

The explanation fell flat.

"I don't understand, dear," she said patiently. "You used to be so concerned about him."

"That was some time ago. In the interval — well, he's dropped us, don't you think?"

"You can't apply ordinary standards to Gerald. His disfigurement and his leg — that sort of thing throws a man out of the normal — especially with women. And I suppose he's made himself a social outcast and taken to drink and — the rest of it."

He had the false impression that she was trying to make him angry and that somehow he had goaded her into it. It was self-hatred that stung him into asking:

"I say, Jill, has Gerald some special significance for you?"

"That's rather a funny question for you to ask me, Rhode." She paused, but he made no use of it. "The answer is — yes-and-no. As

you know, I saw a great deal of him while you were in the Army. I found his society very stimulating. With me, he unbent, and I did the same. That was obvious in my letters."

"Were you about to tell me something that was not obvious?"

"I'm not in the confessional box, Rhode. I have nothing to confess to you, as my husband. Oh, dear, we're both getting worked up, and it would have been so much better to keep everydayish!"

"No, no — we're not worked up!" It was not because he doubted her fidelity that he must hear all she could be induced to tell him . . . "Finish it, dear, now you've started."

"A rather awful thing happened," she said. "We were in the drawing-room. He was rambling — and he can ramble beautifully when he unbends. I had turned on the light and was drawing the blinds. He didn't do anything suddenly — it was all part of the ramble, in a way. He put his arms round me. He intended to kiss me and I intended to let him. And then — God forgive me! — the light was on his poor face and I — I shuddered. He must have felt me shudder.

"He did not kiss me — how I wish he had! He put his head on my shoulder so that I couldn't see his face, and he said: 'I was going to ask you to marry me, but I'm not, now. Goodbye, my darling.'

"He lit a cigarette and sat down, and we both chattered a little to restore our nerve. Then he said: 'I think Rhode will turn up in a minute or two. I'll just stay until he comes, if I may.' I thought he was raving. But you did come — out of the war. You hadn't wired or anything, you know . . . I haven't seen Gerald since then."

Grenwood remained silent. Gerald could have found out about his movements if he had made it his business to do so. That proposal had been timed. There was some kind of system in it.

"That he proposed to me — obliquely, anyhow — is of no importance. That I hurt a sensitive man's feelings is very important indeed. So you see, dear, when you ask whether he has any special significance for me, I think the answer must be — yes. You aren't upset, are you?"

"Not about your part in it, Jill." He added sharply: "I'm not upset at all. Why should I be? I've not even any complaint against him. You and I were not engaged. He had a perfect right to try his luck."

And Gerald Raffen had had no luck. Because he had lost a leg and his face was disfigured.

"So you see," added Jill, "I do feel we ought to do something."

During the next day he elaborated the argument about its being a gross impertinence to interfere with Raffen. The day after that, he stopped fooling himself and took a taxi to the dentist in Chelsea and asked for Mr. Raffen. He was imprisoned in the waiting room for an hour. And then the feather-headed receptionist took him in to Raffen's chief, and he had to explain.

"But Raffen left me about two years ago. I've no idea where he is now." The dentist was curt, but relented. "His professional conduct has never been questioned. You can find him through the Register."

The Register yielded an address, in the poorer part of Hampstead, which he found with great difficulty. Eventually he turned into a short alley in which there was an external iron staircase at the back of a stable of early eighteenth century design. He knocked with his fist on an ill-fitting modern door, which was opened by a blowsy woman in a kimono.

"I am a friend of Mr. Raffen's."

"He's out now, dearie!" Grenwood did not believe her. "Couldn't you write, so's he'd be at home when you came?"

"You are quite sure he is out?"

The woman looked more thoroughly at Grenwood and summed him up with sufficient accuracy.

"Tell you what, sir. You come back in half an hour and I'll have him all tidied up for you. Make it a good half-hour, mind."

He made it three-quarters of an hour. When he returned it was Raffen who admitted him, Raffen in a decent lounge suit, looking very little the worse.

"Hullo, Rhode! I was expecting you. Come in, old man. Lottie-the-slut has effaced herself. This place used to be occupied by Wellington's head-groom. Not so bad, is it?"

It was indeed not so bad. It was tastefully decorated: some of the furniture he recognized.

"Thought I'd look you up. Jill is wondering why you never come to see us."

"And now you can tell her! If you do it tactfully, you can even tell her about Lottie-the-slut. I think her name's Lottie. They come and go. And you'd be surprised that most of them are jolly good charwomen."

"Chuck it, Gerald!" pleaded Grenwood. "What's been happening?"

"A natural process. I have found a milieu that suits me. But you're thinking of the police court, of course. I like noisy pubs and I like drinking a lot."

"Isn't it bad for business?"

"Hardly — for my business! I only do locum work, and a spot of technical reviewing — which is all I want. As I've no future, I prefer to be comfortable."

"Why have you no future?"

"Because I wouldn't know what to do with it — because my history would repeat itself." Grenwood looked blank, so Raffen explained: "A few years ago — try not to laugh, old man! — I fell in love. Careless of me, but — she shared my slant on so many things. Each of us could light up the dark corners for the other. You can fill in the color for yourself — soul mates in a universe of two, with the rest of humanity just background figures."

He meant Jill, of course. Grenwood was at a loss. He ought to confess that he knew. But Raffen had already

said enough to make it difficult. And there was no means of stopping him.

"I thought that my scar and the rest of it wouldn't count. And so did she — or she would never have made it possible for me to touch her. When I did touch her, her nervous system revolted. That was a shock for her as well as for me. It broke us up." Raffen paused and added: "She married one of the background figures — a worthy, beefy fellow — and I borrowed the nearest Lottie."

Grenwood went to the window and stared down at the empty alley. Did Raffen suspect him of knowing that the girl was Jill? There could be no certainty.

"Isn't it rather knock-kneed, Gerald, to let everything rot because of a romantic disappointment?"

"I don't think of it in romantic terms. To me the girl is a symbol — a notice board. Keep Off The Grass. There is no place for me among my own kind — and I no longer want one."

Grenwood was stumped. A long silence was broken by a raspy chuckle from Raffen.

"I can do nothing to help you, Rhode!" The perpetual sneer gave emphasis to the words. "And for God's sake, stop trying to help me!"

On his way home, Grenwood churned it over. *He* can do nothing to help *me!*

His report to Jill escaped positive misrepresentation, but contained no reference to Raffen's "romantic disappointment."

"We have done all we can," pronounced Jill. "We shall have to try and forget that he ever existed."

To Grenwood that meant no more than leaving him out of the conversation. Raffen, he supposed, must be dipping into his capital. Dipping, not necessarily squandering. For a year or so, Grenwood did nothing about it, hoping that circumstances would again alter the perspective and give him another respite. He began to lose weight. During 1927, he tried a series of tortuous little enterprises to help Raffen by stealth, all doomed to futility. There was an elaborate mechanism by which a hard-up dentist was induced to employ Raffen at a salary, paid by Grenwood. It lasted a fortnight. Frequently he would sneak out to Hampstead to watch the end of the alley. Twice during 1928 he saw Raffen coming home but lacked the courage to accost him. Now and again, catching sight of his reflection in a shop window, he would pretend that he could see a scar on his own left cheek and his lip lifted in a perpetual sneer at himself.

"Darling, I'm afraid you'll have to own up that you're worrying about Gerald."

"I know I'm a fool."

"A very dear fool! And a very brave man who is frightened of a shadow on the wall which he has made himself."

"There's no shadow on any wall!" he cried. "What's behind all this, Jill?"

"Rhode, you've been — ill — for

a long time. You mutter in your sleep."

"What about?"

"That fire at Charchester."

"What do I say about it? About — the fire?" She could feel the words being dragged out of him.

"Nothing coherent."

"Then what has Gerald been saying to you?"

"Oh, Rhode! As if I would see Gerald without telling you!" She went on: "I've read the official report. It told me only what I already knew — that no one can tell me anything about that fire except you — and you can only tell me of — a shadow on the wall. Why don't you tell me, Rhode? It would vanish if we looked at it together."

Grenwood relaxed. The defensive irritability disappeared.

"My dear girl, it's nothing as elaborate as all that!" He laughed, almost naturally. "Perhaps I am a bit of a sentimentalist. But — one's past is always a part of one's present, if you see what I mean. We were close friends as boys. And I suppose I am haunted by what happened to him — especially as he seems to be making a mess of his life."

Two years later, Raffen's name was again in the papers, for the same offense, but at a different court. There was no joke by the magistrate and the fine was only forty shillings. The punch came in the last line.

*Defendant asked for time in which to pay the fine: when this was refused he was removed in custody to serve the alternative sentence of fourteen days.*

So Raffen was penniless!

"I've got him now!" he said to himself, hoping that Jill had not read the news report. But Jill had.

"If he's difficult about taking money, you might be able to use the fact that he could probably have got a hundred or so more for the house, if he had put it up for auction."

By midday, Grenwood had paid the fine and was waiting for Raffen to be released. In due course, Raffen appeared in the hall, unescorted. He was unshaved and looked dusty. It was a very cold day, but he wore neither overcoat nor gloves. The perpetual sneer was lifted in a grin.

"Congratulations, old man!" said Raffen.

"Come and have a spot of lunch," said Grenwood.

"Splendid!" They left the prison together. "Easy there! You've forgotten I can't walk as fast as you can."

Over lunch, in a restaurant near the prison, Raffen told a number of waspish anecdotes about himself in the prison. Grenwood, who was learning caution, contributed reminiscences of the Army. As the meal finished, Raffen lapsed into silence.

"Now we've stopped chattering, we can talk," said Grenwood.

" 'Little Tommy Tucker must sing for his supper,' " chirped Raffen. "We'll adjourn to my place. And we certainly can't talk dry. My cellar, unfortunately, is empty. Let's see, I owe you two quid for the fine, ten

bob for the costs. On Friday I shall receive a check for a fiver for some reviews. If you can oblige me with the other two quid ten, I'll endorse the check and post it to you."

Grenwood paid for the taxi, but Raffen directed it. It stopped outside a wine merchant's, where Raffen bought two bottles of whiskey, which Grenwood carried to the stable flat.

The first thing Grenwood noticed was that the flat was now very dirty — the stream of Lotties had dried up. Most of Raffen's furniture had been replaced with second-hand gimcrackery. They sat in upright chairs at a ramshackle table. Raffen opened one of the bottles. The glasses had to be washed before they could be used.

"Cheers!" exclaimed Raffen. Their eyes met. Each became aware that, after years of repression, the moment of open hostility had arrived. "Rhode, you're crumpling up, old man! Why don't you take to drink, too? We've got the same complaint. Both afraid of what we might see in the looking-glass."

Grenwood did not intend to be diverted.

"When you offered me your house at a valuation —"

"I remember! It was old brandy then. You liked it and I liked it. And you liked telling me about Jill. That was a very graceful fade-out, Rhode — until you spoiled it."

"If I had known it was to be a fade-out, I wouldn't have accepted your offer of the house. There's reason to believe that you could have got another five hundred for it at auction. In the circumstances, whether you feel insulted or not, I must insist on repaying the five hundred."

Raffen laughed, drained his glass, and filled up again. Grenwood dropped an envelope on the table.

"In that envelope is a check for five hundred pounds, and twenty pounds in currency for your immediate needs. You can repay the twenty, if you like, when you've cleared the check."

"Jill put you up to that!" As Grenwood made no answer, Raffen added: "You're trying to buy. I have nothing to sell you. Drink up, old man."

"No, thanks. I'm going."

Grenwood stood up. He picked up his hat, set it down while he put on his gloves, then picked it up again, and put it on.

"Don't forget your luggage." Raffen pointed to the envelope lying on the table. "If you leave it there, I shall post it to Jill."

"You're broke, Gerald. You'll starve. They'll put you away where no one will understand your sarcasm. Why won't you take the money?"

"Because, though a down-and-out, I'm not a crook. Figure this out for yourself, Rhode. When one man says to another, 'I forgive you'—"

"Forgive me for what?" cried Grenwood.

"— the words mean only, 'I will not seek vengeance.' They can't mean anything else at all. I knew it — when I was fifteen."

"*Forgive me for what?*" Grenwood's voice was dry and shrill.

"I accuse you of nothing. It's you who've plunged yourself into an automatic, self-starting hell. Good Lord, man! You've got the woman who would have been mine if the fire hadn't turned me into a gargoyle. And because I get drunk about it, you offer me money to mumble some maudlin abracadabra to free you from the curse. You will never be free."

Grenwood put one gloved hand on the back of the chair, to steady himself. His voice was quavery.

"You're quite right — except that it isn't any mystical nonsense," he faltered. "Listen, Gerald, if you can! I have a sort of nervous tic — a cloud in my brain — about that fire. You can clear it up. I'm groveling to you for the truth, as I've groveled for your friendship —"

"Rats, laddie! If you'd had a cloud in your brain you'd have paid that five hundred quid to a psychiatrist to shift it. I was wrong about the looking-glass. You aren't afraid of what you might reveal to yourself. You're afraid of what I might reveal to others."

"You must be drunk already, if you can believe that. The report protects me —"

"Jill would believe anything I told her about that fire."

"Leave Jill's name out of it!"

"We can't," asserted Raffen. "You forgot that fire during the war. But you began to remember it again when you held my girl in your arms. Wait till I find my hat — I'll come with you. And you and I and Jill will soon shift that cloud from your brain."

"I won't take you to Jill. You're not sober."

"Let's see — yes, I have enough for the taxi to Rubington. Drunk or sober — with you, or without you — the result will be the same. She'll have a nervous revulsion against you, this time. Reaction in my favor . . . I never thought of that. What a joke! Jill! The last of the Lotties!"

Grenwood took in the words, but he could see only the perpetual sneer, which his hysteria magnified beyond bearing. He snatched up the unopened whiskey bottle as a mallet with which to destroy the perpetual sneer. He went on wielding the mallet until the bottle broke and the whiskey splashed over the blood-soaked hair.

He let the neck of the broken bottle fall from his gloved hand. Then he left the flat, shutting the ill-fitting outer door behind him. He had to walk for some five minutes before he found a taxi, near the wine merchant's. He noticed that the wine merchant's clock said five past three.

In the taxi that was taking him to the office he smelled whiskey. Some had splashed onto his shoes. He rubbed them on the mat.

That evening he gave Jill a substantially truthful account of his day, merely antedating his departure from the flat by some three or four minutes.

"I left him a check for five hundred, but I doubt whether it will ever be cashed. He was very spiteful."

"About — the fire?" asked Jill.

"Oh, no! Nothing about the fire! Just sneering at our attempts to help him."

"Funny! I did hear that he had been writing begging letters to people he met at the tennis club here."

"It doesn't matter to us. I shall never see him again. It will be easy now to take your advice — I mean, to forget that he ever existed."

The body was found the following Monday, five days later, by the rent collector, the news-agent and milkman having suspended credit. Before Inspector Karslake arrived on the scene the local police had discovered, from gossip, that a "tall, well-dressed gentleman" had emerged with deceased from a taxi at the wine merchant's and had accompanied him to the flat, leaving it at about three o'clock.

Karslake was at Grenwood's office in the early afternoon. The check and the notes, though an odd combination, very strongly suggested that Grenwood had been paying blackmail and had lost his head. Karslake began by asking if he knew Raffen.

"Very well! A personal friend." He glanced at Karslake's card. "May I ask — ?"

"He has been murdered," said Karslake and watched the reaction.

There was, in effect, no reaction. Grenwood sat at his desk in total silence.

"When did you last see Raffen?"

"Last Tuesday. At his flat. But I had better tell you the whole unhappy circumstances." Grenwood began with the meeting at the prison, was precise about the sums of money, the call at the wine merchant's.

"I was not there very long. Twenty minutes, perhaps. It was about three when I left."

The frankness of the report, corroborated by his own information, was disappointing to Karslake.

"Had he demanded money of you on any other occasion?"

"Demanded money!" snapped Grenwood. "He never did any such thing! I thrust it on him, having grave doubts whether he would cash the check. I've been trying to help him for years. I've had to resort to benevolent trickery — and the trickery failed."

At the blank look on Karslake's face he went on: "The poor fellow had a great many disappointments. He took to drink and messed up his career. My wife and I tried hard to find some way of helping him, but his social pride made it all impossible. As to that check, we both regarded it as almost a moral debt to him —" Grenwood told him about the house.

Karslake left, with the rueful reflection that the blackmail theory had fallen down, especially as Grenwood had brought his wife into it. The motive obviously had not been robbery. That left only revenge.

Raffen evidently had been not a crook but a genteel waster.

In a week or two he had rounded up most of the Lotties, including the one who had seen Grenwood seven years ago. Gaining nothing, he traced Raffen, with some help from Grenwood, from the time he sold the house in 1919, which seemed far back enough. There was not the ghost of a motive against anyone nor the ghost of a trail. The only fingerprints in the flat were those of deceased and Grenwood. There were no prints on the neck of the broken whiskey bottle.

After a month's adjournment a Coroner's jury returned "murder by a person unknown." Grenwood told Karslake that he would be responsible for the funeral expenses and for any other claims that might arise because, as the Inspector already knew, he considered that he had morally owed the deceased £500.

In 1932 — two years after the death of Raffen — Detective Inspector Rason of the Department of Dead Ends received a slip marked *re Raffen*, attached to a visiting-card, *Lieutenant-Commander N. Waenton.*

"I am a Naval officer," explained Waenton, somewhat unnecessarily. "I've been on a foreign station for three years and didn't know what had happened to Raffen. I dropped in on the chance that Scotland Yard would be good enough to give me some information."

"Depends on what sort of information you want."

"I can't find out whether Raffen left any money, and I thought you might know. I have a small claim against any estate there is. I wouldn't bother — only, as you've probably heard, we're always broke in the Navy."

"I can't tell you offhand." Rason produced a dossier and rummaged in it. He came upon Karslake's note that Grenwood would be responsible for reasonable claims and expenses, wondering vaguely what it meant.

"As far as we are concerned," he said grandly, "it would depend on the nature of the claim. There is provisional — er — provision, if you understand me."

"It's an I.O.U. for a tenner." Waenton produced a pocket case. "And here's the letter that came with it. He sent the I.O.U. before I sent him the money."

The letter began, *Dear old Waenton.*

"You knew Raffen very well, Commander?"

"Not exactly. Hadn't seen him since we were boys at Charchester. Sort of special bond, in a way. There was a fire — we were in the same dormitory. The other boys and I got out safely, but Raffen was badly scarred. Lost most of one leg, too. As a matter of fact I met another man in the East — a planter — not one who had been in the dormitory. Raffen had touched him for £25. I fancy he used an Old Boys list and wrote to everybody."

"Shouldn't be surprised," said Rason untruthfully. "If you care to

leave this with us, Commander, I can let you know shortly."

When his caller had gone, Rason studied the letter. It was an educated version of the usual begging letter, with which he was familiar. Then he dived into the dossier.

"Grenwood says Raffen refused all offers of money on account of his social pride. He proves it by quoting the dentist, who was to pay Raffen a salary at Grenwood's cost. But Raffen writes a begging letter, to two men, on the old-school-tie gag. You might say Grenwood begs Raffen to beg from him and gets turned down every time. Why?"

The next morning he called on the dentist who had been approached by Grenwood, and asked for confirmation.

"The arrangement only lasted a fortnight. Raffen said, very bluntly, 'You haven't enough patients to need an assistant. Grenwood put you up to this.' I didn't admit it, but of course he was right. I never saw Raffen again."

In the afternoon Rason called at Grenwood's office.

"I'm following a money trail in the Raffen case, Mr. Grenwood," he said, almost as if he were speaking to a colleague. "I see a note by Chief Inspector Karslake that you are willing to pay all 'claims,' whatever that means. Are you willing to meet this?"

He showed him the I.O.U. and the begging letter.

"Good heavens! This is utterly incredible! You can take it from me that letter's a forgery."

"I never thought of that," said Rason. "Meaning that man wasn't a naval officer at all?"

"No, I don't! I mean that Raffen was friendly with some very low types. When he was drunk he might have spilled enough information for a crook to be able to write that letter."

"Thanks for the tip, Mr. Grenwood," said Rason, knowing well that no professional forger would take all that trouble on the chance of receiving ten pounds. Also, the letter was written from Raffen's address.

So far, he had only the naval officer's letter, the planter being too nebulous to quote. He sent the letter, with other specimens of Raffen's handwriting, to be tested for forgery. Then he thought he might as well try other old Charchester boys who happened to live in London.

The difficulty was to get hold of an Old Boys list. Charchester was a couple of hours out of London, so he took a chance and called on the headmaster, asking for a list and giving his reason.

"I admit that Raffen wrote to me too — and that I made him a small loan. Some of the other masters were also importuned. But can this investigation serve any purpose, now that the unhappy man is dead?"

"We have to find out who killed him, sir. It's most probable that he was killed by a man he had been blackmailing."

"Blackmail! I hope he didn't sink to

that. Cadging is bad enough. But to blackmail an old schoolfellow would be abominable. I feel sure you can put that thought out of your mind."

"Was there a contemporary of Raffen's here, sir, named Grenwood?"

"Your train of thought is obvious. And if I may say so, Inspector, as obviously fallacious. There was no possibility of his levying blackmail on Grenwood. The report made it abundantly clear that no kind of blame attached to Grenwood."

Rason agreed with enthusiasm, not having the least idea what the headmaster was talking about. He was given an Old Boys list and a copy of the report on the fire, which he read on the way back. From his point of view, it was a depressing document, for Grenwood emerged very creditably. Yet the headmaster had come over very headmasterish about that fire. Might be worth shaking it up in the lucky bag. . . .

So, back to the original riddle: Raffen had been cadging for fivers and tenners from everybody except Grenwood; and from Grenwood he had turned down offers of hundreds.

Perhaps because he was demanding thousands? There could be, he thought, no other explanation.

On his next call at Grenwood's office he took Chief Inspector Karslake with him.

"Our experts have certified that this letter and I.O.U. are not forgeries, Mr. Grenwood. Moreover, we know that Raffen wrote similar letters to the headmaster and other masters at Charchester. Will you admit that you misled us as to Raffen's character, admit that he had no social pride?"

"I have to accept your statement," said Grenwood. "I am utterly astounded. I can only say that I misled you in good faith — in the light of my own experience with him."

"Now, as we've agreed he had no social pride, we want another explanation of why he refused to let you help him in a big way."

A long silence told Rason he had registered. Grenwood was racking his brain for a credible lie. Why had Raffen begged tenners from others and refused hundreds from him? The sneer danced before his eyes.

"I have no explanation to offer."

"The jury will want one," said Rason. "And they'll probably like to hear all we can tell 'em about that fire!"

Grenwood felt panic rising. As in the trenches long ago, his nerves played him tricks. Again the boyish voice that could not be there screamed his name: *Grenwood! Tell them you heard me calling your name and you wouldn't turn back because you were afraid for your own skin. Tell them!* And once again Grenwood rushed from the greater fear to an enemy superior in all the relevant talents.

"He was blackmailing me because he had found out I had been unfaithful to my wife. He asked too much. And I lost my temper and hit him with the bottle."

Again the sneer danced before his eyes . . .

·Continued from back cover

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—*continued on inside cover*

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