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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, Vol. 18, No. 92, JULY 1951 Published monthly by Mercury Publications, Inc., at 35¢ a copy. Annual subscription $4.00 in U.S.A and possessions, Canada and the Pan American Union, $5.00 in all other countries. Publication office, Concord, N. H Editorial and General offices, 570 Lexington Ave., New York 22, N. Y. Entered as second class matter at the post office at Concord, N. H under the act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1951, by Mercury Publications, Inc. All rights reserved Protection secured under the International Copyright Convention and the Pan-American Copyright Convention Printed in U.S.A.

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WINNER OF A SECOND PRIZE: A. H. Z. CARR

Most readers of EQMM will not forget for a long time A. H. Z. Carr's "The Trial of John Nobody," which won a Second Prize in our Fifth Annual Contest. In your Editors' opinion, this was one of the finest original stories we have read in the past decade, and have had the privilege of publishing in these pages since the birth of this magazine.

In last year's contest A. H. Z. Carr again won a Second Prize — but this time with an entirely different kind of detective story. As Mr. Carr himself wrote to your Editors, "Murder at City Hall" was "my first attempt at a formal detective story, and in writing it I felt a greater respect than ever for the masters of the art."

Don't let Mr. Carr's modesty fool you: his first attempt at the straightforward detective story, "complete with clues, suspects, and deductions," is one which any "master of the art" would be justly proud of.

Like all Mr. Carr's stories, "Murder at City Hall" had its origin, its proximate cause, in a combination of real-life incident and creative imagination. Some years ago, Mr. Carr met a group of big-city politicians on a holiday, and he became fascinated with their specific view of life. Then, later, he had a talk with a Weather Bureau official who pointed out the commercial implications of weather forecasting and rain-making. And in those two sources of supply, Mr. Carr found the essential ingredients of what he calls "his brew." Precisely how the actual plot of the story jelled is now lost in the mists of Mr. Carr's memory, as is also the precise origin of his flatfooted narrator — although Babe Higgins, the narrator, is undoubtedly the synthesis of all the cops Mr. Carr has known and liked in his own lifetime. . . .

MURDER AT CITY HALL

by A. H. Z. CARR

CONFIDENTIALLY, I am the guy who steered the Commish to the answer in the Holcombe case. Just ask him, if you do not believe me. He says that is why he likes to have me around, because out of the mouths of babes. He is joking, of course. . . . On the Force they call me Babe Hig-

gins, on account I am six feet two and weigh two hundred and twenty.

We got the news about Holcombe at the last big party rally before election. The Commish had to be there, of course. Politics. I go along, being his bodyguard and under orders from His Honor the Mayor, Johnny Connors himself, to stay on the job at all times. This has been going on ever since the Commish busted up the big gambling syndicate and we got word that some of those lice had threatened to get him. The Mayor says he is taking no chances on losing the best Police Commissioner the city ever had.

At the rally Johnny Connors is sitting near us. He is wearing his big grin over a maroon bow tie, with his empty cigarette holder at the usual cocky angle, but you can see the circles under his eyes getting darker by the minute. The boys are whooping it up for victory, and the fifth speaker on the platform is saying what the first four said, every vote counts, the party got to get out the vote tomorrow and win, and I am thinking, "Praise be, this is the last one of these things I will have to sit through for two years no matter who wins," when a cop in uniform comes in and hands me a note and whispers, "For Commissioner Danwood."

I give it to the Commish. He reads it and gets up quiet and eases himself down the aisle. I go after him. When he passes the Mayor I see Johnny wink at him and hear him whisper, "Where you going, Danny-boy?" The Commish just smiles and slides out. Waiting in the lobby is Inspector Stotter, who is a smart cookie, even though he looks and talks like a college professor. He says, "Commissioner, I have just come from City Hall, and I thought you would want to know right away. Somebody shot Dr. Holcombe."

It takes me a second before I get who he means. Holcombe is the guy who makes the rain — made the rain, that is, for Stotter says he is dead.

The Commish frowns and says, "That's a rotten shame. He was a fine young fellow."

When the Mayor borrowed Holcombe from the state university, even though he voted with the wrong party, the newspapers played it up big. This was a good time for the Mayor not to think about party politics, because for a while the dry spell we had looked like it could go on forever. The reservoirs were way down, not only the ones upstate, where the watershed starts, but also the two big reservoirs inside the city limits. Although people laughed about not taking baths, they were plenty sore, and down at City Hall everybody got new creases in the forehead trying to answer complaints. Then Holcombe begins to go up in that plane of his and spray clouds with dry ice, and sure enough, every time he does it — whammo, rain. Some say he was lucky, but if it was luck he sure made a pass every time he rolled the dice. The level in the reservoirs went up a little and he was a kind of public hero, and Johnny Connors took a lot of credit for hiring him.

The Commish stands there in the lobby of the auditorium and thinks for a second. Whenever I look at him, I always wonder how some of these detectives in books got the nerve to pretend they can tell what a guy is just from his appearance. Over that sawed-off, middle-aged figure of his the Commish just has a common American face — gray hair, what he has of it, which isn't much, stubby nose, big jaw, steady blue eyes. In his tux, which he was wearing that night, he could have been taken for anything — a business man, or a lawyer, or a politician. Instead, he was just a cop. That is all he ever was — rookie, plainclothesman, Detective-Sergeant, Lieutenant, Inspector, Chief Inspector — but always a cop. When Johnny Connors called him in and said he wanted him to be the new Commissioner of Police, I guess nobody was more surprised than the Commish. But it was a smart move by the Mayor. He was getting hit hard by the papers about that time, because the Department was in bad shape — lots of graft and funny business. He knew that the Commish was popular with the reporters, and sure enough, the papers called him an honest cop and said if anybody could clean up the Force he could. They were right. He fired the precinct captains who were protecting the gamblers and reorganized the Department. In two years you would not know the Force, the way the morale zoomed.

Everybody was set up about it except the Commish. He does not like sitting at a desk and sounding off, and he keeps wishing he was back out there with the boys. Once he says to me, deadpan, "Babe, if anybody brings me another report to read today, shoot him on sight." He is joking, of course. But another time he is not joking, because he looks tired and worried, and he says, "Babe, politics is a rotten business. I hate to think what is going on around this town and what is being covered up. Thank God, my Department is fairly clean."

"You bet it is, boss," I tell him, and he slaps me on the shoulder and grins.

Now he says to Stotter, "How was Holcombe killed?"

Stotter says, "A bullet through the left temple. There is no chance of its being suicide. The gun has disappeared and so has the cartridge case. The hole looks like a .32. The Medical Examiner was probing for the slug when I left."

A short guy wearing a natty tux and carrying a brief case comes out of the auditorium and lights up a cigarette. He is short and dark-haired and for a second I think it is the Mayor, but then I see it is only Lloyd Thompson, his brother-in-law, who is also his public relations man. When Johnny Connors appointed Thompson after Mrs. Connors died a few years back, some claimed it was what they call nepotism, but they tell me Thompson is really pretty good at his job.

Seeing Thompson reminds the Commish to ask Stotter, "Have the papers got it yet?"

"No," says Stotter, "I thought we had best keep it to ourselves for an hour or two."

"Good," the Commish agrees. He turns to Thompson and says, "Mr. Thompson, after the Mayor has finished his speech tonight, will you give him a message in my name? Ask him to come to City Hall as soon as the rally is over. I don't want to disturb him before he speaks."

"Glad to, Danny," says Thompson. That is the kind of guy he is — calling the Commish by his nickname, like the Mayor. He is always aping Connors in everything. He goes on, "Care to tell me what it is about, Danny?"

The Commish hesitates, but finally he says, "You will realize it is important not to have a leak on this until the Mayor gives the word. Dr. Holcombe was murdered tonight at City Hall."

Thompson lets out a whistle. "Boy, oh boy," he says. "That does it. Can't you see the headlines tomorrow? '*MURDER AT CITY HALL!*'"

"I'm afraid so," says the Commish.

"Hell," says Thompson. "Don't think I'm not sorry about Holcombe, but this election is so close a few thousand votes one way or another could swing it. This could wreck us unless we handle it just right." He turns on what he thinks is his charm and smiles at the Commish. "I know we can count on you to cooperate with us, Danny."

"The first step," says the Commish, "is to give my message to the Mayor."

"This will be tough on Johnny," Thompson says. "We have been on the go since four o'clock this afternoon and underneath that smile of his I know he is ready to crack."

"It's a strain, all right," says the Commish. "We had better get started." He nods to Thompson, and we go out to the car which Stotter has waiting outside. It is a dark, cloudy night, but warm, and the Commish does not even let me go back for his hat and topcoat. The driver touches the siren and gets up speed, and the Commish says, "Let's have it."

Stotter gives. "The Medical Examiner says it happened between six and seven tonight, probably closer to seven. In Holcombe's office at the Hall. A scrubwoman found him, a Mrs. Barkowsky. That was around nine thirty, when she went into his office to clean up. He was sitting at his desk, or rather, slumped over his desk."

The Commish says, "Bill, a minute ago you said the doc was probing for the slug. I should think a .32 fired into the temple at close range would come out the other side."

"That has been bothering me, too," says Stotter, in his careful way. "When I questioned the doctor he said the bullet might have been deflected by the cranial wall, and so followed the curve of the skull, instead of going through. But what really puzzles me is that there were no powder burns around the wound. Whoever shot him apparently stood some distance away and yet unerringly hit the mark."

"Anybody hear the shot?"

"No one we have yet questioned," says Stotter. "We have sent for Holcombe's secretary, a girl named Maxine Austin. Also for the man who has the office next to Holcombe's, Dr. Kreedlin."

I knew this guy, Kreedlin. It is a joke down at the Hall that whenever Johnny Connors runs into trouble he hires himself a new consultant, and this Kreedlin was the first bird the Mayor picked when the water shortage began to look bad. He is an engineer, and he has big ideas and makes big plans, but nothing happens until Johnny gets wise and brings in Holcombe, who makes it rain.

"I thought the Mayor had dropped Kreedlin long ago," says the Commish, but I am not surprised. Johnny Connors hates to fire anybody who works for him, even the stinkers.

"No, Kreedlin is still on the payroll," Stotter says. "They tell me he has very good connections at the Hall. Besides him and the secretary, I have put out a call for two others, either one of whom might well be the killer. One of them is Frankie Coletti."

I let out a whistle, because of course this Coletti is one of the gambling syndicate that the Commish wrecked, and a very hard cookie, and he is still operating around town, although not on the same scale.

Stotter goes on, "Holcombe wrote Coletti a letter, making an appointment between five and six today. I saw the carbon copy on his desk. And he was dead by seven."

"Hmm," says the Commish. "Who is the other man you are bringing in?"

"It's a woman. Name of Vera Loomis. Did you know Bill Loomis, who owned the Mohawk Amusement Park across the river? She is his widow, and she seems to be running the Park now. I found a letter from her to Holcombe. It has a rather threatening tone. I thought we had better invite her and Coletti both in for questioning without telling them our reasons."

"Right," says the Commish. "Anything else, Bill?"

Stotter shakes his head. "Nothing was touched in the office. No sign of a struggle. The door handle was wiped clean. Evidently we are going to have to concentrate on motive and hope for a break. Unfortunate that this had to happen on election eve. It will give the press a field .day, and Johnny —"

"The Mayor," the Commish corrects him.

"I mean, the Mayor," says Stotter, "is going to want the killer in handcuffs on the front pages tomorrow morning."

The Commish nods. We pull up at City Hall, where there are a couple of police cars and lights turned on inside. Stotter leads the way through a side door and down a couple of long marble corridors, and at the end of a row of offices we reach one where it says on the door, *Dr. Richard Holcombe, Meteorological Consultant to the Mayor.* It is a long narrow room,

neat and clean, with white woodwork and pale green paint on the walls, and walnut desks for Holcombe and his secretary.

The flashlight and fingerprint boys and the doc have finished and gone when we come in. Under a sheet in the center of the room is the corpse. Lieutenant Harris, who is a nice guy, is waiting to report. He salutes the Commish and says to Stotter, "This is going to be mean. No fingerprints on the desk except his. The slug was a .32 like you said, and I sent it down to Ballistics."

"Then all we know," says Stotter, looking gloomy, "is that someone shot him through his left temple as he sat at his desk, and he died instantly."

"That's right," Harris admits.

Meanwhile the Commish has drawn back the sheet and is looking at the corpse. Holcombe must have been a handsome guy. The things you noticed especially were his dark eyebrows, which were very thick, and his chin, which had a kind of "I'll-do-what-I-please" look about it. Lying there dead, he reminded me of the bird on the ten-dollar bills — what's his name? Hamilton.

After a while the Commish says with a sigh, "Better have him taken away." Harris gives the order to a cop outside the door, and pretty soon some guys come in and lug out the body. The Commish sits in Holcombe's chair and looks over the desk. The desk blotter, which is gray, shows a bloodstain where Holcombe's head must have fallen. The rest is just what you would expect — a desk set, half a dozen pipes, a jar of tobacco, some books, a wooden tray marked *Pending* with some papers in it, and some big technical-looking charts.

"These are the letters I told you about," Stotter says, reaching into the wooden tray. "They were in the drawer of the desk."

The Commish reads the letters, and when he is through I sneak a look at them. One is a yellow carbon of a letter to Mr. Frank Coletti at the Lancaster Hotel on Park Avenue and it says: *Dear Mr. Coletti — My secretary tells me that you telephoned and asked me to call on you Monday afternoon. If you wish to see me, I shall be in my office at City Hall on Monday between five and six. Very truly yours.*

The other letter has great big red and blue printing at the top — *Mohawk Amusement Park — Executive Office.* It is written in black ink — a splashy handwriting — *Dear Dr. Holcombe: If you will not listen to reason, I am going to have to take action, as I warned you. Yours truly, Vera Loomis.*

"Have they been brought in yet?" the Commish asks.

Harris says, "I talked to Mrs. Loomis on the phone, and she said she cannot possibly leave the park until it closes at one o'clock, and how about tomorrow morning? She wanted to know what it was all about, but I just told her I would call her back. We are still looking for Coletti. Kreedlin, Mrs. Barkowsky, and the Austin girl are in the office across the way."

The Commish stays in the chair, and begins to look around the room, not missing a thing. Just an ordinary office. Filing cabinets, armchairs with leather seats, and some photographs of clouds on the wall. I got the feeling that the Commish was kind of pleased to be in on the ground floor of a murder case again. The way he squints up his eyes and runs his hand over his jaw reminds me of a cat figuring out a way to get at the goldfish. None of us says anything.

After a while he gets up and goes to the door, and then I notice that on the door-frame, just inside the room, there is a little dark streak, which shows up against the white paint at the level of the Commish's eyes. You would not notice it unless you were a sharpie. The Commish touches it with the tip of a finger, and says, "Ash?"

"I saw that," says Lieutenant Harris. "Looks like somebody brushed it with a cigarette or cigar sometime."

The Commish turns back to the desk and says to Stotter, "We will have to try to get at the motive, as you said, Bill. Suppose you handle the questioning, and I will just sit by, if that is all right with you."

"Fine," says Stotter.

"The Barkowsky woman is taking it pretty hard," Harris mentions.

"All right," says Stotter. "We'll talk to her first."

When they bring her in, she turns out to be a short, stumpy dame with a red, sad face and a Polish accent, and she is crying, because she thinks we suspect her. But Stotter handles her gentle, and she tells how she came into the office, put on the light, saw the body, yelled, and ran out to find a cop.

Stotter looks at the Commish, who says, "You liked Dr. Holcombe, Mrs. Barkowsky?"

"Oh, yes," she gulps. "He was a fine man. So handsome, and always a smile. When he works late here and I come in, he always says good evening, and asks me about my son, who is sick, jaundice, for six weeks now —"

"I see," the Commish says. "And I suppose you always cleaned this office carefully?"

"Like it was my own home," she comes back. "Everything spotless. He noticed how good I clean. Once he says to me I am Mrs. Dutch Cleanser herself."

"When did you clean the office last?" he asks her. "Yesterday?"

"No, yesterday was Sunday. On Saturday afternoon I cleaned."

He wants to know whether she remembers cleaning the woodwork around the door, and she says, "Yes, Saturday is my day for a thorough cleaning. I wash all the woodwork then."

The Commish goes to the door and points out the little streak. "If that had been there Saturday," he says to Mrs. Barkowsky, "do you think you would have noticed it and wiped it off?"

"Oh, yes," she says, "I do not miss any dirt in this office."

"Thank you very much," says the

Commish, and she goes out feeling better.

Stotter is looking puzzled. He says, "I don't quite follow that, Commissioner."

"A very small point," says the Commish. "May be nothing to it. I was just wondering when that cigarette, or whatever it was, brushed against the woodwork. Of course, she might have missed such a little streak as that, but the rest of the panel is spotless, so I figured it was probably made since she cleaned last. That's all."

"But what can you make out of a cigarette brushing against the doorway?" Harris says, frowning.

"I'm just groping around," says the Commish. "Who are you taking next?"

"Maxine Austin," says the Inspector, and a few seconds later in comes a small brunette who would have knocked your eye out a city block away — the pocket-size Venus type — even though she is pale and there are pink rims around her big brown eyes. She is dressed in a dark red dress and a black cloth coat and hat — nothing fancy, but on her they look good, with all the curves where you want them. For a second she looks ready to break down and bawl as she glances around the office, but she manages to control herself. Stotter is very polite, the Commish offers her a cigarette, which she takes, and pretty soon the facts start coming. She is twenty-four years old. She shares an apartment with two other girls. She has worked for City Hall for three years. Six weeks ago she was assigned to Holcombe from the stenographers' pool. She never knew him before and she liked him a lot.

"I will do anything I can to help you find his murderer!" she says. "Anything!"

Stotter brings out that Holcombe had been out of his office most of the day, and there had been no visitors. She had left the office at five o'clock that afternoon, a little earlier than usual, because she wanted to do some shopping, and Holcombe said it was okay.

"He was here when you left?" says Stotter.

"Yes, at his desk. Studying his weather reports. When I said good night, he looked up and said, 'Goodnight, Maxine.'"

"You called him Richard?" says Stotter.

"Oh, no," she tells him. "Dr. Holcombe, always. But he called me Maxine. Said he was old enough to be my uncle. But it wasn't true — he was only thirty-six."

"What kind of man was he?" the Commish asks.

She hesitates. "On the surface," she says slow, "he seemed lighthearted. But he took his work very seriously, and he could be very stern."

"Was he ever stern with you?" says Stotter.

"Oh, no," she comes back. "He was always very nice to me. It was just something I felt in his personality. I

don't think he was very religious, but it was just as if he had a hard core of principle, like a religious person."

Stotter looks her over, which is what I have been doing ever since she came into the room, and he says, "Dr. Holcombe was a bachelor, I understand. Did he ever take you out?"

Her face colors up and she says, "Yes, twice. Just to dinner, when we were working late nights. But that was all." She wiggles a little in her chair, and uncrosses her neat legs and crosses them again.

"I see," says Stotter. "I suppose he dated other girls from time to time? Ever hear him telephoning them?"

She does not like that. "I was not jealous of him, if that is what you mean," she says. "I liked him, I liked him a lot, but his dates were his own business. I never tried to overhear his personal conversations."

You can see Stotter does not believe her. He says, "Now, Miss Austin, are you trying to tell us that you did not listen when Dr. Holcombe telephoned to other women —"

"I didn't!" she says. "I had my own work to do. I don't know who his girl friends were." Then she catches her breath, and snaps, "Are you suggesting that I — that I —"

"I'm not suggesting a thing," Stotter tells her quick. "Just trying to get the picture." But she is working up to a real mad when the Commish comes up with a question. He says, "I am interested in the charts Dr. Holcombe was looking at when you left this afternoon, Miss Austin. Do you mean these, lying on his desk?"

That calms her down. She gets control of herself, looks at the charts and says, "Yes, I think so." Then she goes on like she is pretty proud about knowing so much, "Those are hour-by-hour humidity and temperature reports at different places and different heights. He used them to help decide whether to make a rain-flight. Saturday they showed conditions were right and he went up and that was why we had that big shower Saturday afternoon and night. He once said that he was going to be unpopular with golfers, because this was the third Saturday in a row that he had tickled the clouds."

"Was he planning another flight soon?" says the Commish.

"Oh, yes," she tells him. "He said the cumulus cloud formations over the city were very promising. I heard him tell people on the phone that with a little dry-icing he thought he could nearly guarantee another good, steady rain in the metropolitan area which would help the city reservoirs. He was checking up the late reports when I left."

Stotter picks up the ball. "How about this man Coletti?" he says.

"Who? Oh, Mr. Coletti. Last week he telephoned twice and said he wanted Dr. Holcombe to come to his home. Saturday morning, I think it was, Dr. Holcombe wrote him a letter saying —"

"Yes, I have seen it," says Stotter.

"Did Holcombe know who Coletti is?"

"No, I don't think so," she says. "He said the name was familiar, but we could not place it."

Stotter says, "You never heard of the notorious gangster, Frankie Coletti?"

"Oh, *that* Coletti," she comes back. "I never dreamed — no, we did not think of it."

He keeps at her. "You did not see Coletti, then?"

"No," she says. "Do you think he — that he shot —"

"We have not got that far yet," says Stotter. "How about Mrs. Loomis?"

"I don't know anything about her," says the girl, "except that she telephoned Dr. Holcombe and they had an argument."

"About what?" says Stotter.

"I'm not sure," she says. "I only heard Dr. Holcombe's side of it. All he said was that he was serving the public interest, and his philosophy was, 'Hew to the line and let the rain fall where it may.' He told her if he once began to yield to any pressure, from any source, there would be no end to it. He said that Mrs. Loomis would simply have to pretend that he and his dry ice were part of nature."

"Did you hear any other conversations that might relate to the murder?" says Stotter. "Anything at all?"

She stops and thinks. "Well," she says finally, "I stepped out of the office for a minute just before five o'clock, and when I came back Dr. Holcombe was talking to somebody. I don't know who. I heard some of that because I wasn't using the typewriter and he was talking very seriously and sharply, for him."

"What did he say?" Stotter asks.

She says, "It was about the Long Park reservoir. I heard him say, 'You can't tell me the low level at Long Park is due entirely to the dry spell.' Then he said, 'Don't try to tell me my business. If I choose to look into it, I will. You can't call me off.'"

"He didn't say anything more about it?" Stotter asks.

"Not a word. He went back to reading his reports and I said good night and left."

That is when the telephone rings. Harris takes it, listens for a minute, and says, "Okay, hold on." He turns to the Commish and says, "Coletti. He is at his house. He says what is it all about. He says if we want to talk to him, we can come to his place, and he will have his lawyer there, but he is not coming down here unless we pull him in with a warrant, because he has not done anything."

The Commish says, "Tell him we will be along," and Harris does. Then the Commish turns to Maxine and says, "Was anybody in this office Saturday night or Sunday?"

"Why, no," she says. "Dr. Holcombe and I were the only ones with keys. I wasn't here, and after making his rain-flight Saturday he went to the country to spend the weekend with friends."

"Did Dr. Holcombe ever smoke cigarettes?" the Commish wants to know.

"I never saw him smoke anything except a pipe," she says.

"Thank you," says the Commish, and they let her go home.

Stotter is staring at the boss like he has some questions to ask him, but the Commish just says, "Let's take a look at Kreedlin."

Before they can send for him, though, we hear a lot of footsteps in the marble corridor outside, and the door slams open, and who is it but His Honor, Johnny Connors himself.

He is the same height as the Commish, but that is where the resemblance ends. The Commish looks like anybody, but Johnny is a one and only. Standing there in his tux and soft black hat, with his thick wavy gray hair and heavy dark eyebrows, and his strong face, like a good-natured hawk, he was as handsome as any motion-picture star.

"This is a sad business, Danny-boy," he says, and you can see he means it. "I don't have to tell you how I feel about Holcombe. I want a quick conviction for the rat who did it. Where do we stand?"

The Commish says, "We're just rounding up the facts."

Thompson, who is right alongside, carrying the Mayor's topcoat, puts in his oar. He says, "We are hoping you get the killer tonight, Mr. Mayor. Leaving out our feeling about Holcombe, and talking realistically, this could cost us a lot of votes."

"That's not important, Tommy," says the Mayor.

"A good deal will depend on the kind of statement we get out," says Thompson. "We might hint at a political plot to make the water shortage worse and injure you at election time."

The Mayor says to the Commish, "Don't let me get into your hair, Danny-boy. But it would be a load off all our minds if this story hits the morning papers all buttoned up. Have you got any idea who did it?"

"Not yet, Mr. Mayor," says the Commish. He always calls Johnny by his title.

"Well, I know that with you in charge everything that can be done will be done," says the Mayor. "If anything breaks, let me know right away. Tommy and I will be in my office. We have got to draft a press release and dope out the angles. But first we must find out who Holcombe's nearest relatives are and break the news to them as gently as we can. Come on, Tommy-boy."

They go down the hall, while I hold the door for them. From the rear, with their form-fitting tuxes and black fedoras, he and Thompson look like a couple of song-and-dance men, Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly, or somebody.

When he was gone, Stotter says, "With all he has got on his mind, he can still think about Holcombe's relatives." The Commish nods and says, "Let's have Kreedlin." A cop goes to get him, and the Commish meanwhile

says to Stotter, "What was that you said before about Kreedlin's having good connections?"

This is a sensible question, because nobody wants to step on the toes of a guy with good connections if he can help it. Stotter is not very helpful, though. He just says, "That's the way I heard it — that somebody high up recommended him to the Mayor."

Then Kreedlin comes in. He is a thin guy, medium height, with a bony face and eyeglasses, and a sharp, aggressive way of talking. He says, "I am sorry Holcombe is dead, but I do not see why this could not wait until morning. You got me out of bed."

Stotter says, "Sit down."

Kreedlin sits, puts out the butt of a cigarette, and right away lights another out of a crumpled pack in his pocket, and sticks it in the corner of his mouth. Stotter starts on him. The guy says he was in his office until nearly seven. He knows Holcombe was alive soon after six o'clock because he went to the men's room around that time and passed Holcombe's door, and heard voices. No, he could not tell if Holcombe's voice was one of them — he could only hear a low murmur. He does not know who was in the room with Holcombe. They were still talking when he got back. He did not hear a shot. He thinks Holcombe was alive when he went home, because although he did not hear voices, as he passed the door he heard him sneeze.

Stotter says, "Did you see anybody in the corridor as you went out?"

"No," says Kreedlin. "These city officials always go home early. You will not catch them working nights. All the offices were empty." He sounds very contemptuous.

"Then you did not see anyone?"

I am beginning to think it does not look so good for Kreedlin. The doc says Holcombe died before seven — and according to Kreedlin's own story, Holcombe was still alive when he left his office at nearly seven. The murderer must have been around right at that time, but Kreedlin says he did not see him or hear a shot. Maybe this sinks in on him, too, because all of a sudden he changes his tune and says, "Wait. I did see someone, a woman. A big woman. I forgot about her until now. I saw her outside, in the lobby. She was looking at the building directory, and as I went by she started down this corridor."

Stotter says, "Can you describe her?"

"Well," says Kreedlin, doubtful, "I did not look at her closely, but I have an idea she had red hair and freckles. It just comes back to me now."

I can see that Stotter does not think much of this, but he says to Harris, "See if you can get a line on any big, redheaded freckle-faced woman who might have been around here just before seven o'clock."

The Commish asks a question now. He says, "You liked Dr. Holcombe?"

Kreedlin stammers a little, but he says, "Why, yes."

The Commish says, "You approved

of his methods of dealing with the water crisis?"

Brother, that did it. Like sticking a needle into a ripe boil. A lot of nasty stuff came out. Kreedlin thinks Holcombe was a phony. The rain coming at the times he went up in his plane was just because Holcombe knew it was going to rain anyway, and pretended he was doing it.

"Just a publicity stunt," Kreedlin yaks, getting excited. He snubs out his cigarette, lights another, and tells the Commish, "That was no way to meet a water shortage. You must go to the source of the trouble. Soil erosion. Drainage. Reforestation." He starts telling about his plans for fixing up the city water supply over the long term, and how he is an engineer and a real authority, not a fake.

The Commish interrupts, "I take it the Mayor did not favor your plan?"

"He said it was not politically practical at this time," says Kreedlin.

"But he kept you on his staff?"

Kreedlin gets red and says, "He must know my services will eventually be valuable to the city."

The Commish says, "A moment ago, Mr. Kreedlin, you spoke of city officials with a note in your voice that I think I recognized. You do not regard yourself as a city official?"

"Certainly not," says Kreedlin. "Not a regular official. I am here as a consultant."

"And yet," says the Commish, "as a consultant, you are evidently willing to go on drawing a salary after your ideas have been discarded?"

Kreedlin fidgets, and says, "That's my business. I know I can be of use to the Mayor."

"No doubt," the Commish says. "But you regard yourself as an engineer or a businessman, rather than as a city employee?"

"What has that got to do with this murder?" snaps Kreedlin. "I told you I did not hear the shot. That is all that concerns you."

The Commish just plows ahead, like a polite machine. "Your experience before coming to work for the city was in business?"

"Yes," says Kreedlin. "I was consulting engineer for the Kreedlin Construction Company before coming here. My brother is President. Is that enough for you?"

I knew the name, of course. They are big contractors on a lot of city work, but I never tied them up before with this Kreedlin. The Commish nods, and says, "You left a job of such importance just to come to work for the city?"

"It was my duty as a citizen," says Kreedlin, "to try to help meet this water shortage."

The Commish looks at him without speaking for several seconds. Then he says, "Did you speak to Dr. Holcombe on the telephone this afternoon?"

"No," says Kreedlin. "Why would I talk to him on the phone when my office is right next door?"

"Was it the Kreedlin Construction Company that built the Long Park Reservoir?" says the Commish.

Kreedlin scowls and says, "Yes. What about it?"

"Have you heard anything about a flaw in the construction of the reservoir," says the Commish, "such as a crack in the cement floor, that would account for the water level there being abnormally low?"

That reaches Kreedlin. "A lie!" he yelps. "That was just Holcombe's excuse because he was not able to raise the water level there."

"Ah," says the Commish. "Then you did hear about it. Who told you?"

"I can't remember," says Kreedlin, without trying. "It was just one of these rumors that travel around."

Stotter picks it up. "It is fair to say you had a grudge against Holcombe?"

That stops Kreedlin. He looks around at us, cautious, and then says, "I was resentful, but I would not say it was a real grudge."

"Just a routine question," says Stotter. "Do you happen to own a gun?"

Kreedlin glares and says, "This is ridiculous, but okay, if you want it, no, I have no gun, and I have no access to any gun."

Stotter tells him he can go home, but to be on tap first thing in the morning, and Kreedlin goes out quick, without a word.

"He might have had a motive," says Stotter to the Commish, "but if he is our man we are going to have trouble proving it."

The Commish just says, "Let's get over to Coletti's."

Coletti lives in a snooty hotel, and he has a very fancy apartment. When we arrive he is wearing a silk dressing gown and smoking a cigar — a husky guy with a mean little mustache and a face to match. I would like nothing better than to smack him once or twice, because he is one of the guys that threatened to get the Commish, but this is not the time for it. With him is a fat little lawyer who hardly says a word, but just sits there and takes it all in.

"Well, well," says Coletti. "The Commissioner himself. To what am I indebted for this unexpected honor?"

"Cut the comedy," Harris tells him, and Stotter says, "We just want answers to a couple of questions. You visited Dr. Richard Holcombe at City Hall this afternoon?"

Coletti screws up his face and looks from Stotter to the Commissioner before he answers, but he finally says, "Yeah. So what?"

"What time?" says Stotter.

"About quarter to six," says Coletti. "Why?" He is getting uneasy.

"How long were you with him?" Stotter asks.

"Maybe ten minutes, maybe fifteen," says Coletti, looking worried now. "Since when is there anything wrong with a citizen visiting a city official?"

Stotter grins, but it is not a funny grin. "Not a thing wrong unless the city official happens to be murdered about the time the citizen visits him."

"Murdered!" yells Coletti. "Blast

you, what are you trying to pin on me?"

"If you did not do it, you don't have to worry," the Commish puts in, very mild. "What we really want to know is why you went to see Holcombe?"

Coletti begins to talk fast. "I have known him for years —"

"Don't be a fool," says the Commish. "Holcombe wrote you making the appointment. He did not know who you were. Try again, and make it the truth, if you do not want to be detained as a material witness. What did you have to say to Holcombe?"

"Wait a minute," says Coletti, and goes into a huddle with the little lawyer. Then he says, "Okay, here it is. There is nothing illegal about it. I had a little deal I wanted to discuss with Holcombe."

"What kind of deal?" the Commish demands.

"It was like this," says Coletti. "I do a little betting on the races." This is a laugh, because we know he still runs a flock of bookies. He goes on, "Sometimes a guy can make a buck if he knows the horses and it happens to rain at the right time. I just wanted to get an inside line on when Holcombe planned to ice the clouds around the local race-courses. Perfectly legal, like I said. It would have been worth something to me to have the dope."

"I see," says the Commish. "Just a little business deal."

"Sure," Coletti says. "That's it. A little free private enterprise."

Lieutenant Harris gets impatient and asks, "What did Holcombe say?"

Coletti sneers. "The screwball says nothing doing. I offer him a reasonable cut, but he gives me a line about how he is a scientist trying to serve the public and is not trying to cash in for himself or anybody else. For a minute I think maybe I will use a little pressure, but I see he is one of these stubborn guys, so I say, what the hell, let's drop it. No hard feelings, I tell him, so long as he keeps his trap shut about my proposition. That was all there was to it. Then I go out. He was okay when I left, just sitting at his desk."

That is his story, and he does not change it when Stotter shoots in the questions. He says that after leaving Holcombe a few minutes after six, he went direct to a night-spot he owns a piece of, *The Red Parrot*, and had drinks and some dinner and took in the first floor show, and there are twenty guys who can prove it. Finally Stotter says, "Do you own a .32 pistol or revolver?"

The little lawyer pipes up, "Unless you have justifiable grounds for suspicion, which you cannot have, he is not answering questions about guns."

"Let it go," says the Commish to Stotter. "We will get nothing more here. Oh, wait a minute." He turns back to Coletti and says, "Do you smoke cigarettes?"

Coletti looks at the boss like he thinks he is nuts, but he just says, "No, I hate the things. Just cigars."

That was all, except that after the

Commish goes out the door I kind of stumble and step hard on Frankie Coletti's toes, which are in a slipper, and he lets out a howl. I say, very polite, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Coletti. Please excuse me. It was an accident. It is a funny thing how accidents happen to guys who talk tough about getting the Commissioner. Maybe you ought to remember that." Then I go away, while he uses language.

In the car the Commish looks at his watch and says, "How about a quick run out to the Mohawk Amusement Park, Bill? It's still early."

"Good idea," says Stotter, and he tells the driver to make it snappy. The siren begins to moan, and in no time at all we are through the midtown tunnel and zooming up the highway to where we can see the lights of the big Ferris wheel and the roller coaster.

In the park we head for the office, which is at the entrance, right in back of the ticket window, and we ask for Mrs. Loomis. A man who is counting up the evening's cash says that she is somewhere out on the Midway, and goes to the door with us to steer us to her. "I can't leave this money here," he says, "but you will probably find her at the first shooting gallery, right around that corner," he says.

"Does she like to shoot?" says the Commish.

"Does she!" says the guy. "She used to be a trick shot with a circus, and then she bought the shooting concession in this part. That's how she met Loomis. Now she owns the whole show."

There is a crowd around the shooting gallery, and you can see the glint come into Stotter's eye, because the woman they are watching is big and she is freckle-faced, and she has light red hair, pulled back into a big bun. For a while we just stand there and watch her perform. What a dame! She is about thirty-five, and a type I could go for — a little on the tough side, maybe, but a good-looking face, and big everywhere, without being fat. She is wearing blue slacks and a gray sweater, which give her quite a profile, and I hear Lieutenant Harris let out a little whistle. But even so, I keep my eyes on the shooting. Annie Oakley had nothing on her. She is using a pair of old-fashioned Colt revolvers, and she does all the tricks — puts out six candles in six shots — looks in a mirror and shoots over her shoulder to break a row of pipes — fans the gun and hits a bull's-eye every time — the works. A guy behind the counter keeps loading up for her, and every time she shoots the crowd cheers. "How do you like that, boys?" she keeps saying in a deep voice that sounds like Texas, and they like it fine, and she loves it.

Harris whispers to me, "If she shot Holcombe, we won't prove anything with a nitrate test for powder grains." I see what he means. Finally she quits, and as the crowd lines up at the counter to try a few shots themselves, she turns toward us, and Stotter talks to her. She looks us over with a cold

blue eye, and says, "I don't know what you want with me, but come into my office." It is a comfortable place, with good chairs, and when we are sitting down, Stotter says, "Mrs. Loomis, you can help us by just answering a few questions, and it will not take long. First, to speed things up, would you mind telling us where you were this evening between six and seven o'clock?"

Mrs. Loomis frowns, but she says, "At my home on River Drive."

Stotter says, "Do you know Dr. Richard Holcombe?"

She says, "I have talked to him on the telephone. But suppose you tell me what this is all about." She talks like a man — flat and direct, and Stotter answers the same way. He says, "Dr. Holcombe has been murdered."

"Murdered!" says Mrs. Loomis. "I'm sorry. He sounded like a good man when I talked to him. But what has it got to do with me?"

"Yesterday," says Stotter, "you wrote Dr. Holcombe a letter." He shows it to her and goes on, "What we want from you is an explanation."

"Certainly," she says. "It is very simple. You see, I own Mohawk Amusement Park — inherited it from my husband. You might not think it, but it is a pretty substantial business. Early this year, at considerable expense, I reconditioned the entire park. I even built an outdoor dancing pavilion, and fixed it up with radiant heat and a tropical garden. It is so warm that when the heat is on, customers can dance there all year round, even in cold weather, just as if they were on a southern cruise. I brought in a name band and bought a liquor license, and we got off to a good start. One of our features is our Saturday night dance contest. I built it up and advertised it into a big draw, and frankly, that is when we make the money, because we lose during the week. You can imagine, it is a pretty serious thing for me to have rain three Saturday nights in a row."

Stotter says, "You attribute this to Dr. Holcombe's activities?"

"What else?" says Mrs. Loomis. "Why does he have to pick Saturdays for his flights? Why not week days? I am as anxious as anybody to end the water shortage, but why should my business have to suffer? That is what I asked him over the telephone."

"What did he say?" Stotter asks.

"He said he picked the times when there were good cloud formations over the city, and it just happened that the clouds had been right several Saturday evenings in a row. Anyway, he was more interested in filling the city's reservoirs, he said, than he was in filling my amusement park."

"When was this conversation?" Stotter wants to know.

"Last week some time — Tuesday, I think," she says. "I asked him for God's sake to give me a break and lay off next Saturday, and he only made some crack about let the rain fall where it may. Then Saturday when it rained again, I was pretty sore. That was when I wrote him this letter."

"You referred to taking action," says Stotter.

"Oh," says Mrs. Loomis, "I meant legal action. I told Holcombe if this kept up I was going to sue him and the city for a million dollars. Frankly, I did not think I had a chance of collecting, but I figured the publicity would be worth something, anyway."

Stotter asks her, "That was all? You had no other contact with Holcombe?"

"None," she says.

"You never visited him at his office?" says Stotter.

"No," she says.

Stotter looks her in the eye and does not speak for a second. She sits straight and still. Then the Inspector says, "Hadn't you better think again, Mrs. Loomis?"

"What do you mean?" she says.

"Suppose I tell you," says Stotter, speaking very slow, "that around seven o'clock tonight a witness saw you in City Hall walking down the corridor toward Holcombe's office."

Stotter is partly bluffing, of course — and me, I still would take Mrs. Loomis' word for it before Kreedlin's. But what do you know, she goes to pieces. "Oh, my God," she says, and her face turns white underneath the freckles. Stotter almost slaps himself on the chest, he is so pleased, because this looks like the break he has been hoping for. "Let us have the facts," he orders her. "What happened when you saw Holcombe?"

Mrs. Loomis runs her hand through her red hair and looks frantic. "I didn't do it," she says, in a low voice. "I have three kids. I'm a business woman. I didn't even know Holcombe. Do I look like the kind of woman who would murder a stranger? Or anybody, for that matter?"

Stotter just says again, "Let's have the facts."

She gets a grip on herself, takes a deep breath, and says, "I won't conceal a thing. This matter was important to me. I'm in debt to the banks pretty heavily, and I was counting on the dry spell to help business. These frequent rains, especially on Saturdays, were raising hell with me. Last Saturday night I felt I had to do something. That is when I wrote Holcombe the letter. This afternoon I telephoned him again."

"What time?" Lieutenant Harris interrupts.

"A little after five, I guess," she says. "I told him I meant it about bringing suit. I was not going to stand by and let him ruin my business. If he had to make it rain, I said, let him do it late at night, after my customers had gone home. He gave me the same reply — he had to put the public interest ahead of any private interest. But he did not sound unfriendly, and I thought maybe I could convince him. I said, how about my coming to see him tonight, and could he wait until I got there? He said all right, he had to be in his office anyway, and we made an appointment for seven o'clock. I got to City Hall just before seven, and looked up his room number on the directory in the lobby. I

remember a man coming by then. That is when I was seen, I suppose. Then I came down the corridor. Ahead of me, farther along the corridor, somebody was walking away from this office, but he was going fast, and turned the corner as I came up, so I never got a good look at him. He was carrying something — a small valise, I think."

"You're sure it was a man and not a woman with a handbag?" Stotter puts in.

"I have an impression of pants," says Mrs. Loomis, thinking. "It must have been a man. In dark clothes. Unless it was a woman wearing slacks."

"What happened next?" says Stotter.

Mrs. Loomis goes on, "I knocked at the door and there was no answer. Then I tried the handle, and the door opened. The light was not on, but there was enough light from the window so I could see somebody sitting at the desk in a slumped-over position. I thought Holcombe might be asleep, so I said, 'Good evening.' When he did not answer, I said, 'Excuse me, but I think we had better have some light.' I found the light switch, and when I looked at Holcombe again I knew he was dead."

"Did you touch him?" says Stotter.

"No," she says. "I was shocked and horrified. When I went up to him I saw the hole in his head, and I knew there was nothing I could do for him, the poor guy. Then I did a foolish thing. I was afraid I might be suspected if anybody knew about my argument with him. Right now, when I am trying to get my loans extended at the bank, bad publicity like being mixed up in a murder case could ruin me. I looked out in the hall, and nobody was around, and I walked away. I did not think anybody noticed me."

"Did you wipe the door handle and light switch with your handkerchief?" Harris says.

"Why, no," she says.

"Weren't you worried about leaving fingerprints?" he asks her.

"I was too upset to think about it. Besides, I was wearing gloves." She turns to Stotter and goes on, "I did not mean to do anything wrong. I was just trying to protect myself and my family."

Stotter questions her about a gun. She shows us a Colt .45 which she keeps in her desk, and she has a license for it, but she insists she never had a .32.

The Commish says, "One or two more points, Mrs. Loomis. Do you smoke?"

"Not much," she says, looking surprised. "Cigarettes now and then."

"Did you smoke while you were in Holcombe's office?" the Commish asks her.

"No, sir," she says.

The Commish says, "About this man you say you saw ahead of you in the corridor. Can you remember anything else about him? Was he large or small?"

She hesitates. "Not large, I think. But I don't have a clear impression. It was just the merest glimpse."

Stotter says, "Mrs. Loomis, I am not arresting you at this time, but you realize you have put yourself in a bad spot by your failure to report this murder. I want you to go home now and stay there until we see how things stand. You will hear from me tomorrow."

"All right," she says. "But I have told you the truth. All of it. That is all I know."

Back in Holcombe's room at City Hall, Stotter says, "Mrs. Loomis' story sounds like the truth to me. Personally, I am more interested at this moment in Kreedlin. He was close at hand when Holcombe was shot. He was personally jealous of Holcombe. And if he was trying to prevent exposure of trouble at Long Park he had a strong motive for murder."

Harris speaks up, "What you say about Kreedlin is right, Inspector — but there's a point that sticks in my craw. I doubt if he is a good enough shot to plug Holcombe in the temple from a distance far enough so no powder burns will show. But Mrs. Loomis could have done it."

"Her motive is not strong enough," says Stotter.

"I don't know," says Harris. "Holcombe's rainstorms were ruining her. She is desperate about her business. And she has seen a lot of rough life, you can tell that. Murder wouldn't mean as much to her as it would to most men. She talks with Holcombe — gets no satisfaction. Okay, she gets up and goes to the door. At that moment he has turned his head — maybe to pick up a paper, or the telephone. She whips out a gun, and standing fifteen feet away, shoots him in the temple. For her, that would be a cinch. Then she merely walks away."

The Commish says, "Holcombe was the kind of man who would have risen to his feet when a woman was leaving his office. In that case he would not have turned his head. And he would hardly have been seated in his chair, slumped over the desk when he was found."

"Maybe just this time he didn't get up," argues Harris. "Maybe he did not like her attitude. To me it is important that she has the marksmanship and the motive and the character. In a way, she was fighting for her kids. The tigress type. She would be capable of bumping off Holcombe if she thought his death would boost her take at the park and enable her to stave off the banks from closing her out, and let her bring up her kids in comfort. Besides, I think that story of hers about seeing someone ahead of her in the corridor is phony."

The Commish says to me, "You agree, Babe?"

"No, sir," I tell him. "With me it is Coletti, right down the line. The way I figure, Holcombe probably threatened to spill Coletti's proposition to the papers, or maybe to the racing authorities. That would have made Coletti look pretty ridiculous, which is something that guy could not take. He would not need any other motive.

He is the type who would just as soon kill a man as not, if he thought he could get away with it. He would not take a chance on Holcombe making him a laughing-stock. He probably pretended to leave, looked out into the hall, saw it was clear, came back into the room, and shot Holcombe. There is enough noise from traffic outside so that if Kreedlin heard the shot he might have thought it was a truck backfiring, and it did not register on him. Then Coletti walked out, and nobody saw him."

"And the man that Mrs. Loomis saw, with the suitcase?" the Commish puts in.

"If there was such a man," I come back, "it was probably just some clerk who was working late."

"I don't know," says the Commish. "Coletti was pretty convincing when we talked to him."

"An act," I insist. "He was probably laughing up his sleeve about dropping a murder in your lap at the time when it will be most embarrassing to you and the Mayor. It is my hunch that if we really bear down on Coletti's alibi, we will find he was with Holcombe later than he says, and got to *The Red Parrot* after seven o'clock. One of those rats who hang out there will probably crack and spill it if we work on them."

The Commish shakes his head. "I am not convinced," he says. "There are a couple of points I would like to see cleared up. One of them is that streak on the doorframe." Stotter raises his eyebrows, but the boss goes right on. "The other point is the sneeze Kreedlin heard. It must have been a loud sneeze, if he heard it through the door. By the way, have we had a report from Ballistics yet?"

"I'll get right at it," says Harris, and goes to the phone. A minute later he hangs up and says to the Commish, "That's something definite, anyway. Ballistics says the bullet that killed Holcombe was fired by a gun with a silencer."

"Good," says Stotter. He is a shrewdie, like I said. "That would fit in with the sneeze. The shot might have sounded like that to Kreedlin. But that doesn't mean he did not shoot Holcombe. He might easily have decided to pretend he heard the shot from outside the door, so as to cover himself."

The Commish picks it up. "The silencer would decrease the bullet's muzzle velocity, and might account for the fact that it did not go through Holcombe's skull. It would also make a pretty big gun to carry away. Add somebody disappearing around the corner with a valise, and what have you got?"

"Commissioner," says Stotter, getting excited, "that's it! That means Mrs. Loomis was telling the truth. It looks better and better that the man she saw was Kreedlin. What we have got to do now is find that gun, and break down Kreedlin's story."

"Maybe," says the Commish.

Stotter's mind is made up. "If you agree, Commissioner," he says, "I would like to ask Judge Rosen for a

search warrant for Kreedlin's home. And if you don't need Harris, I should like him to come with me, and alert the search squad from Homicide. We'll give Kreedlin's hand the nitrate test, but of course he may have worn a glove. At any rate, if he hid that gun anywhere, or if there is a hole in his story, we will find it. He represents the only real chance we have of getting this thing settled tonight. Have I your permission to go ahead, sir?"

The Commish looks doubtful, but he finally says, "All right."

It seems to me the Commish is glad to be alone, except for me, of course. He sits back in Holcombe's chair, and then he gets up and goes to the door again and looks at that tiny streak. It seems to fascinate him.

After a while he says, "Babe, how does a man leave a horizontal streak like this from a cigarette?" He is talking to me, but I can tell he is thinking aloud, so I do not answer him. He goes on, "It must have been a cigarette. A cigar would have left a wider mark. The chances are good it was made today. I think we can assume that. It has a fresh look about it. If it had been there several days, with the door opening and shutting and jarring the doorframe each time, the grains of ash would have flaked off and fallen to the floor, and this line would be much less distinct. Besides, Mrs. Barkowsky cleaned the woodwork Saturday. Nobody was here Sunday. Holcombe was a pipe smoker. According to Maxine Austin, there were no visitors all day today."

"She smokes cigarettes," I suggest.

He shakes his head. "She is not more than five feet two. She would have had to be holding her cigarette above her head to make a mark at this height. No, Babe, it really seems likely that this mark was made by someone who came in after Miss Austin left the office at five o'clock."

"I see what you mean," I say.

"It bothers me," he says. "In a case where there are no direct clues, we cannot afford to neglect any unusual circumstance, even if it seems petty. How did that streak get there?"

"You've got me," I admit.

"Nobody would carry a cigarette in his hand at that height. It must have been in the mouth of somebody who came in here after five o'clock this afternoon. Who? Holcombe smoked a pipe only. Coletti smokes cigars. Mrs. Loomis says she seldom smokes cigarettes, and did not smoke in the office. If she was telling the truth on that point, it means somebody else visited Holcombe, besides those three."

"Boss," I tell him, "that's good." This is the first time I have ever heard him go for the Sherlock Holmes stuff, but I can see he is enjoying himself.

"If our reasoning is right," he says, "we have a picture of a man — or a woman — possibly a desperate person, a murderer, coming through this door with a cigarette in his mouth, and brushing it against the woodwork. The streak is about three inches above my own mouth. I am five feet six. That would suggest a man about five feet nine."

"Kreedlin!" I suggest. "That's about his height, and he is a chain smoker."

The Commish rubs his jaw. "As you say, Kreedlin is suggested. And yet — Babe, how often does a man with a cigarette in his mouth brush it against a doorframe? Brush it hard, so that it leaves a streak? It would be a man who was pretty unsteady on his feet, wouldn't you say, to be so far off balance?"

"Maybe Kreedlin had some drinks to get up enough nerve to bump Holcombe off," I say. "Or maybe he and Holcombe had a fight —"

The Commish shakes his head. "Kreedlin disliked Holcombe, he may have feared him on his brother's account, but he does not impress me as capable of feeling the kind of desperation that drives a man to murder. My guess is that we are looking for a man combining violent despair with a powerful motive."

I shake my head, and say, "You got me."

We look at that streak. "Let us think again," he says. "Suppose a man has just opened the door a crack to look out in the corridor? And he has a cigarette in his mouth? And he forgets it is there? Like this." He lights up a cigarette, takes a few puffs, opens the door a little, peers out, and manages to rub the cigarette against the side of the doorway. A little streak shows on the white paint three inches below the other one.

"You've got it!" I yak. "Mrs. Loomis! She had a motive, like Lieutenant Harris said. She admitted she opened the door to look out. She is a big woman and that is just about where her cigarette would leave a mark."

"Mrs. Loomis," the Commish says to himself. He goes back to Holcombe's desk, sits down in the chair again, and opens the desk drawers. Pretty soon he comes across a pack of cigarettes, nearly full. "It is possible," he says. "Holcombe probably kept these to offer to visitors." He shakes his head. "Curious, but I had to twist my head around to leave that mark. It isn't natural. Usually a smoker handles a cigarette as if it was part of him."

"Mrs. Loomis isn't used to cigarettes," I point out. "If Holcombe offered her one, and she took it to be polite, and then shot him and opened the door to look out —"

"Maybe. It could have been like that," says the Commish. He leans back in the chair and looks up at the ceiling, so I shut up and just sit around. I wonder how Stotter is making out with Kreedlin, but now my money is on Vera Loomis. Although I hate to think of her as a murderess, I do not see why the Commish does not send for her and have it out. After a while I get bored, so I go to the window and look out at the cloudy sky. This gets tedious, too, so I decide to remind the Commish what we are there for. I say, "Do you think it will rain tomorrow without Dr. Holcombe?"

The Commish does not answer, but

about five seconds later he gives a little start and looks at me and says, "What did you say, Babe?"

I tell him, "I was just wondering whether it would rain tomorrow without Dr. Holcombe using his dry ice."

"That's what I thought you said," he says. "Thank you, Babe."

"For what?" I say.

"For giving me the clue I needed," he says. But he does not look happy about it. There is a grim look on his face. He sits thinking for a minute, and then he says, "I think the time has come for us to give our report to the Mayor. He must be anxious to hear from us."

We tramp through the halls to Johnny Connors' big office. When we rap, the Mayor says, "Come in." It is a pretty fancy room, with the American flag on a bronze stand on one side of the desk, and on the other side the city flag. A thick rug — pictures on the wall — leather sofas — just about everything. Johnny is sitting there with Thompson, and they are working on a paper. Both of them look pale and tired. "Danny-boy," the Mayor says. "Have you got it? Have you made an arrest?"

"No, Mr. Mayor," says the Commish. "I think we are on the track, but we are not ready yet to make the arrest."

"How long will it take you?" says the Mayor.

"We should be all set in a few hours," the Commish tells him.

"We can't wait that long before letting the press in on it," says the Mayor. "As it is, we will be criticized for keeping it quiet." He turns to Thompson. "Better get the release out as it stands," he tells him. "Let it rip."

"Right, Johnny," says Thompson, and takes the paper and goes out.

"I'm exhausted," says the Mayor, yawning. "I have been talking to party rallies since four o'clock this afternoon. Thank Heaven, no speeches tomorrow. I guess I had better go home and read myself to sleep with these reports." He starts to stuff some papers from his desk into his big briefcase, and at the same time he says, "Who did it, Danny? Who killed Holcombe?"

"There is still an element of guesswork in our ideas," says the Commish.

Johnny Connors shakes his head disappointed, locks the brief-case, puts it down, crosses the room to the coat-rack, and puts on his coat and hat. The Commish stands up, too, and picks up the brief-case, like he is going to carry it for the Mayor. But I see he is looking it over careful, and after a couple of seconds he pokes his finger into a little hole near the bottom of the case, on the end, where the accordion pleats are. The Mayor does not see this, because he is busy sticking another cigarette into his holder. He says, kind of impatient, "Well, who does the guesswork pick for the murderer?"

The Commish says, "You, Mr. Mayor."

For a second I think I have not

heard right. Then Johnny Connors says, very quiet, "Have you gone crazy, Danny-boy?"

"Maybe," says the Commish. "I will tell you what I think about this crime, and then if I am wrong, you can fire me, and you will have every right to."

"This is a joke, isn't it, Danny-boy?" the Mayor says, looking at him hopeful. "If it is, even though it is in poor taste, we are all tired and not ourselves tonight, so let's forget it and say no more about it."

"I only wish it was a joke," says the Commish.

Johnny's face gets red, and he says, "I would fire you right now if I did not think you are a tired old man who is not fully responsible for what he is saying. What the hell do you mean by this nonsense?"

"You are right," says the Commish. "I am tired and I am old. I wish I had quit this job long ago. But now that we have got this far, Mr. Mayor, sit down and let me explain myself."

Johnny hesitates, looks at his watch, and finally says, "I'll give you five minutes," and sits down at his desk.

"It won't take long," says the Commish. "There is a little streak of cigarette ash on the white door-panel of Holcombe's room. I feel pretty sure it was made by the murderer when he looked out to see if the coast was clear. For a while I thought it must have been made by a man about three inches taller than either you or me. Then I remembered the cigarette holder that you have made your trademark. At the angle you usually carry it, the end of the cigarette comes about three inches above your mouth. And of course, those holders are awkward things to manage in the crack of a door. In fact, it would be nearly impossible for a man without a holder to leave such a mark unless he deliberately tried."

"For God's sake!" Johnny Connors sneers. "And I thought you knew your job! What kind of a cop are you? Is that evidence?"

"No," the Commish admits, "but it is suggestive. Bear with me and I will give you evidence. We know that the bullet that killed Holcombe was fired from a gun equipped with a silencer. That makes too big a weapon to carry in a pocket or a holster. The murderer had to conceal it in a large container of some kind. If Holcombe had seen the gun he would have put up a fight, and there was no sign of a struggle. So we have to assume that the murderer kept the gun concealed the whole time he was with Holcombe. He probably fired it through the container — which was a brief-case, I suspect. That is why there were no powder burns on Holcombe's face. The way I visualize it, the murderer stood next to Holcombe, with the business end of the gun a few inches from Holcombe's head, and on the pretext of taking some papers out of his brief-case, pulled the trigger. Right afterward a man was seen hurrying away from Holcombe's office. He was not a large man — and the person who saw him thought it might

even have been a woman in slacks. Not many men have figures trim enough, or wear their clothes tight enough, to suggest even remotely the female form. This man was carrying something that looked like a small valise, but that could have been a large brief-case."

"So what?" Johnny says, looking the Commish right in the eye. "You are wasting time. You made a wild accusation. Prove it. Put up or shut up."

"This big brief-case of yours, Mr. Mayor," says the Commish, "has a neat little hole near the bottom, right where it would be if a gun had been fired through it."

The Mayor laughed, but it was a strained laugh. "A little hole in my old brief-case," he says, "and that makes me a murderer."

"Not by itself," the Commish comes back. "But if we should look into the brief-case and find powder traces around the hole, that would bring us closer, wouldn't it?"

"This is going too far," says Johnny. "My patience has its limits. Give me my brief-case. I am going home. Speaking as the Mayor to his Police Commissioner, I am disappointed in you. With all your wild talk, you have not even suggested a motive or put up one piece of evidence. Tomorrow we can attend to your resignation."

"One second," says the Commish. "The motive. That stopped me, I admit. Unless the murderer was a habitual killer, he has to be a desperate man. And what was there that would make anyone desperate enough to kill Holcombe? Nothing I could think of seemed to make sense, until Babe here wondered whether it would rain tomorrow without Holcombe."

"Now what has that got to do with anything?" says the Mayor. "You have really gone crazy."

"You believed in Holcombe," the Commish goes on in his steady way. "You knew he was planning to make a flight tomorrow, and that he expected to produce a big, long rain. You could not afford to have rain on Election Day, with a close race, every vote counting, and the party organization worried. A heavy rain would make your defeat virtually certain. Your only hope was in a big vote, and rain always keeps thousands of voters away from the polls."

"You fool," says Johnny, and he is mad clear through, "do you think I would commit murder for a few thousand votes? Do you think I would murder a nice boy like Holcombe, or anybody, just for politics? Do you think if I wanted a murder done, I would do it myself? Do you think I would kill a man on election eve, just when a bad news break could ruin me? You don't make sense, Danwood."

The Commish does not answer for a minute. Then he says, very slow, "You need to win this election, Mr. Mayor. Some bad things have been covered up in your administration. If the opposition got in, they might open up some scandals that would ruin you."

The Mayor looks at him. "You are

seriously accusing me of murder," he says, like he cannot believe it.

"Holcombe was a problem to you," the Commish goes on. "No doubt you asked him first, in a nice way, not to fly tomorrow. And then you found that he did not give a hoot about your election, or even about holding his job with the city — that he was just an honest scientist, trying to do what he had been hired to do for the public. Under his friendly manner, he had a rigid, stubborn, idealistic streak in him that you had not expected. He was being paid to produce rain, so every time there were enough clouds in the sky, he would go up and ice them — regardless of who liked it, or didn't like it. He probably told you what he told others — that if he once started yielding to pressure from any source, there would be no end to it. The clouds were gathering tonight, so he was planning a flight tomorrow to help fill the reservoirs, and he would not let politics interfere. That was the way he thought, and that is what he must have said — especially since he was not in your camp, politically."

"Go on," says the Mayor. "It's a good story. Maybe you can make a living writing mysteries after I fire you."

The Commish sighs and says, "Holcombe was waiting in his office — probably he had been asked to wait. The gun went into the brief-case. I hate to think of the state of mind that led to that gun and silencer being ready. The building was empty — or so it seemed. Anyway, the murderer had to take a chance on being seen. He was desperate. Perhaps he made a last attempt to persuade Holcombe, and then, when he got nowhere, shot him."

"I have had just about enough of this," says the Mayor.

"I think not," the Commish says. "You may be interested in knowing that the murderer had a narrower escape than he realized, because a man passed the door just before he pulled the trigger. Then the murderer picked up the cartridge case, switched out the light, opened the door, and peered out. That is when his cigarette, in the long holder, left a mark. I think that is one of the worst things about this crime, Mr. Mayor — that picture of the murderer, looking out of the door, and wearing his holder at the usual jaunty angle."

The Mayor wet his lips, but did not say anything. He was looking at the Commish as if he were hypnotized. The Commish says, "The hall was empty. The murderer wiped the door handles and the light switch clean, left the room and hurried away. He did not know that behind him a woman had entered the corridor and saw him before he rounded the corner."

"She could not have seen me," says the Mayor, and now his voice is hoarse for the first time. "I wasn't there."

"No?" says the Commish. "Anyway, that is a rough outline of how the crime was committed, Mr. Mayor."

The Mayor takes a deep breath, and when he speaks the old ring is

back in his voice. "It is time to end this nonsense," he says. "There is one big, fatal flaw in your fine story. It just happens that until I heard of Holcombe's death, I was not near the Hall since four o'clock this afternoon, when I spoke at a meeting uptown. Since then I have been with other people continuously. Every minute of my time can be accounted for. I did not kill Holcombe, and if you are fool enough to make me prove an alibi, I can."

The Commish nods and says, "That was what I wanted to hear you say. I believe you. You have given me the final fact I needed."

"What do you mean?" demands the Mayor.

"One of the things that stopped me in this case," says the Commish, "is that the crime was out of character for you. You have always struck me as a fundamentally kind and decent man. I could not see you deliberately murdering a good man for a selfish motive."

"Well, then!" the Mayor says.

"If you did not kill Holcombe, Mr. Mayor," the Commish goes on, "then it had to be done by someone whose cigarette would leave a mark at the height of yours. It is a joke around City Hall that Lloyd Thompson imitates you in everything — the way you smoke, the way you dress. His figure, seen from the rear, has a dandyish appearance, like yours. He had access to your brief-case. He had a motive even more powerful than yours."

"Leave Tommy out of this," says the Mayor. "You have no more evidence against him than you had against me."

The Commish goes on, as if he has not heard. "Defeat in this election would probably have been even worse for Thompson than for you. I think you are an honest man yourself, but it is an open secret that some of the men around you are deeply involved in graft. Your loyalty to your friends would be a fine trait in anyone but a public official. Now I think it has ruined you."

"You think — you think!" rasps Johnny Connors. "Suspicions, suspicions. Where are your facts?"

"Yes," the Commish admits, "we are still short of facts. I have not yet had time to find out whether it was Thompson who brought Kreedlin into your staff, but I think we will find that he was Kreedlin's important connection. I have not yet had time to find out just what Thompson and Kreedlin were trying to cover up in the construction of the Long Park reservoir, but I think we will find that it was something scandalous and dangerous for Thompson, as well as for the Kreedlin Company — something that might send all of them to jail. We probably will not be able to prove it, but my guess is that it was Thompson who telephoned Holcombe about the Long Park reservoir this afternoon, and tried to call him off. It probably was then, when Holcombe refused to yield to pressure, that Thompson decided he had to die, before he broke the scandal wide-open. That motive

passed through my mind early tonight. But I could not imagine why Thompson would murder Holcombe on election eve, when it might hurt your chances of re-election. Wouldn't he wait a day longer — until you had been safely voted back into office? Then Babe's remark made me realize that there was another motive, one that called for prompt action — the danger that rain tomorrow might mean your defeat."

The Mayor lights a cigarette, and his hand is trembling. He says, "Tommy was uptown with me all afternoon."

"No doubt," says the Commish. "The murder was committed about the time you must have gone home to dress for tonight's affair. I think we will find that was when Thompson came back to the Hall, carrying your brief-case, and committed the murder. With Holcombe out of the way, and barring a natural rainfall tomorrow — and he had to gamble on that — he thought you stood to win the election. He really did not think the news of the murder would injure your chances with the voters. On the contrary, he was going to convert it into favorable last-minute publicity and use it to win public sympathy for you. Once you were re-elected, he could cover his tracks on the Kreedlin deal."

"You have not proved anything," says Johnny Connors.

"Still covering up for him? Even to murder?" says the Commish. "Here is how I see Thompson after the crime, Mr. Mayor. He must have been worried about what to do with the gun. I suspect he kept it in your brief-case all the time he was at the rally tonight. He carried the brief-case with him even when he went into the lobby to smoke. It would have seemed safer to him that way than to try to hide the gun. Oh, Thompson was clever: *who would dare to search the Mayor's brief-case for a murder weapon?* If you wanted some papers out of the case, he would just have handed them to you. No doubt he was still carrying the case with the gun in it, under your topcoat, when you stopped at Holcombe's office tonight. I cannot believe you knew about it then. You seemed to mean it when you said you wanted a quick conviction for the rat who killed Holcombe. Thompson probably did not confess to you until you were alone in your own office. Perhaps you noticed the gun in the brief-case. Or perhaps he told you voluntarily what he had done, because he counted on your personal loyalty to protect him, and because your self-interest is involved. He knew if he were caught the scandal would drag you down with him. And his first need was to find a safe place to dispose of the gun."

The Mayor's face was gray. He says, "This is all a tissue of guesses. Where is your proof?"

"The gun is not in the brief-case any more," says the Commish, looking around the office, "and Thompson was not carrying it when he left this office just now. I'll make you a sporting proposition. Give Babe the brief-

case, and give me your keys, and let us search your office. If we do not find traces of burnt gun powder inside the case, and if we do not find the gun, I will admit I cannot prove anything, and I will resign, and that will be that."

"Why should I submit to this kind of thing?" says the Mayor. "It is an insult to my office."

"You can refuse," says the Commish, "but then I shall have to leave Babe here to make sure you do not take the brief-case and gun away, and I shall tell the boys to arrest Thompson, and get a search warrant. And if the reporters ask me why I am getting a warrant to search your office, I shall have to give them the facts."

"Blackmail," says the Mayor. He puts another cigarette in his holder and lights it. His hand is trembling, but he is still wearing the holder in the same cocky way. "Danny-boy," he says after a second, "don't tell me you're another Holcombe. Don't give me a lot of guff about public service and your duty. You owe me something. I made you what you are. The party has got to win tomorrow. You ought to have enough loyalty to me so you won't go on with this. You and I both have too much at stake. Remember, if I am through, you are, too."

The Commish does not say anything, but just looks at him steady, and after a while Johnny Connors throws out his hands. "All right," he says. "You win. Don't bother to search." He unlocks a drawer of his big desk, one that needs two keys to open it, and takes out a Smith and Wesson with a silencer fitted on it.

The Commish stands up and says, "That's all, then. We will tell the boys to pick up Thompson."

"One second," says the Mayor. "This finishes me. I have no stomach for the dirt that lies ahead. There is nothing I can do for Tommy — and with Mrs. Connors gone" — He breaks off and says, "You have always been a good friend, Danny."

The Commish stands there thinking. "I am just a cop," he says finally, "and it is not my business to pass moral judgments, but I know what you mean." He motions me back as I am reaching for the gun.

"Thank you, Danny."

"That's all right," says the Commish. "Come on, Babe."

I start to object, but he stops me and we start for the door.

"Goodbye, Danny-boy," says the Mayor.

"Goodbye, Johnny," says the Commish, and that was the only time I ever heard him call the Mayor Johnny.

We go out into the hall, closing the door after us. The Commish stands still, rubbing his jaw, and looking pretty bad. After a couple of seconds we hear a sound like a sneeze from the Mayor's office.

"I liked him," says the Commish. "I like him now better than ever."

When Cornell Woolrich needed a pen-name, how did he happen to hit upon the attractive and mnemonic "William Irish"?

In 1941 — or was it 1942? — Mr. Woolrich was under contract to Simon & Schuster. His first full-length detective novel, THE BRIDE WORE BLACK, *had been published by S & S in 1940 and the remaining books of his contract had been delivered in manuscript. But Mr. Woolrich was writing more detective novels than a single publishing firm could handle. Now, Whit Burnett, one of the editors of "Story," had published some of Cornell Woolrich's short stories in his celebrated magazine — yes, detective stories in high-hat "Story." So, Mr. Woolrich showed the manuscript of his newest detective novel to Mr. Burnett, and Mr. Burnett showed it to Lippincott's, and Lippincott's liked it so much that terms for publication were agreed upon before the party of the first part could say "Jack the Ripper." The book was the unforgettable* PHANTOM LADY.

Since Simon & Schuster had exclusive use of the name Cornell Woolrich, it was necessary to invent a pseudonym for PHANTOM LADY. *Mr. Woolrich and Mr. Burnett discussed the problem after the signing of the contract, and Mr. Woolrich suggested: How about a geographical name — like English, French, Welsh, Irish —*

Mr. Burnett interrupted, raised his hand, and said: "I'll buy that."

It took less time than it takes to tell this anecdote. In less than two minutes an author's surname was born — Irish. The first name was even more quickly arrived at: a common name, deliberately chosen, to keep the emphasis and memory-value on the surname. William Irish — as simple as that, and it might just as easily have been James English or Thomas French or Robert Welsh . . . Some of the greatest pen-names in literature have had no more difficult a delivery . . .

DEATH IN ROUND 3

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

HALFWAY THROUGH THE PRELIMS, while I was in the dressing room working over O'Dare, Burns, his trainer, came in looking like bad news. "I don't like the looks of it," he muttered to Shackley, the champ's manager. "Donner's burning like a slow fuse. He's been nursing a grudge

against our boy ever since they tangled at the weighing-in this morning. It wouldn't surprise me if he's fixing to double-cross his own manager."

"He wouldn't dare!" Shack answered viciously. "He'd be back walloping docks in no time! It took me plenty to fix this fight!"

"You fixed it with his manager but not with him," Burns reminded.

O'Dare, the champ, slapped me out of the way and sat up on the table. "Hey!" he squawked. "I thought you had this all fixed, Shack. What are y' gonna do? I can't flatten that guy on the champagne you been letting me train on!"

I tried to get him to lie down again, so I could finish priming him.

"Come on, kid," I pleaded, "just let me ——"

It was the wrong time to pick for interfering. Before I knew it he'd snatched up a bottle of liniment and cracked me across the jaw with it. I went down, with glass tinkling all around me and a couple of gashes on the side of my face.

Burns came over, picked me up like I was a piece of furniture, and pushed me outside the dressing-room door.

"Beat it before you get mauled any worse," he advised me. "Get a couple of stitches in that cut, and see that you're back before he climbs through. Y'know how they are before the bell, like prima donnas!"

He felt sorry for me, I guess, because back in '18, instead of waving towels at the other guy like I was doing now, I had them waving at me — by him, among others. At least, he'd never forgotten I'd once been champ; that was why he'd given me this job fanning and rubbing O'Dare.

Staggering up the alley that led from the dressing rooms to the main level of the arena, with my face all bloodied, I met this dick Hallett on his way in to us to say howdy before the scrap. Sort of a bread-and-butter call. Shackley used to give him Annie Oakleys to all O'Dare's bouts. That's how I'd gotten to know him.

He was a swell guy to know, too — but not in a business way. On a case, I'd heard, he was tough as nails, and as merciless as a wolf. But a nice fellow personally. I guess I liked him because he was a great hand at stringing me along, drawing me out about the old days.

"Wow!" he said. "What y' been doing, Carp, leading with your face against a buzz saw?"

I mopped myself with my sweatshirt. The whole side of my face was twitching. "I only tried to get him to lie back on the massage table, and he got sore at me and said it with a bottle."

He seemed disgusted, and gave the dressing-room door a dirty look.

"He's always saying it with bottles, one way or another," he remarked. "And one of these days he'll say it once too often. I hear they unloaded Pommery Sec by the case up at his training quarters, and didn't even try to stop the newsreel guys from taking shots of 'em doing it. No wonder there's no O'Dare money around!"

"That was the whole idea," I said. "Shack put on that show up at the farm purposely, to send the odds on Donner as high as he could.

"They were 15-to-1 this afternoon. I think you can get twenty now. Of course knowing the decish ahead of time like you and I do, whoever bets on O'Dare is going to clean up. You're on him, aren't you?"

"Everything I've got," the detective answered. "Shackley must figure I'll come in handy to him some day, the way he throws things my way. I suppose you've got a few plunks down on the line yourself, eh?"

I liked him, that's why I told him the truth about it.

"Ever since I been working for him he's treated me worse than a dog," I said bitterly, my face twitching away. "In all that time I've been able to scrape together just one hundred bucks. That's all I've got in the world, as I stand here tonight. And I'm punch-drunk and I'm no good any more, Mr. Hallett. But my hundred bucks is down on Donner — to show you how I feel about O'Dare!"

He scrutinized me curiously. "A gesture of defiance, eh?" he said. "Sort of an expensive gesture, though, don't you think? Case of cutting your nose to spite your face." He gave me a little push — not roughly. "I'm a dick," he reminded me; "you're not fooling me any. You know something."

"I've got a hunch, that's all, and I'm playing it for all it's worth. O'Dare insulted Donner at the offices of the State Athletic Commish when they went there for the weighing-in.

"They swung at each other. I saw the look on Donner's face after they'd been separated. That's why I went out and put my money on him to win. You've heard of guys throwing a fight; my hunch is Donner's gonna throw the *fix* by winning the fight!"

"Here's hoping you're wrong," he said. "I'll have to hock my badge. Better get that cut cauterized." He gave me a slap on the shoulder and knocked on O'Dare's dressing room and went in.

I went to a drug store outside the arena and got myself taped. I ran all the way back, but they were already in the ring by the time I got there. Shackley and Burns were sitting at the ringside. Shackley had his raincoat folded across his lap; the papers had predicted showers. There was a stool for me during rounds on the other side of him. I couldn't see where Hallett was sitting, because the glare over the ring threw the rest of the place into shadow.

The round ended. I jumped up and gave O'Dare the business.

"The dirty slob!" he was blubbering. "I can't make it. He's sold us out!"

The alarm clock went off and I jumped down again. The next round was the same. All O'Dare could do was spar, spar, spar. He didn't seem to have a punch in him. The fans were razzing him now, and he was popular as the mumps.

He went down twice, but somehow he lived through it. After two such rounds it was sure going to look phony for Donner to dive, I said to myself. Shackley and Burns were giving each other looks as if they'd lost their last friend.

O'Dare was half out when I hoisted myself to his corner this time. He dribbled the mouthful of water I gave him all over his heaving chest. Burns bent down over him and I heard him say, "All right, kid, hang on — this is it now." It had been fixed for the third.

O'Dare shook his head groggily. "He's welshed on you, welshed on his own manager, too! He told me just now he's going to cut me to pieces!" I sponged the blood off his lips, and he gasped, "Tell Shackley to stop the fight!" He was almost sobbing.

The bell had a knell-like sound, like a funeral gong. There were four of them in the ring when I sat down again — three that every one could see, and one that nobody could. Donner and O'Dare and the ref, and an invisible hooded figure who was the real champ. Who always is. Kid Death, heavyweight. But, of course, I only knew that later.

Shackley was sending up clouds of cigar smoke as Burns repeated what O'Dare had just told him.

"Every cent I have in the world is on our guy!" I overheard him groan. He ran his hand across his shiny head, as if he had hair on it. One of the folded-over sleeves of his raincoat opened and fell down over the edge of his knees, like a short elephant's trunk pointed at the floor.

On the resin O'Dare was taking the punishment of his life, with only champagne and the ghosts of pretty little blondes to give him staying power. There was a curious rhythm to Donner's blows, in-out, in-out, like a human piston.

O'Dare went back, back, back, anywhere and everywhere, ballooning the ropes on this side, then on that, as if they were elastic bands. His plight seemed to rouse all the cruelty in the excited audience.

They howled for his blood, they threw peanuts and popcorn at him, they called him names. You couldn't hear yourself think in the din that was going on.

The timekeeper had his hand poised above the bell, his eye on his watch. The round was going to be over any second. A fool could have seen that Donner wasn't going to throw the fight any more. He couldn't have by now even if he'd wanted to. It would have been such a dead give-away he'd have been lynched on the spot.

He quit closing in on the battered champ, backed off just enough to give himself room, and then sent a long haul at him that all but short-circuited him. They were right opposite us at the moment, O'Dare with his back to us, Donner facing us.

O'Dare went down. There was a finality, a loglike stiffness about the way he did it that told the story. He was already out on his feet, and he wasn't coming up again.

But he did, in a way that reminded me more of a movie comedy than anything I'd ever seen in the ring before. The ropes caught him at about the shoulders, sagged with his weight so that they let him down nearly flat anyway, at waist level to Donner and two thirds out of the ring. I thought he was coming down on me, and jerked my arms upward to save myself.

But then the elastic ropes contracted and bounced him upright again for just a split second, so that he hid Donner from us, the way they were standing. I didn't hear Donner hit him any more. He must have seen by his face that he didn't need to, and a moment later O'Dare had toppled anyway, this time forward, flat on his face. Then he rolled over and lay still.

The bell bonged, but you couldn't hear it in the bedlam that had torn loose. Twenty thousand people were on their feet at once, blasting away like maniacs. I saw the ref put Donner's hand up, but as close as we were, couldn't hear him yell, "The winnuh!"

It was over, but O'Dare just stayed there spread-eagled on the resin dust. Donner himself, grudge or no grudge, would have hoisted him up, but a gang of fair-weather Charlies had already snagged him from the edge of the ring and were carrying him off on their shoulders.

I caught the ropes and jumped in with O'Dare. No one had gone near him until now. Talk about being unpopular! I tugged at him with one hand, reached for the sponge under his stool with the other. The noise was beginning to die down a little as the place emptied itself. I yelled, "Hey, Burns! Help me get him down, he's out cold!"

Burns stood up disgustedly. "Throw him in the ash can for all I care!" he said, and went slouching up the aisle, hands deep in his pockets, taken for all he was worth, wiped out.

A moment later Shackley had jerked to his feet and gone after him, rasping, "Where's Foley? Let me get my hands on Foley!" careless of who heard him. Foley was Donner's manager and had arranged the set-up.

That left me alone with two hundred pounds of unconscious ex-champ on my hands. I couldn't do anything with him there in the ring, so I flagged one of the arena guards, and he climbed up to give me a hand.

We hoisted him up, got him on an even keel between us, then suddenly dropped him again — or rather, he did. In falling, O'Dare turned over on his back, with me still gripping his ankles.

"Look at that!" the guard gasped, eyes bulging. He was pointing at a bloodstain that showed where O'Dare had been lying on the resin, but I was looking at the wound that matched it in the middle of his back. A little off side, right behind the heart. A wound no glove, no rope, no fall, could possibly have made.

The guard backed away. "He's — he's been plugged!"

The side of my face started in

tickling. I looked around, sort of helpless and plenty scared, and spotted Hallett, standing up in his seat about ten rows back, lighting a cigarette. The arena had already emptied itself through about sixty different exits. He was looking right at me, and for some reason that made me even more scared. I didn't call him or anything, but he must have seen by my face that something was wrong. He came down the aisle as far as the ropes, squinted up at me.

"Somebody's shot him!" I gabbled excitedly. "I think maybe some fan sitting out there thought he was using blank cartridges for a noise maker, and by mistake ——"

But this was already business; he wasn't like the same guy at all.

"Nobody asked you!" he clipped at me coldly. He swung up and under, examined O'Dare briefly. He didn't say a word about whether the ex-champ was dead or not, but he acted like he was.

"Get him inside, you two!" he barked. "Pick him up, don't be afraid of him!" And he held the top rope up for us to slip him through.

Long before we got out to the dressing room with O'Dare I knew he was dead; his body was cooling already, with the sweat of the fight barely dried on it yet. He'd gone into his last corner. Behind us, I heard Hallett giving orders not to clean up the arena, to leave it the way it was, and asking where there was a phone.

We'd no sooner stretched O'Dare out on the same table where I'd primed him such a short time before than Hallett came into the dressing room after us. He already had a uniformed cop with him, whom he left outside the door.

"Where's the rest of his retinue?" he asked me. "Do they always beat it off and leave 'em flat like this when they lose?"

"Yeah, always," I said, remembering that night in Chicago in 1919. Both my eyes had been closed and I hadn't been able to get home all night because no one would come near me to help me.

Shackley came in, white in the face, but bitter, not sorry. "What's this I heard out front? What'd he do, bump himself? Good idea!"

"Not unless he was double-jointed," Hallett said dryly. "And unless he's a kangaroo he's got no pockets on him a gun could have come out of." And he turned and looked at the strips of tape the druggist had put on my cheek. He kept looking and he kept looking, until I couldn't stand it any more. I had to put up my hands to cover it and turn my face away.

What went on in that small-sized dressing room around the dead O'Dare for the next hour was what they called routine, but to me it seemed more like some kind of a riot. There was a whole squad of detectives moiling around. Their captain installed himself and took charge, giving orders. Burns was picked up and brought in from a grill a block away where he'd gone to drink himself to death on the cuff.

"You were his trainer — what do you know about what went on tonight?"

"Too much," was the sullen answer. "The big slob used his hands to keep his sides warm!"

"Take him outside and put him under a shower," the captain said.

They asked Shackley the same thing.

"First I heard about it was when I got outside to the street. And if you think my eyes weren't on him the whole time he was up there, you're screwy. He spelled dough to me!" Shackley told them bitterly.

A guy whom they called the medical examiner, and his assistant, had been working steadily over the champ meanwhile — but not like I used to. He handed something finally to the captain on a piece of paper.

"Dead center to the heart," I heard him say. He stripped off a pair of rubber gloves. "Got something for you," he added. "Fired from absolute ringside. Course was acutely upward. Bullet entered much lower than where it stopped."

"You're good tonight!" the captain told him delightedly. "Give you a job with us."

"I'm always good," the medical examiner answered. "See you in the papers," and he went out.

After that they held traysful of flashlight powder up in the air and made blue glares all around the champ. It was the first time he'd posed for pictures without crouching and leading with his left.

They brought in Donner, the new champ, with Foley, his manager, and his trainer, to see if they could help them any. Donner was on top of the world now. How could a prizefighter have had a concealed gun on him anyway, and used it in full view of thousands of people?

"I kept my glims on his dukes, to see if there was any more fight in 'em. Next thing I know he's down," he told them. He went ahead finishing his dressing, knotting his tie and combing his hair by O'Dare's mirror. "Don't keep me here all night, will ya?" Donner grinned like a kid. "Tonight's my big night. They're turning the town inside out for me!" They all smiled, and let him go.

Foley and the trainer went, too, after a few more questions. They hadn't seen or heard anything, either. Shackley glowered at them, but had sense enough not to air the dirty wash between him and Foley in front of all these outsiders.

Hallett, who had been outside for quite a while, came back in.

"I've got their exact positions reconstructed for you out there, Cap," he announced. "We've rounded up everybody who was sitting ringside on that side. Wanna come out and have a look?"

I took my jacket with me; there wasn't any heat in the big empty arena any more. It gave me the creeps to look at what Hallett had done, when we got out there. He'd borrowed two clothing dummies from some haberdashery nearby and had

them set up where Donner and O'Dare had been at the finish.

Somehow, it was worse than looking at the real O'Dare — a goofy-looking thing with a sickly smile on its face. They had a long flexible paper cutter sticking into its sawdust back, at an angle that followed the course the bullet had taken. They made us all sit back where we'd been — me and Burns and Shackley, and some newspaper guys.

Hallett hoisted himself into the ring with the dummies. "O. K., Cap?"

"O. K."

He took a piece of chalk and stroked an X. "The referee." The real ref nodded in corroboration. Hallett went on, "With a little geometry we can narrow this down to the right seat. I took a prize in math once."

"Did they catch you?" the captain chuckled.

Hallett took out a folded line measure and began to open it up. He matched it to the end of the paper cutter sticking out of the dummy. A dick below the ring took hold of the end of it and kept it in a straight line for him.

It cut between the top and middle ropes and hit the floor back in the third row ringside, passing over my head. Hallett pushed the dummy back against the ropes, as O'Dare had fallen that time, and the line measure, foreshortened, hit me on the kneecap.

"Right about there," Hallett said in a voice that froze me. "Even making every possible allowance for shifts to the left or right."

There was a sudden silence, like judgment day had come. Every eye was on me. My lower jaw was wabbling. I felt like a fly stuck on a pin. I tried to say something and couldn't get my voice up. I was reduced to panicky gestures, feeling myself all over. Something hit my hand. I stuck it in my pocket, pulled it out — and it came up with a gun in it!

I yelled and dropped it as though I'd been bitten by a snake. Then they grabbed me.

"I could have told you that without going through all this hocus-pocus," I heard Hallett saying to his captain. "But you like proof and not theories, you once said. Notice the tape? O'Dare did that to him just before the fight tonight. He went out to get it fixed up, and missed nearly the whole first round — probably was scouting around for the gun. I noticed when he came back in.

"O'Dare's been abusing him for a year — there's your motive. He had so deep a grudge against him that he bet every cent he had on Donner tonight, knowing as we all do that it was a fixed fight. He told me so himself."

I'd been shaking my head for so long that I found I couldn't stop now — it kept going from side to side, from side to side.

At about three that morning, in the dressing room, I was groaning for the three hundredth time, "I didn't do it. I never saw the gun before."

O'Dare was gone now. I'd hit the floor, and hit the table he'd been on,

and hit the walls, so often, that the old days when he used to slap me around just once in a while seemed like heaven by comparison.

I wondered why I didn't tell them I'd done it. I'd pass almost out, then they'd throw water on me to bring me to, and the whole thing would start all over again. Sometimes I thought I was back in that fatal ring in Chi against "Dynamite" Perry again — only there were half a dozen Dynamites lambasting me now, and there weren't any neutral corners and there wasn't any referee or bell to save me, and the purse was electrocution. So I wouldn't say I'd done it.

"Why not?" I heard the captain say finally. "We can try it — I'm about all in!"

Then one by one they all wiped their faces and put on their coats and went out — except Hallett, the guy that I had always liked so.

There was just me and him in there then — and the confession, all typed out on the table, just waiting for me to sign. I thought I was in for it sure, and I wabbled to my feet to take whatever it was special they had been saving for me. Because I wasn't going to sign that confession. I was punch-drunk, all right, and at that moment I hardly knew myself whether I'd shot O'Dare or not, but I knew this much — to sign that paper would be the death of me, and I didn't want to die.

But Hallett didn't even roll up his sleeves, or anything. He just sat down and crossed his legs comfortably. And all of a sudden I had a cigarette in my hand!

I dropped it, I was shaking so, and he gave me another. "Relax," he said, "this is recess. Hell, Barney, I like you, and I know how it is."

He went to the door and they passed him in a cup of water for me. He put in a slug of whisky from a bottle they'd found in Burns's pocket.

"This'll make you feel better, Barney," he said softly, and then while I drank it he sat down and looked off into space. And he began to talk.

He talked about the old days, and the old fighters he had known, and what swell fellows they were. And he talked about me, and how he'd always liked me, and how it had made him boil to see the raw deal I was getting all along from O'Dare. And his voice — I guess it sounds pretty dopey of me to say it — seemed to have a kind of music in it as he talked on. I wasn't listening very close to what he was saying, just to the warm, friendly tone of his voice, and it was so long since anybody had talked to me like that I felt something in my eyes that must have been tears.

Hallett reached over and patted me on the shoulder.

"Hell, Barney," he said, "I know how you feel. I'll tell you something. One reason I like you is because I saw you fight once — in Louisville in 1917."

I shook my head. I was too rattled. I couldn't remember.

"You came up against Bobby

Watkins, and took him in the fifth. A clean knockout. You were good that night. It was my first fight. I was in knee-pants. Gee, I was excited! I thought the sun rose and set on you! I ran around to the side door when you came out afterwards, and nearly fell all over myself opening the door of your cab for you."

He gave me another cigarette, and a light. "Ain't life the damnedest thing?" he said softly.

But my hands were still shaking, and this cigarette tumbled, too, and I was all bent over, staring at my hands.

"Brace up, old-timer," Hallett said, and he put his hand on my shoulder and slipped a fountain pen between the fingers of my right hand. Paper crackled under my chin.

"Get the chair out of your mind," he said. "This doesn't have to mean the final bell. I know what I'm saying. Extenuating circumstances, the way he abused you, and all. I can testify to that for you, myself. You'll be all right. Just make it easy for yourself——"

I had to wait a minute to get the wet out of my eyes. I knew I was going to sign now. I couldn't hold out any more. Not after the friendly way he had talked to me. Then I switched the fountain pen over to my other hand and wrote out "Barney Carpenter" at the bottom of the confession.

I looked up to hand him the pen, and he took a step backward. His face was white. "What'd you change fists for?" he yelled at me.

"I'm a southpaw," I cringed. "I can't do anything with my right."

With that, he grabbed up the confession I'd just signed and tore it once across and once down the other way, and pitched it at the wall and started swearing like a maniac.

"Take off that coat!" he hollered, when he'd worked his way back to decent language again.

I jumped and got it off in a hurry, thinking he was going to wallop me some more. Under it was my sweat shirt. He did, actually, swing at me with the back of his arm and luckily missed me.

"Why the hell didn't you say you were a southpaw in the first place?" he demanded savagely.

I had a good answer for that. "Nobody asked me."

"And this coat was where, while you were out there?"

I pointed to the locker.

"And whose is this?" He hauled the raincoat out.

"Shackley's," I said. "He had it out there with him on his lap." I scratched my head doubtfully. "At least, I'm pretty sure he did. Yeah, tell you how I remember! One of the sleeves dropped down like an elephant's trunk and——"

But he didn't seem to be listening to me. He was too busy turning the coat in and out and all around, like a clothing merchant about to make a sale. "A sleeve fell down?" He slipped his hand through one sleeve, turned it inside out. Then he did it with the other one.

Then he went to the door and opened it and jerked his head at them to come back in again.

"Him, too," I heard him say. "Oh, very much so!" Then he jogged me roughly out of the chair I was in. "Get up and let the right guy sit down!" he snarled.

I heard a scuffle and I turned my head. They were bringing Shackley back in again a second time, as if he'd just tried to bolt.

"You're — you're kidding me, ain't ya?" he stammered as they sat him down by main force.

"Yeah, we're kidding," Hallett said tersely. "So is the lining of this sleeve, maybe."

He showed it to the captain and the others. "Powder burns!" the captain said. "All pitted with powder burns!"

"Now look down near the cuff," Hallett said. "See that? A fold of the lining got in the way of the bullet. See the crease the shot ripped through it?"

"I gave it to him to hold!" Shackley squealed, and pointed at me.

"Then you admit it's yours," Hallett said. "May as well, your name's inked in on the tag here. You've also just admitted you had it out there with you. People don't usually hand things to a fighter's aide to hold for them, the way he's up and down every minute."

Shackley got his second wind. "What are you trying to pull off here, anyway?" he blustered. "Did you find the gun on me?"

"No, because you planted it in this poor devil's coat pocket, while you were hanging up your raincoat, right while we were in the room with you! Probably you tried to ditch it out front first, but too much of a mob formed around you, and you didn't have the chance. So you came back here instead. But you overlooked one little thing: you put it in his *right* coat pocket, and he's left-handed! Didn't know that, did you?"

Shackley glowered. "So I shot my own fighter, did I, with every cent I had in the world on him to win! Try again, dick, your psychology's punk." He fumbled in his wallet, brought out his betting slip, marked $20,000, and waved it.

Hallett didn't bother looking.

"No, it was your aim that was," he said, unruffled. "You didn't shoot to kill O'Dare. You shot to kill Donner, because he was licking the tar out of the champ instead of lying down. There was only one way of getting the decision canceled, and getting your original stake back, if nothing else. You took it.

"You slipped the gun out under cover of your folded raincoat, stuck the muzzle through the empty sleeve, shortened it by taking a tuck in it, and fired away. The howling of the fans drowned out the noise, the sleeve doused the flash. But the ropes bounced O'Dare up again into your line of fire, after he'd already been flattened; he stopped the bullet that was meant for Donner with his own body!"

"Cert'n'y!" Shackley blurted. "Y'

don't suppose I——" Then his jaws came together with a click, and it was awfully quiet in that dressing room for a minute or two.

This Hallett had that way about him, like when he'd gotten me to sign before. He seemed to use nothing but his voice, where the rest of them used their fists. He was full of what you might call vocal tricks, that took your mind off what you were doing and saying. Weeks later, for instance, I found out I'd never been in Louisville in 1917, never fought anyone anywhere named Bobby Watkins, and that Hallett had never seen me or heard of me until recently, much less hero-worshiped me as a kid! But then, I'm punch-drunk anyway, and never was an Einstein.

Hallett broke the silence. Very quietly he said, "Nothing to keep us around here any longer now, is there, Cap?"

"You're telling me?" the captain answered. And they all filed out, with Shackley in the middle of them.

"You, too," Hallett motioned to me, "material witness." He saw me get a little frightened again when I heard that, so he said, "It's better than wearing a sandwich-board on Sixth Avenue. You'll be a guest of the city for a couple weeks, that's all. I'll keep you in smokes and magazines. You'll get your hundred back, too — I understand all bets are off, seeing that Kid Death won the title tonight, and he wasn't on the card at all."

Gee, that guy could even make jail sound attractive; he had that kind of a way with him!

On our way up the alley to where the police van was waiting, he remarked, "I got a cousin, in the money but all out of shape. He's got a little private gym fitted up in his basement. I'll talk to him. When all this is over I think he could use a guy like you to pace him with Indian clubs."

A real guy, this Hallett. If I ever again have to sign a confession for a murder I didn't commit, I'd rather do it for him than anyone else.

Stop us if you've heard this one . . .

When MacKinlay Kantor moved to New York City in the early 1930s, he still had an Iowa license plate on his car. One day, while driving near the Holland Tunnel, his car was stopped by a whole squadron of Jersey City cops, who searched both the car and Mr. Kantor with a thoroughness not even to be found in the hardest-boiled fiction. Mr. Kantor asked if the cops were looking for a hot car. No, it turned out that they were looking for a hot man. (It was about this time that Dillinger and other mid-western bandits were on the lam, hightailing it around the country.)

About a year later MacKinlay Kantor had become a constant contributor to "Detective Fiction Weekly." One night, while driving away from New York, Mr. Kantor committed a minor traffic violation — and who should descend on him (have you ever driven a car through New Jersey?) but another battalion of Jersey City cops. Again, they ordered Mr. Kantor out of his car and conducted a highly professional search.

Now, it happened that several of the cops were the same ones who had overhauled Mr. Kantor a year before, and when "Mac" identified himself, the zealous policemen, with their photographic memories, remembered him; moreover, they now knew Mr. Kantor very well indeed.

You see, in the intervening year, they had come to know Mr. Kantor through the pages of "Detective Fiction Weekly." One and all were rabid detective-story fans, and they liked Mr. Kantor's cops-and-robbers stuff. So much so that they wanted him to stop over at the police station and sit around with them all night while they gave him plots out of their own personal experiences.

Here is one of the very stories which the real-life detectives enjoyed so much. . .

SPARROW COP

by MacKINLAY KANTOR

OVER ON ACOLA STREET, two men stood before the door of a cheap, second-floor, rear-hall apartment and rang the bell. Both had guns.

Three blocks away, in a restaurant at the corner of Lead and Bellman Streets, Officer Nick Glennan of the park police walked up to the cigar

counter in his satiny shoes and mirror-like putts, and bought a package of chewing gum.

"Grand day," said Nick Glennan to the girl cashier.

"Swell day," she agreed.

"Because," said Glennan's gentle voice, "there's a feel of spring on a day like this. It won't be long now." He stowed the chewing gum deep in an inside pocket, and rubbed imaginary wrinkles out of his uniform.

"Twitter, twitter," spoke a voice behind him.

"And what is so rare as a day in March?" said someone else.

Glennan's face turned from maple to mahogany. He knew those voices. Both of them. . . .

He turned and flashed a scornful eye at the two big men who lounged at a wall table, picking the relics of luscious T-bones.

"How's the Sparrow Cop?" asked the bigger of the two men. He was Nick's brother, Sergeant Dave Glennan of the Detective Bureau. He was fifteen years older than Nick and forty pounds heavier, and he looked like a none too surly baboon.

"The Sparrow Cop," said Nick warmly, "is just as healthy as any dick who wears an oversize double-breasted suit and parks his fanny all day in a Cad. Yeh, and just as handy with his dukes."

Dave chuckled. His companion, Pete McMahon, grinned at the youngster and waved a genial toothpick. "You always take Dave too serious, punk."

"Then he can leave off that noise about Sparrow Cops, and welcome. He used to wear harness himself."

"But not at the Zoo," grunted Dave.

"And what's wrong with the Zoo? Do you think there ain't any police protection needed in the park?"

"Indeed there is," his brother declared. "For one thing, you can never tell about bears. The bears might get out and bite somebody. And once an old lady fell headfirst into the lagoon. Somebody is liable to steal General Sherman's statue from in front of the aquarium — most any day now. And if some kid comes up to you with a dirty nose, don't you forget to blow it. That's in regulations. It's practically a city ordinance."

Over on Acola Street someone opened the door of that cheap apartment, and one of the men lifted the butt of his gun and brought it down, quickly and very hard.

Nick twisted his shoulders and settled them back regretfully under the sleek serge of his uniform. "Some day, you big noise, I'd like to show you that a park copper is just as hard as your kind."

"Any time," crowed Dave cheerily. He yawned, and patted his round stomach. Nick thought of the ugly masses of pink and white scar tissue which adorned that protuberant abdomen, and he felt somewhat ashamed. Dave was a real guy, no doubt of that.

He was a brother for anyone to be fond of. But, somehow, he could never keep from feeling angry when Dave kidded him.

He'd only been on the force six months. And he wouldn't be a Sparrow Cop all his life. Dave ought to know that. Just because Dave had been a cop for twelve years, and had been shot and promoted and decorated and half-killed and tooted up in the newspapers was no reason for him to get so blamed noisy about it —

"Ready to go, Dave?" McMahon looked at his watch.

They paid their checks and waddled to the door. Nick adjusted his peaked cap, flicked a microscopic atom of dust from his glistening Sam Browne, and followed.

"What time do you go on?" asked McMahon of Nick Glennan.

"In about an hour and a half."

His brother's wide mouth curled in amusement. "Devotion to duty, and how. You're all slicked up and self-inspected, when you could be at home with Alice."

"Alice likes to have me pay attention to my job," said Nick loftily.

"Which means working an hour and a half longer than you're paid for." Dave bit off the end of a cigar, and patted the boy's shoulder. Again Nick flamed at him. "My boy," said Dave, "you're one snappy policeman. Look at them putts, Pete! Like glass!"

The younger Glennan tried to quench his mounting annoyance. "What's on the hook for you two?"

"Suspicious flat to look at. And wait till you're thirty-eight. You won't walk, you'll roll. All the Glennans gather meat to warm their bones, soon as they get dry behind the ears."

"This one won't," Nick assured him.

The two detectives turned toward Bellman Street, and Nick moved in the opposite direction, where the park showed its bare shrubbery in the midday sunlight, one block distant.

"Tell Alice hello for me. I'll be up to kiss her and drink some soup with you some fine night."

"She wouldn't kiss you," said the Sparrow Cop, "and I hope she puts castor oil in your soup if you do come. S'long, McMahon. And you, fatty."

McMahon warned, "Don't let the seals out."

"And don't get lost in the greenhouse, Sparrow Cop."

Nick Glennan did not dignify these remarks by any acknowledgment. He strode along the street, disgust and injured pride seething within him. Sparrow Cop! Agh, the two fat loafers! He told himself that he despised every fibre in their assorted anatomies, beginning with the huge flat feet and continuing upward to the thin fuzz on their bald, puffy heads.

Just because Dave was a sergeant and wore plainclothes and was mentioned in the newspapers, he didn't have to — *Sparrow Cop*. Dave looked like a mattress with feet and arms, indeed he did.

Nick went on toward the park, his

cap cocked at a slight angle, his arms swaying easily, his steps even and quick on the slushy sidewalk. When he passed cars parked along the curbstone he gave them a careful once-over. You couldn't tell. Might be stolen cars along there somewhere. Mentally he ran down the latest list of hot-car numbers.

Though he was not due for duty until two o'clock in the afternoon, and had an hour and a half of leeway, the enthusiasm for his office had driven him from the tiny apartment where he and Alice were spending their second year of marriage. It did, daily. He liked to be in uniform. He liked to be on the job, even before he had to. The Glennans were like that. There was a red-faced, bewhiskered grandfather who had gone down beneath a horde of rioting anarchists, long ago. The father of Nick and Dave was officially retired now, but something more than necessity kept him in the uniform of a private bank policeman, even though his hair was like curly cotton.

Nick held his chin up. His eyes saw everything, and found it good: the hard blue sky of late winter, and warm sunlight thawing against the bare brick walls, the caravans of children and nurses moving toward the park. His curved fingers brushed the blue-steel revolver against his hip, staunch in its polished holster. . . . Sparrow Cop, huh? He'd like to show —

The man in the brown coat held the woman, twisting her arms cruelly as she struggled. "Tie her up, Jack. Then we'll go over this joint with a fine-tooth comb."

"You might as well kill me," the woman sobbed against the harsh fingers that squeezed over her mouth. "You've killed him . . . might as well kill me —"

Pete McMahon and Dave Glennan reached the intersection of Acola and Bellman Streets and turned to the right.

"What's the number, Dave?"

"Thirty-four nineteen."

"Yeh. The news?"

"Apperson said to look her over. Apartment Twelve. Somebody phoned and said it sounded funny."

"Stool?"

"No. Just some neighbor. Nothing to it, or I'd 'a' brought a squad. Apperson said if I got out north in the next day or two to stop by. Well, this is the next day or two, and we're north, so we might just as well stop by."

McMahon spat out a soggy wad of cigar pulp. "Precincts ought to have to look after this stuff."

"Yeh. But since the harness bulls from Eighteen walked through that Hefty Lewis flat and muffed the job, with Hefty hid in a clothes hamper all the time, they've shifted suspicious flats to the Bureau. A whole lot of work for nothing."

"You said it," agreed Pete. "There it is. That crumby-looking joint across the street."

They strolled from behind a parked

car and approached the front entrance of Thirty-four nineteen Acola Street. It was a shabby, smelly-looking building not five years old, but already stained and cracked about the corners; colored glass panes in the vestibule door were broken; Dave Glennan was positive that he could smell a mixture of gin, cauliflower, and damp diapers the moment he stepped inside. Half apartment-hotel, half family-flat-building, its garish evil jarred the whole row of sober little buildings where it stood.

"Looks like a pest-house," muttered McMahon.

"Smells like one. Feels like one. It *is* one," grunted Dave.

They pushed their way into the vestibule, nudged aside a filthy baby carriage and a velocipede, and scrutinized the greasy line of mail boxes and bells.

"Apartment Twelve," read Glennan. "Frank R. Johnson."

"Ought to be Jones or Smith," McMahon observed. "Johnsons are getting too common these days."

"Aw," said Dave, "this is probably some out-of-work Swede who beats his wife, or something." His big thumb moved toward the bell, then hesitated. "Neighbors are always butting in when they hear a family row," he philosophized. "Probably that's how come the tip. Just the same, I don't like the looks of this place. Try that vestibule door."

Pete rattled the door. "Locked," he reported.

"I'm not gonna ring," said Dave, surprised at his own stubbornness. "Let's go to the rear —"

"Here comes somebody." McMahon stepped back as a middle-aged woman with a market basket opened the door from the inside. His big hand fell forward and stayed the open door as she passed through; the woman turned and grunted with surprise. "Police officer," said McMahon.

The woman muttered in Italian, and shook her head. "Go along, lady," grinned Dave. He held open the outer door as she passed through.

"Anything to her?"

"Naw. Somebody's grandma from the wilds of Sicily. It's a cinch *her* name ain't Johnson."

"Well," said Pete, "we got the door open."

Glennan said, "I'll take the back door." Some hard-bitten suspicion was spearing up in his brain; he did not believe in premonitions, knew nothing about them, in fact. But he had been a guardian of the public safety for more than twelve years, and this building did not look good to him. Neither did the name of Frank R. Johnson opposite the bell.

In such circumstances he knew that a beleaguered criminal, surprised by a summons at the front door, usually made for the rear. With natural aptitude he selected the post of danger for himself.

"You rear, me front," recited McMahon. He took out his watch. "How long?"

"I've got to find the rear stairway and line up that door," said Dave.

"Give me at least five minutes. Seven is better. Make it seven minutes. Then you go ahead and tell 'em hello at the front."

"It looks to me like you're going to a lot of trouble for an out-of-work Swede."

Glennan shrugged and glanced at his watch. "That makes it ten of one. At ten minutes of one you give the front door a buzz."

The woman with the tousled, straw-blonde hair was tied bolt upright in a chair, her mouth gagged, her eyes open and staring. When they did move at all, they turned toward that hunched pile inside the front door of the flat. . . .

Jack emptied a bureau drawer in the middle of the rug, pawing quickly through the heap. "Hell," he said. "They got it salted away somewhere, Spando."

The man in the brown overcoat came to the kitchen door; there were ugly, white lines around his mouth. "Then she'll talk. We'll make her talk. I wish I knew where that kid was, anyway."

"I heard the kitchen door shut, just before she come in."

"Hell. That was her. She shut it, when we pushed Al over."

"When you pushed him over, you mean. You didn't have to sock him so hard."

"How'd I know he had a glass head?"

"A ride would of been safer. Now we got a corpse on our hands."

Spando said, "There's gonna be two stiffs here, unless she talks and talks quick —"

Officer Nicholas Glennan strolled down the wide west sidewalk which led into the heart of the park. Strolled is a poor word. Officer Nicholas Glennan paraded; he marched; he was on review, but he was neither too ornate nor useless. He was young and handsome and becomingly stern, and at this moment, as at all moments, he figured that God had been good in letting him be alive and be a policeman. Yes, even a Sparrow Cop.

Dave. The big, fat — bah.

Kids were rioting all about: big kids in droves and dozens — boys on bicycles, perilously tottering through the slushy pools, girls in bright-colored play suits. And babies by the regiment, all swaddled in their cabs. When Nick saw those kids, there was something in his face more than mere good looks and duty and enthusiasm. Something wistful and a little grim.

He and Alice had wanted a kid. More than one. But now they had been married nearly two years, and the kid they wanted hadn't even suggested himself. . . . Alice cried, sometimes. She had wanted a boy baby, and had planned to call him Nicky — first thing when they were married, she had wanted Nicky. Well, two years wasn't forever. Maybe it would happen, yet.

He comforted himself with this vain hope. For he could not forget that old Dr. Fogarty had told him

that he might never be a father. Life was funny. No reason for things like that. . . . And Dave was a bachelor. Maybe there'd never be any more Glennans to be cops.

Headquarters of the park police lay toward the north, but Nick Glennan moved in a southerly direction. He planned to pass through the Zoo, skirt the wide sweep of the lagoon, and arrive at headquarters on the dot.

Of course there was the usual crowd by the bears' dens, along both the upper and lower walks. Nick descended some steps and came into the lower court which was flanked on one side by the cages of wolves and foxes. It smelled like fury down there, and crowds didn't gather.

The small boy was plodding dolefully through the opposite shrubbery when Glennan first saw him. He was a very small boy, in blue coveralls and cheap gray sweater; he had no cap, and evidently the world had been bad to him. He wailed to himself in a monotonous, muted alto.

Glennan's long arms reached in and drew him out of the bushes. "Hi, buddy," he said.

The teary eyes blinked in sudden awe. Nick picked the child up in his arms. "How'd you know my name, policeman?" quivered the little voice.

"Indeed, I didn't. Is that your name? Buddy? It's a fine name — Buddy. Are you lost?"

"I came to the Zoo," said Buddy. He snuffled violently.

"Bet your Mamma didn't know it," grinned Nick.

Buddy nodded seriously. "No. She went away, one time. The men took her in a great big box."

"Oh, yeh?" grunted Glennan. He felt embarrassed. "Well," he said, brightening, "I bet your Dad didn't know it either."

"I haven't got any Dad. I have got a big doll, though. It's named Popeye, that doll."

"Yes," said Nick, "and you've got mighty cold hands, too. Whereabouts do you live, Buster?"

The boy pointed toward the distant gap where Bellman Street abutted on the edge of the park. "I live up there, I guess maybe a hundred miles. And I saw a man hit Uncle Al on the head, so I came to the Zoo."

This bit of information was disturbing to Glennan's equilibrium. He forgot that all lost children were to be taken immediately to park headquarters. He forgot that he wasn't yet on duty — as if that mattered. He even forgot about Buddy's cold hands. "Huh?" crowed Nick. "You saw a man hit Uncle Al? When? And who's Uncle Al?"

"He's mean," said the child. "He hit me. Here." There was a bruise on the side of the thin little jaw.

"Oh, yeah?" breathed Glennan, gently. "He hit you, huh? When?"

"I guess maybe about six times or maybe ten or four. Aunt Ida cried. I like Aunt Ida. But I don't like that old Uncle Al. I wish Mamma would come back out of the big box."

Glennan muttered, mostly to himself, "And how! I'll bet you do." He

cleared his throat, and grinned, and juggled Buddy in his arms. "Look," he said. "Gum!" With some difficulty he managed to extract the package from his pocket, and Buddy seized it in a dirty fist.

"Now, listen, big boy," Nick directed him seriously, "you know, policemen always like to find out about men who hit other men on the head. What about this guy who hit Uncle Al? Who was he, anyway?"

—"He was a big man. I don't like him. But I like gum. . . ."

Strolling slowly toward the boulevard with the shivering boy in his arms, Glennan searched out the story. Buddy, it seemed, lived in a great big building, 'way up that way. He was playing with Popeye on the stairs, and he was very quiet, and he watched the two men who rang the bell outside his apartment door. From a vantage point on the shadowy stairs above, it appeared, he had watched them without being seen. When Uncle Al opened the door, a man hit him and Uncle Al lay down on the floor.

Anyway, Buddy hadn't stayed to see any more, after the door closed. He had come to the Zoo; Aunt Ida had taken him to the Zoo, once before, and he knew the way. It was, he thought, about a hundred miles, or maybe six or ten. And he liked gum.

"Yeh," agreed Officer Glennan, abstractedly, "gum is sure hot stuff." They were standing beside the boulevard now, and when Officer Glennan held up his hand, a taxicab skidded quickly in the slush.

Nick hoisted the child in at the open door.

"Listen, Officer," cried the driver, "I just got a call —"

"You sure did," said Glennan, "and this is it. Turn west on Bellman Street. Drive not too fast — and not too slow." He climbed in and sat down beside his charge.

"This is a damn nice cab," said Buddy.

"Now, you blasphemous midget, no cursing in the park." He lifted the boy to his knee as the cab swung through the gaunt trees. "Let's see, Buddy, if we can find that big building of yours. Did you cross a street car track?"

"Yes," nodded Buddy, "but I was careful. I looked all ways. I looked and looked and looked."

Glennan directed the driver: "Go on, then. Cross Lead Street."

"It's this way," said Buddy. "You go down here. I know the way to the Zoo, don't I?" The gray eyes regarded the Sparrow Cop seriously. "But if we go home now, we'll go to the Zoo again?"

"I bet you we will. Do you go past this corner, too? And now where does Uncle Al live?"

"Up that way." The soiled finger pointed toward Acola Street. "But I don't like him. I like you better."

Glennan nodded. "Yeah. And gum."

"Yes," said Buddy, champing noisily, "and gum."

Spando stood there and looked at Ida Carrier, alias Irene McCoy, alias Ida Johnson. His mouth twitched

scornfully as he turned to survey the body of her consort, Albert Carrier, alias Luther McCoy, alias Frank R. Johnson. He swung back to the woman trussed in her chair.

"He's out like a light," he said. "Dead. Do you understand? We pushed him over. My God, his head musta been an egg-shell. There ain't any graft in it for you to hold out on us. You tell us where you got that roll, and tell us quick. Dirty double-crossers, both of you —"

Jack Novack loosened the gag in Ida's bruised mouth. Her answer came, pained and hating. "I'll see both you rats take a hot squat first," she labored.

"Maybe," grinned Spando. "Take off her shoes, Jack. How'd a nice hot cigarette feel against your tootsies, Ida?" He lit a cigarette and bent forward; there was no bluff about him; his face was the face of a torturer in some medieval dungeon.

The woman sobbed, "Oh, God. It ain't no use. . . ." Her rigid elbow tried to motion grotesquely. "Over there. That radiator. It's a dummy — Al screwed it to the floor. You take out the board behind it, and it's all there, still in the poke."

"All? There was twenty-six grand in that payroll."

"Al kept out two grand. And I took a leaf or two, once when I was hard up. The rest's still there." She began to sob, coarsely and hideously.

Spando chuckled. He went to the kitchen for a screw driver, then came back and began to unloosen screws in the floor while Jack heaved at the radiator. It came loose with a jarring thud, and Spando pried at the board behind it.

In the corridor, his hand caressing his big watch, Pete McMahon heard the murmur of voices. He could not hear words, only that uneasy murmur. The minute hand touched the figure Ten, as the radiator crashed loose inside.

Pete replaced his watch and pressed the button beside the door. *Urrr.*

Spando moved quietly across the floor until he stood beside Ida Carrier. Through his brown coat pocket, a hard muzzle pushed against the woman's head. "Ask who it is," he said smoothly.

McMahon's knuckles thudded on the wooden door.

"Who is it?" called a voice that might have been Ida's.

"Police officer," said Pete McMahon.

Spando's little eyes seemed to laugh. "Tell him you'll let him in," he whispered.

"I'll — I'll let you in —"

Jack Novack drew out his automatic and held the muzzle down on Ida, from a safe vantage point out of range. One hand in his pocket, Spando moved calmly to the door, unfastened the safety chain and flung the door open.

McMahon gaped at him. He knew that face, if he'd had time to think. Spando didn't give him much time. He pounded two shots through the

side pocket of his overcoat. Pete reeled back against the opposite door of the hallway as Spando's gun kept slamming. Pete was a hard cookie, even if he was fat, and he took a long time about his dying.

His knees began to bend, and red syrup spurted from his mouth and nose, but somehow or other he got his gun up and pulled the trigger once before he smashed forward on his face. His bullet tore through Spando's left hand, and Ida Carrier was just behind. She did not know what had happened; it was all very sudden, and surprising; her head dropped forward and she gave a little sigh, tender and lamenting.

The door slammed.

Spando swung his stinging hand, and swore wildly. His eyes rolled back until they seemed all white. "He got her," gasped Novack. "He got her when he drilled you —"

"Good," Spando sobbed. "I tell you it's good. She won't ever make no squawk on us now. Grab that dough, you —" He leaned against the table, threw the empty clip from his pistol and snapped a new one into place. There was red all over his coat.

Dave Glennan was battering at the rear door; not until then did they realize it, for the big automatic was still making door-slams in their ears. Dave had a heavy garbage can and he was swinging it like a club against the outer door with his right arm while his left hand had his revolver ready. . . . Dave was a southpaw.

From the kitchen entry, Novack fired at him casually and coolly. He had the leather bag of money now, and he was anxious to get this irksome mound of flesh out of the way so he and Spando could descend the rear stairway. There was apt to be a driver or even a whole squad out in front —

Clong. The bullet stung through the garbage can and raked Dave's side. "All right," he bellowed, "put down those guns or we'll let you —"

Clong. Clong.

Glennan's first shot tore a wad of splinters from the door casing beside Novack's head. Novack fell back; the big detective came on, holding his ineffective shield, flinging another lead messenger ahead of him.

The ruined door caged him for a moment, and that gave Spando his chance. Jack was still shooting, from the entryway, but Spando had slipped into the pantry. There was a tiny window opposite Dave's shoulders, and it was easy to plant a bullet between Glennan's huge shoulders. Dave sprawled across the doorstep, garbage can and all.

"Front," snapped Novack to his wounded companion. "Our car's there. No more bulls down in front or they'd been here by now —"

"Don't I know it?" snarled Spando as he stumbled over Pete's body in the front hall. Downstairs, a woman was screaming and frightened feet stumbled to and fro. "Mrs. Franchetti," a girl was shrieking, "call the *police*. Mrs. Franchetti —"

Novack cried, "Get outa the way." With his fist he knocked a child across

the hall. Spando left a line of red splashes behind him; he kept whining in pain as he ran.

They reached the vestibule as Officer Nick Glennan leaped from a yellow taxicab. He had heard those screeches as he turned the corner; Mrs. Franchetti was at a second-floor window, and she was telling the world, mainly in screeches, what had happened.

Nick was only a Sparrow Cop, of course, and a rookie at that. Things were happening pretty suddenly, but his face had had time to turn hard and gray and his eyes were hard and gray as well. "Keep down," he said to Buddy, and sprang from the open door of the cab. The driver flung both arms over his head and dropped behind his wheel.

Spando and Novack sped from the vestibule door squarely in Nick Glennan's face. They saw the hated khaki serge and the gleaming star, and the Sparrow Cop was just getting his gun out.

"Get the bull," gasped Spando.

Novack began to shoot, but Nick was coming in very fast. Novack aimed low — a habit of his, a very vicious one. Some fluff flew from the skirts of Glennan's blouse; then the Sparrow Cop's left fist had taken Novack across the jaw. As he went down his foot tripped Spando and the bullet intended for Nick Glennan's heart sang against the concrete instead.

The man in the bloody, brown overcoat squawked something between a sob and a curse. He and Nick Glennan stood there six feet apart, their guns jerking in a nasty chorus. Nick thought somebody had come up behind him and struck his left hip with a club; somebody else had thrown a brick against his left shoulder.

But he was busy putting six pointed pebbles of lead into Spando's body, and he did not topple over until he had done so.

And when he did topple over, he writhed into a sitting position, reloaded his gun with his right hand, and kept the muzzle on Jack Novack's slumbering head until a patrolman yelled in his ear, "Okay. All okay now —"

He felt rather light-headed and he wanted to laugh, and he hoped they wouldn't frighten Alice when they phoned her, and then he was lying on a rug inside the building while a distant ambulance wailed and whined.

They brought in something huge and gross that dripped and grunted and swore. He twisted his head and stared at his brother Dave. "I'll be so-and-so," he cried hoarsely. Then, "Where's Pete?"

"They got him," whispered Sergeant Dave Glennan. "Yeah. He's — dead. . . . Folks said — you got 'em —"

Nick told him, achingly, "I just got one. But I laid the other out, and he'll burn all right. Who were they?"

"Jack Novack was one," gulped his brother. "Guess the other must of been Micky Spando. We always

thought they did that American Packing payroll job. . . . Man and woman dead upstairs. I guess this must be the whole mob."

"One of 'em had a bag."

"Maybe it was a doublecross. Maybe they got in a scrap over the dough."

A woman bent over Nick Glennan and whispered, "Mister, that little boy in the cab — it's his aunt and uncle. They're dead, up in Twelve."

"Who's that?" asked Dave.

The surgeons came in and clustered about them. Outside, sirens chanted in a chorus of Valkyries. . . . Nick moved his head, so that he could grin at Dave. "It was a lost kid. He told me a yarn, over in the park, and I came to take a look. I walked into this —"

"Sparrow Cop." Dave's throat gurgled, and he shut his eyes. "Sparrow Cop. Kid lost in the park. My God." Then, "How about it, Doc? Am I gonna — kick over?"

"Hell, no," rumbled the doctor. "It's in your chest, that's all. They'd have to cut out your heart to kill you, Dave."

Some woman held Buddy up, as Dave and Nick moved out on their stretchers.

"Hey, Dave." Nick motioned toward the boy. "That's the kid. Hi-ya, Buddy."

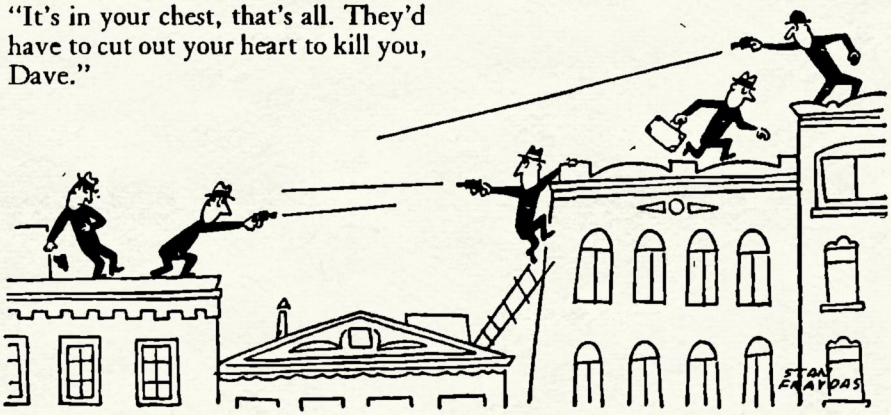
"I heard the guns," cried Buddy. "They made a great big bang."

The neighbors were weeping and clucking over him. "Gee. Poor kid. Poor little kid — nobody to look out for him."

"You'd be surprised," Officer Nick Glennan told them. "Wait'll I get on my feet again. We'll — go to the Zoo. A lot. Hey, Buddy?"

Dave heard him, and shook his round head feebly. "Zoo," he whispered. "Holy smoke. A Sparrow Cop —"

"And just as hard as you, you upholstered fly-cop," Nick grinned at him. Their hands clutched, a little bridge from stretcher to stretcher. Then the ambulances went whining away with them.



THE WEDDING PRESENT

by ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

THE PACKAGE came in the morning mail. When Frieda Marshall opened it she found a cigar box with a .38 gun inside. The gun, wedged diagonally into the box, had a tag tied to the trigger guard. On the tag was typed:

Lady, here's a wedding present. It's the gun Dexter Paige killed his first wife with.

At first shock, Frieda could see it only as some ghastly practical joke. She'd known her fiancé, Dexter Paige, all her life. So she was fully informed of the circumstances, five years ago, of his wife's death. Dexter and Alma Paige had been wakened by a furtive prowling. Cornered, the burglar had fired one shot, killing Mrs. Paige, and had then jumped from a window. Two neighbors had seen him running away. Frieda Marshall, who lived in the next house north, had herself been one of those witnesses. Police, arriving in five minutes, had found a jimmied window and footprints of the burglar's retreat. It was a clear case against an unknown prowler.

And now came this gun. A typed note lay beneath it in the box:

Lady, I wasn't armed that night. Never packed a rod in my life. They heard me and came into the room where I was. I was scared and beat it. As I jumped the alley fence I heard a shot. Thought it was Paige shooting at me from a window. Next day the papers said I'd killed his wife. So I knew Paige must have shot her himself.

Fantastic, this charge! But it wasn't the first time Frieda had heard it. "Suppose," some people had whispered, "that Dexter had wanted to get rid of Alma. A burglar would provide the opportunity."

To show the world she didn't believe such ugly rumors, Frieda had shown toward Dexter the utmost cordial confidence. Often, in his first years as a widower, she had deliberately paired herself with him in public. She'd always admired the man. His recent proposal of marriage, though, had caught her off guard. Oddly, her first thought had been: "If I say no he'll think I'm not quite sure of him. And I am. *I am!*"

Her eyes dropped angrily to the note again. There was another paragraph:

Lady, it put me on a spot. If I went to the cops they'd hang it on me. But I did some tight thinking. What had Paige done with the gun? He wouldn't dare hide it in the house. He didn't have time to bury it outside. How could he

get rid of it in five minutes? In casing the prowl for dogs, I'd found out the people next door south were away for the summer. Paige might figure the cops wouldn't search a locked house next door. If he could get the gun into that house he could pick it up in a week or so and ditch it in some deep river. So I played a hunch. A night later I prowled that next-door house. The gun was in the mail pocket in the front hall, dropped in through the mailman's slot. I took it home with me. It would match the murder bullet, and the serial ought to prove it had been bought by Paige. If cops picked me up, the gun would clear me. So I hung on to it. Now I'm where they'll never find me and I don't need it any more. But you do, lady. Papers say you're going to marry that guy. So I'm mailing you the gun.

Frieda put the gun back in the box and rewrapped the package. The thing to do was to take it straight to Dexter. He should be allowed to decide, himself, whether to ignore it or to try tracing the sender. . . .

She found him at home, a solid, prematurely gray man with a distinguished profile. He greeted her eagerly, then stopped with a quizzical stare when he saw her distress.

She handed him the package. "It came in the mail, Dexter. It's cheap, false slander and nothing could ever make me believe it. The only question is, what shall we do with it?"

He put an arm around her and led her to a chair. "Don't take things so seriously, Frieda."

He stopped to light his pipe, then calmly opened the package. Just as calmly he looked at the gun and read the note. His prompt and forthright decision, then, made Frieda's pride and faith in him rise to the heights.

"Frieda," he said quietly, "get your hat. We're taking this package straight to the police."

Twenty minutes later she was telling her story to Inspector Mark Hallam at Headquarters. Dexter Paige handed the package to Hallam, who opened it and took out the gun. "Popular household model," he commented.

As he read the note a wise smile curved his lips. "We got a whole morgueful o' these crank letters, Miss Marshall," he consoled. "Fake confessions or fake accusations. Easy enough to check and make sure, though." He thumbed a desk button, and a file clerk appeared. "Bring me the exhibits in the Alma Paige case, Eddie."

Eddie brought an envelope. From it Hallam took a labeled bullet. "It's the murder slug," he said, and thumbed another button. To the man who responded he said, "Here's a gun and a slug, Herb. See if they match."

The man went out with the .38 gun, and with a bullet probed five years ago from the body of Alma Paige. "Our ballistics expert," Hallam explained. "He never makes a mistake. And now, if you'll just make yourselves comfortable —" The Inspector returned his attention to routine matters on his desk.

Five minutes slipped by. Then Frieda heard a shot in the basement. Hallam looked up to explain: "It's the gun you brought in. Herb just fired it into a boxful of cotton waste. He'll compare the bullet with the other one. Rifling marks will tell positively if they came from the same gun."

Another five minutes. Frieda looked at Dexter Paige and saw that he was quite at ease. Yet she couldn't relax, herself. The bullet either would or wouldn't match the gun. If it did — But what was she thinking of? It was heresy even to consider such a possibility.

Those assertions in the note were absurd. Imagine Dexter dashing next door to drop a gun in the Morgans' mail slot. Still — the Morgans *had* been away that summer, and they'd always left their key with the Paiges in case of fire. Dexter could just possibly have —

The ballistics man came back, then, and brought her a complete letdown of relief. "You can relax, folks," the man reported cheerily. "They don't match. Somebody's been kiddin' somebody."

He handed the hoax gun to Hallam.

Hallam said, "Thanks, Herb. That's the way I figured it. Some screwball just picked up any old .38 gun and mailed it to stir up trouble."

He tossed the gun over to the file clerk. "Put it back in the box, Eddie, and stow it in the crank morgue."

He stood up and shook hands warmly with Paige. "You did just right, Mr. Paige, bringin' it in. That's what we're here for." He shook hands no less warmly with Frieda. "Now run along home," he said benignly, "and forget it."

But Frieda had turned deathly pale. Her hand grew icy in Hallam's as she stared beyond him at the gun package. Eddie had just dropped the gun back into its mailing box.

It lay there loosely, straight with the box.

It didn't need to be wedged in diagonally, from corner to corner. With a sickening conviction Frieda knew *it wasn't the gun which had come in the mail.* This one had a slightly shorter barrel.

Paige spoke from the door, impatiently. "Coming, Frieda?"

"No," she said firmly. "Not now or ever."

She faced him with level, accusing eyes. "You told me, Dexter, to get my hat and we'd go straight to the police. And while I was getting my hat, you switched guns."

NEIGHBORS

THERE are queer goings-on in the house next door —
  Come close, we must talk in quieter tones —
Since the dark-eyed man and the woman came;
  But I ask no questions, Mrs. Jones.

They keep themselves to themselves all day;
  No radio, mind you; but telephones
Buzzing and buzzing, and then all night —
  But I ask no questions, Mrs. Jones.

All night I can't get a wink of sleep,
  Not a wink, for the tramping about and the groans;
And no voice, only the woman's voice;
  But I ask no questions, Mrs. Jones.

Two strangers came last Friday week,
  A fat man one, the other all bones;
And I've only seen the thin one leave;
  But I ask no questions, Mrs. Jones.

That night I woke, and I seemed to hear
  A scuffling sound, then sobs and moans,
And four feet running upstairs and down;
  But I ask no questions, Mrs. Jones.

Before it was light, the man went out —
  I do not *think* it was filled with stones —
With a sack, I could almost swear, on his back;
  But I ask no questions, Mrs. Jones.

— G. ROSTREVOR HAMILTON

Here is the fifth in a series of short puzzle stories which derive from folk-lore — from the folk-tales of all ages, as re-told by a Philadelphia school-teacher. "The Pawn of Justice" is based on a Hebrew legend which is four centuries old in printed form, ten centuries old in manuscript, and orally — who knows? The protagonist is Solomon — king, judge, writer, riddle-solver, and builder (I Kings 1:2) *— about whom countless tales have appeared in the literature of all nations. Solomon wrote* Song of Songs *in his youth,* Proverbs *in his prime, and* Ecclesiastes *in his old age; he is the reputed author also of "lost" books of magic and science.*

One tradition (I Kings x:1-10) *interprets the Queen of Sheba's visit to Solomon as pleasant, ending in marriage. Another tradition* (I Kings x: 5) *reveals bad feeling between the two. "The Pawn of Justice" follows the latter interpretation, as well as the account in the Koran (Chapter 27) of Solomon's discovery that Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, was an evil spirit in disguise. The proverb in the tale has come down to us in* Ecclesiastes vii: 28.

BIBLE LESSON: *The Pawn of Justice*

re-told by MARK RONDY

WHEN SOLOMON TURNED from the casement, the other two had not, apparently, moved. Benaiah sat hunched over his side of the table, stealing awed glances at the dusky Queen and breathing in the beckoning perfume of her body.

Erect and lovely on the couch nearby, Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, arched her brows in question to the King. "My lord concerns himself over some soldiers in a street fight?"

"A king must concern himself with many things." Solomon waved away the Sheban slave-girl with her platter of fruits and sweets, watched her appreciatively as she left the room, and resumed his seat. "I believe," he said, "I was describing my experiments with the game as originally played in India — But you do not listen, lady! My chess talk bores you?"

Balkis, considering the array of gold and silver pieces on the table, smiled, in her slow, secret way. "I was thinking of something else — something you said this morning."

Solomon's eyes narrowed planfully, as if foreseeing a distant combination on the squares. "I do not like my position, Benaiah! Quite bad . . ." The fingers of his right hand pattered a tune on the table-edge. "Pardon, lady — you were saying . . .?"

"The new proverb — how did it go? I have forgotten it."

"My five-hundred-and-sixty-first." Solomon cleared his throat, and quoted, savoring the rhythm and balance of the line: "*One man in a thousand have I found to be true.* It needs a companion line, to make the couplet — I have not yet worked it out. . . . Yes, I believe I must yield this game to you, Benaiah, and pay the forfeit. Shall we begin another?"

"As my lord desires." Benaiah frowned. "But for a true victory should we not play it out?"

Balkis laid a lovely hand along a lovely throat. "What is your thought about it, Benaiah? The proverb, I mean?"

His gaze lifted from the hand and the throat, met hers, dropped again. "I do not question the researches of my lord King, my lady. . . . Your move, lord."

Solomon threw back his head for a hearty laugh. "What modesty! Who slew the lion in a pit on a snowy day, and smote the two altar-hearths of the Moabites? Who killed the giant Egyptian, plucking the great beam of a spear out of his very hand? Who, at my word, fell on Adonijah, on Joab even as he clung to the altar of God, and cut them down so that they died? He, of course, is the man — the one in a thousand, this Benaiah of mine and of my father David's before me, peace upon him!"

Benaiah flushed, and Balkis pursed her lips. "Yes," she said silkily. "I have heard of Benaiah's mighty deeds. . . . But as to this game: have not the captures thus far been equal?"

"Surely," replied Solomon. "Every capture has been an even exchange."

"Yet, lord, of the pieces on the squares *you* have one less." Jeweled hands gestured above the table. "Benaiah has *seven* captures, while *you* have only six."

At this, Benaiah raised his head and stared rigidly at the Queen.

"It is so." Solomon considered her thoughtfully. "You are suggesting . . .?"

She shrugged, looked pointedly at Benaiah's captures, and let the King complete his own sentence: "One of my pawns has been taken off the squares, it appears, while I went to the casement."

Balkis smiled again, and murmured, "One man in a thousand . . ."

Benaiah came to his feet, a growl in his throat. But the King spoke before him. "You think he stole my pawn?"

"Lord —" The word came, strangled, from Benaiah.

The Queen broke in coolly. "I *saw* him take it. By stealth. As the maiden moved among us with the platter."

Benaiah gasped, and the King spoke to him directly: "The Queen, Benaiah, accuses you. . . ."

Benaiah opened his mouth, then closed it, stubbornly. The King looked at him, through him, to some far-off point.

"A noise in the street to take me from the game," he said. "The girl between me and the table to blind me from the squares. All *arranged.*"

"Unless it was a sudden impulse on his part." The Queen laughed cruelly.

"One way to win, lord. Solomon to beat, and a forfeit to gain."

"It is a possibility," said Solomon.

"Possibility, lord? When he stands silent at my accusation?"

"There is another possibility, lady: if Benaiah did *not* take the pawn, then *you* did."

"Ridiculous!" she cried with anger.

"Not at all," said Solomon reasonably. "We are in *your* chambers, at *your* invitation, it is *your* hand-maid with the concealing tray."

"Nonsense! What have *I* to gain?"

"For two-and-twenty days," said Solomon, "you have plied me with hard riddles. All of them I solved, costing you each time a blow to your pride *and* a rich forfeit. What satisfaction for you, perhaps, to breed distrust between me and Benaiah! To spread abroad how he belies my latest proverb, how he steals from me and I — Solomon! — do not even know it until the Queen of Sheba points it out. . . . Do you deny, lady, that you take delight in all this?"

Balkis shrugged once more. "You are cunning, lord. But how does my delight prove that *I* schemed against you to take your pawn? These *are* my chambers, and so on, but the noise came from the *street* — and is not Benaiah commander-in-chief of Israel's hosts? *His* soldiers patrol the streets, lord!"

Solomon nodded gravely. "And as to Benaiah's silence —"

"Guilt!"

"Perhaps. But Benaiah reveres women, as I cannot, having married too many of them. You above all has he admired. A stubborn man, Benaiah! To defend *himself* he must attack *you* — a woman and a queen. Perhaps he cannot do this. . . . Well, Benaiah?"

Benaiah only bowed his head, like a tree before a storm. Solomon meditated a moment. "An interesting problem. . . . Yes, that is it!"

Benaiah spoke at last, harshly. "Your judgment, lord?"

"Judgment?" The King shook his head, smiling gently. "I have been finishing my couplet on honesty."

Benaiah cried out, as if in pain. "But — the pawn, lord?"

The Queen stood upright, every motion of her body like a movement in a dance. The two were before the King as if at his judgment throne.

"Who took it, you mean? I determined that long ago," said Solomon. "As well as who did not!"

EDITORS' NOTE: *Who took the pawn, and how did Solomon know? You now have all the facts, but if this biblical puzzle confounds you, you will find the solution below.*

The King sighed. "I noticed the theft at once. And the Queen's purpose too I saw, when she spoke of my proverb. For I was alert to trickery

the moment she mentioned soldiers in the street. How could she know that *soldiers* made the noise — sitting on her couch away from the casement . . .?

"So I claimed a poor position, and yielded the game. Thus I proved you, Benaiah! For had you taken the pawn, to defeat me and win the forfeit, you would have *welcomed* the chance for victory, no matter how. But you preferred to play on, and so established your innocence —" the King turned to Balkis — "even *before* you accused him." Solomon's voice took on an edge. "Falsely, lady! For you had taken the pawn yourself."

The King rose. "You will both accept my proverb now, I think — you, lady, the opening, and you, my Benaiah, the conclusion. Thus: *One man in a thousand have I found to be true, but in all that number, not a single woman!*"

NEXT MONTH . . .

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THE NEW HAT

by THOMAS BURKE

OLD MRS. MANVERS was wheeled each morning in her chair from a street in Cyprus to her "pitch" near the Woolwich ferry; and there year by year she sat, moping and hating. She was gaunt and grizzled, and her face was soft. Her outer clothing, and those parts of the inner that were visible, were dulled with usage. She was muffled in two or three worn coats, a woollen scarf and woollen mittens. Her arms were long, and her hands, that for years had performed no heavy task, were large and shapeless. People first seeing her thought of November the Fifth, and then felt ashamed of themselves.

In this wooden chair she lived and ate and slept. Day by day she sat at her corner, collecting casual coins and small comforts from the workers she knew, and sometimes making a sale from the tray of matches, collar-studs, and bootlaces which she carried on the arm of her chair; and morning and evening her niece, Daisy, wheeled her out and home. Daisy was brisk, bright-colored, and strong, and Mrs. Manvers hated her. She hated her for being whole and strong, and so stressing her aunt's deformity and the deformity of her aunt's boy, who went on crutches. For the boy she had infinite pity and love; indeed, all things, human and animal, that were maimed or misshapen, won from her warm looks and sympathy. But health and grace, wherever she saw them, whether immediately about her, or in pictures, in men or children or horses, filled her with a longing to seize them and grind them beneath her feet.

What she couldn't do to them she could do to Daisy. Daisy was on the spot, at her hand. Through Daisy she could make her protest to the world, and she did. Week by week she noted with appreciation the slow crushing of the spirit, the drooping of her gaiety, the abatement of her step. To cloud Daisy's beauty with distress and mortification was her challenge to things as they are, and as often as Daisy wilted under her words she knew satisfaction. At evenings she would sit propped in her chair in their two-room home, and encourage the boy, Johnny, and prompt him in tauntings, and chuckle at Daisy's discomfiture; and at any attempt on

Daisy's part to retort, she would curse her and cuff her.

Under three years of this Daisy wilted in patience. There was nothing else that she could do. Her offenders were safe, beyond requital. They could go to any length and she could make no effective return; for they were cripples. That word quieted in her all anger and indignation. She could not use her fluent physical power against them. She could not lift her voice against them. They were helpless, dependent upon her for every small business of the day. She could not resist their whims. She could not bring herself to the cruelty of abandoning them. Too, she knew no other life and no other people. She had here enough to eat and a place to sleep in, and the timid heart craves always the familiar scene and the known faces, though these faces be unkind. So she remained.

Often she looked at the old woman as she sat forlorn in her chair, fondling her son and crooning over him; and often she wished them dead. Of the hopes and desires and dreams that, thwarted, had turned the old woman's heart sour, Daisy was not of an age to guess. She saw her aunt and the boy only as her cruel captors; the weak triumphant over the strong; and the bonds by which they held her were their own deformities. . . .

That Monday evening she had got the old woman home, and had gone out to buy a few scraps for supper. In the street she met the Flanagan boy, and Johnny and the old woman waited and waited, tempers fuming and rising. Suddenly, Johnny, at the window, cried to his mother: "I can see 'er down there. With that Flanagan." And his mother said, "Ah — that's all she thinks of. Gadding about and flirting. We c'n starve f'r all she cares. There's 'er noo 'at she's just brought 'ome from the Club."

Johnny had an idea. Bursting with it, he leaned from the window and shouted to Daisy, "Day-zee! We want our supper. 'F you don' come up, I'll — I'll get yer noo 'at and smash it!" He turned to his mother. "Ah — that's moved her. I done it."

Flustered and petulant, Daisy came in. Without waiting to take off her coat she set about preparing the meal. But her heart was not in the job. It was adrift with the Flanagan boy.

Johnny sat on the step of his mother's chair. "How much longer? Don't hurry up, I'll — smash yer 'at."

The new hat, bought from subscriptions to the factory Club, hung on a peg behind the door. With a hop and a skip he got it. Daisy, at the fireplace, swung round. "Eh? Here — Johnny — you leave that alone. Johnny — you dare. *Johnny!*" Her face went white. She saw her hard-won treasure, this piece of beauty wrought for the gladdening of the Flanagan boy, in brutal hands. "Now — Johnny — put it down. There's a good boy."

"I ain't a good boy!"

"No, but — Johnny . . ." She was approaching him with hands out. "Now — give it me."

He hopped away and waved it. "Git the supper, then."

"I'm getting the supper, ain't I? Now, Johnny. Put it down."

"Supper first. Then you can 'ave it."

"Now don't be silly." She stood before him, wheedling. "Johnny! Don't be nasty, now. You'll have your supper in a tick."

"I could smash it, yeh know. Wouldn't take me long, neither. Ain't much of it. Bin waiting nearly an hour we 'ave."

Despairing of words, she made a grab at it. He put it behind him with "Yeah!" She stood over him, dodging round him, furious, impotent. He grinned. "Go on — 'it me."

Her aunt growled at her. "Leave the boy alone and git the supper."

"But he's got my hat." She was near tears now. "Auntie, make him give me my hat."

"Leave 'im alone, d'y'ear? Tormenting the boy. You and yer 'at. All you think of is dressing up fer the boys, while we have to sit 'ere ——"

"I know. But make him give me my hat . . . Come on, Johnny. I'll get yeh something hot. Something nice."

Johnny stood swinging the hat, grinning. Then the grin faded and the mouth went vicious. "Urr — that's what you say now. Fat lot you cared when you was down there wi' Jimmy Flanagan. Nearly an hour. And me and mum nearly starving. Urr!"

A snap — and his fingers had the ribbon off. A rip — and the brim came away from the crown. At the first sound Daisy flew at him. In the shock of the moment she forgot his crippled state; forgot everything but the crowding afflictions of her situation and the accumulated distresses of the day. They struggled. The hat went down and he stamped upon it with his one sound foot. Then, no longer Daisy, but a suffering organism, unconscious of what she was doing, she struck him in the face. The crutch slipped, and he went down. His head made a noise on the floor. He lay there howling.

For a moment the three of them were stupid with shock. It was as though a kitten had changed before their eyes into a grown tiger. The old woman snarled and tried to heave herself from the chair and fall upon the girl. Johnny picked himself up and ran to the next room. Daisy, blind with tears, stooped over the remnants of her treasure, gathered them up and hugged them. Then she became aware of her aunt's voice.

"Come 'ere, you — come 'ere!"

For the first time in her life she ignored the command. She was possessed. She drew back to the wall, and cried between sobs: "Shan't. You can't make me neither. Stood about enough o' you two. All these years. I'm fed up. All I done for you . . . And now . . . my hat . . ."

The old woman ground words at her through her teeth. "Urr — you beauty. You strike my boy, you — you —— Cripple-boy and all. You little bitch! Urr — if I could get at you."

Daisy stood away, arms down,

hands clenched, and gave hysterical defiance. "Smashing my hat . . . Don't care if I did hit him. Serve him right . . . I wish I was dead. Couple o' beasts — that's what you are. Both of yeh. You — you — you old hag." And grimacing and sobbing she ran upon the old woman and struck the big red face. For a moment her aunt said nothing, and the girl's fury died. "There! You made me. Oh, my God, you made me hit you."

The old woman spoke at last in a whine. "You beauty. You little devil. Striking two 'elpless cripples. You beauty. Come 'ere!" She snapped the last words, and Daisy flew to the window, crying, "No — no. I'll throw meself out first." And stood there, hands over her face, sobbing with hate.

"Come 'ere at once."

"Shan't."

"All right, me lady. You wait."

For a full minute there was no sound but Daisy's sobs and Johnny whimpering in the next room. Then, just as balance was returning to her, she heard a new noise, and dropped her hands and lifted her head. She screamed. The old woman's hands were on the wheels of the chair, and the chair was coming towards her.

The chair had almost penned her in the corner by the window when with a quick turn she dodged to the farther wall. The woman backed the chair, and came at her again. She made a dash for the door, but a sudden twist on the wheels brought the chair across it. Daisy thrust out her arms and turned again for the wall. Twice round the room they went, rumbling and gasping. The old woman swore in ejaculations. On the second round Daisy dodged towards the inner room, but there her way was barred. Johnny stood there with lifted crutch. As she fell back from him, the chair came near her. She turned, and as she turned Johnny hopped forward and pushed her. She fell against and across the chair. The old woman grabbed her. "Gotcher! Now! Now what yeh gotter say — eh?"

All that night she lay awake, and her young mind wandered. Ideas and emotions that she had long repelled were now welcomed. The woman and boy passed from her consciousness as persons: they became symbols of all things mean and malignant; and the hat became a symbol of spiritual grace. Something in her had died during that struggle, and a new personality had arisen possessed by memory of beauty broken. Running away or self-destruction were no longer thought of. Hate now held her. She wanted to direct upon her aunt the force of her hate; to compel her aunt's recognition of her as an enemy to be feared. She wanted her aunt to suffer as she had suffered. She wanted to shower blows upon that ragged head. . . .

Next morning, sick at heart and sullen of face, Daisy was preparing her for the journey to her "pitch" — hating her behind tight lips — when, from the street, came a sudden chorus

of voices that rose without pause to a roar. Both started.

"Dock strikers," said the old woman. "They said there'd be a shindy today."

The noise outside grew swiftly — savage cries, commanding voices, contesting feet, the noise of the jungle animal — Mob. Daisy went to the window. "Oo-er. It's a riot. Police, too. On horseback. One of 'em's got a sword. They're going for the crowd. We can't go out yet." She stood wide-eyed at the window, and the old woman had to shout twice before Daisy heard her. "What?"

"I said: Where's Johnny?"

"Johnny? I dunno. He went out."

"Out? Out where? Go'n fetch 'im in, then. Quick. Don't stand there."

"Go out there? I can't. The crowd's right against the door."

"Right against the door? And Johnny out there?" The old woman waved her arms to command, but Daisy's face was pressed to the window.

"Oh! Listen!"

The roar of voices and the clatter of hoofs came to them in shudders. There was a crash of glass and a big scream. Daisy gave it an echo and clasped her hands. "Oh. Oh. They're riding 'em down. They're riding 'em down. Oh, my God! Oh — Auntie!"

"What is it? What's going on?"

"Oh, look — look!"

"What is it? Wheel me up!"

Daisy did not hear. She pointed through the window, stammering: "Johnny! Johnny!"

"What about it? What is it?" She groaned and twisted herself.

"Johnny — he's out there. In the thick of it. Oh, the noise — like wild animals they are."

The old woman babbled and fumbled with the wheels of her chair. "Go down to 'im, then. Go down to 'im. Or lemme go down. Wheel me down."

"I daren't. I couldn't. They're fighting each other now. Listen."

"Lemme go down. They won't 'urt me. Lemme get my boy. Oh . . . Daisy . . . Come an' get me down."

"No — no. You mustn't. You couldn't do anything. I'll call him." She lifted the window and called: "Johnny! Johnny!" She turned to the room. "He's heard me. He's looking up. But he can't move. He's wedged in. The police are shoving 'em about."

The old woman gripped the chair-arms and struggled to use her limbs and made noises. "Lemme go down!"

"It ain't no use. You can't get out. They're right on the door. Police've got their truncheons out . . . Oo! There's a man down. They're all on top of him. I can't see Johnny. Not now . . . Yes, I can. They're all running. And the police after 'em. Oo! There's a man picked Johnny up — running with him. Oo! Oh, my God — he's — he's down. Listen — they're mad. They're mad. He can't get up. The crowd's coming back. They got sticks and stones. They're just on Johnny now. The police are on 'em."

"Lemme come to the window, then. Oh, Daisy, Daisy. Lemme see. Go down to 'em. Get my Johnny."

"It's no good. You can't. Better keep away. It's too awful."

With swift movements the old woman turned the spokes of the wheels and brought herself near to Daisy. But she was too low to see from the window. "Lift me up."

"No. There's things going on there . . . They won't hurt Johnny. You best not look."

"I must. I must. Oh, lift me up." She scrabbled with her fingers at the sill and drew herself up. From the jungle below came another scream. "I can't see him. I can't see him."

"He was there just now. Where that policeman is. There he is! Trying to run away. He's — oh, my God, he's down again. The horses are over him. They're going this way and that."

"Oh, lemme go down. Oh, my legs. Lemme die with my Johnny. Daisy! I won't be harsh with yeh no more. There's something happened to him. I know there has." She was whimpering now and slipped back into the chair. Her head sagged. She stretched her arms to the window. "My boy!"

Daisy was repeating: "It's no good. You can't ——" when she ran from the window to the bed crying: "Oh, my God."

The old woman moaned. "What did yeh see, Daisy? Oh, tell us."

Daisy got up, choking and white, and waved to the street. "Johnny. I saw him. I can't tell yeh what I saw. Under the horses. You can't see him, though. Don't try to. Don't look. It's too awful. When they moved away, I saw him, and ——"

The old woman shot upward in the chair. Her eyes stared. Her mouth made noises. Daisy, clasping herself, drew away and looked again through the window, and swung back from it and stood over her aunt. With flying hands she pointed her words. "They've just cleared. And I saw him. Only I didn't really see him. Where he'd been standing there was only — only — Oh!" She flew to the bed and covered her face in the pillow and tried to shut from her ears the noise of the strikers and their enemies, and the gurgling of her aunt.

They stayed so for some minutes; then, following a sharp break in her aunt's voice, she was sensible of a curious stillness in the room. She got up and went to the chair. The head had fallen to one side. The eyes were fixed. She put a hand to her aunt's breast. The old woman was dead.

Then she looked up and breathed heavily and stretched her arms, and turned idly to the window.

Two minutes later there was peace. The battle shifted to the main road, and its noise came in faint splashes to the room. A minute later and through the silence came a stumble and a hop and a noisy clatter of crutch on the floor.

"'Ullo, Daisy! Cuh! Ain't half bin a rumpus outside. I see it all. I was at Flanagan's and they took me upstairs to a window. I see it all."

"I know. I saw you there. The row's upset your mother. I think it's done for her. You better go and find a doctor somewhere."

John Crosby, the astute critic of radio and television for the "New York Herald Tribune," confesses to being "an incurable addict of Damon Runyon's stories." He is not alone; indeed, he has literally millions of side-kicks and colleagues. In commenting on the radio versions of Runyon's yarns, Mr. Crosby reminds us that Broadway — the radio name of "first person singular" — "is really a very law-abiding guy. His friends are torpedoes, racketeers, gamblers, thieves of one sort or another but Broadway is none of these things . . . The Runyon world of guys and dolls never existed on Broadway or anywhere else and, because of this, they have sometimes been sharply criticized." Mr. Crosby "emphatically disagrees with this argument. If Mr. Runyon wanted to create a little world of his own fancy, he had as much right to do it as Lewis Carroll or Kenneth Grahame or anyone else."

Bravo!

Now, here is another tale of Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore — hard characters in every respect, as Damon Runyon himself admitted. But it wouldn't be nice, warns Broadway, to call them kidnappers . . .

THE SNATCHING OF BOOKIE BOB

by DAMON RUNYON

NOW IT COMES on the spring of 1931, after a long hard winter, and times are very tough indeed, what with the stock market going all to pieces, and banks busting right and left, and the law getting very nasty about this and that, and one thing and another, and many citizens of this town are compelled to do the best they can.

There is very little scratch anywhere and along Broadway many citizens are wearing their last year's clothes and have practically nothing to bet on the races or anything else, and it is a condition that will touch anybody's heart.

So I am not surprised to hear rumors that the snatching of certain parties is going on in spots, because while snatching is by no means a high-class business, and is even considered somewhat illegal, it is something to tide over the hard times.

Furthermore, I am not surprised to hear that this snatching is being

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done by a character by the name of Harry the Horse, who comes from Brooklyn, and who is a character who does not care much what sort of business he is in, and who is mobbed up with other characters from Brooklyn such as Spanish John and Little Isadore, who do not care what sort of business they are in, either.

In fact, Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore are very hard characters in every respect, and there is considerable indignation expressed around and about when they move over from Brooklyn into Manhattan and start snatching, because the citizens of Manhattan feel that if there is any snatching done in their territory, they are entitled to do it themselves.

But Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore pay no attention whatever to local sentiment and go on the snatch on a pretty fair scale, and by and by I am hearing rumors of some very nice scores. These scores are not extra large scores, to be sure, but they are enough to keep the wolf from the door, and in fact from three different doors, and before long Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore are around the race tracks betting on the horses, because if there is one thing they are all very fond of, it is betting on the horses.

Now many citizens have the wrong idea entirely of the snatching business. Many citizens think that all there is to snatching is to round up the party who is to be snatched and then just snatch him, putting him away somewhere until his family or friends dig up enough scratch to pay whatever price the snatchers are asking. Very few citizens understand that the snatching business must be well organized.

In the first place, if you are going to do any snatching, you cannot snatch just anybody. You must know who you are snatching, because naturally it is no good snatching somebody who does not have any scratch to settle with. And you cannot tell by the way a party looks or how he lives in this town if he has any scratch, because many a party who is around in automobiles, and wearing good clothes, and chucking quite a swell is nothing but the phonus bollonus and does not have any real scratch whatever.

So of course such a party is no good for snatching, and of course guys who are on the snatch cannot go around inquiring into bank accounts, or asking how much this and that party has in a safe-deposit vault, because such questions are apt to make citizens wonder why, and it is very dangerous to get citizens to wondering why about anything. So the only way guys who are on the snatch can find out about parties worth snatching is to make a connection with some guy who can put the finger on the right party.

The finger guy must know the party he fingers has plenty of ready scratch to begin with, and he must also know that this party is such a party as is not apt to make too much disturbance about being snatched, such as telling

the gendarmes. The party may be a legitimate party, such as a business guy, but he will have reasons why he does not wish it to get out that he is snatched, and the finger must know these reasons. Maybe the party is not leading the right sort of life, such as running around with blondes when he has an ever-loving wife and seven children in Mamaroneck, but does not care to have his habits known, as is apt to happen if he is snatched, especially if he is snatched when he is with a blonde.

And sometimes the party is such a party as does not care to have matches run up and down the bottom of his feet, which often happens to parties who are snatched and who do not seem to wish to settle their bill promptly, because many parties are very ticklish on the bottom of the feet, especially if the matches are lit. On the other hand, maybe the party is not a legitimate guy, such as a party who is running a crap game, or who has some other dodge he does not care to have come out, and who also does not care about having his feet tickled.

Such a party is very good indeed for the snatching business, because he is pretty apt to settle without any argument. And after a party settles one snatching, it will be considered very unethical for anybody else to snatch him again very soon, so he is not likely to make any fuss about the matter. The finger guy gets a commission of twenty-five per cent of the settlement, and one and all are satisfied and much fresh scratch comes into circulation, which is very good for the merchants. And while the party who is snatched may know who snatches him, one thing he never knows is who puts the finger on him, this being considered a trade secret.

I am talking to Waldo Winchester,* the newspaper scribe, one night and something about the snatching business comes up, and Waldo Winchester is trying to tell me that it is one of the oldest dodges in the world, only Waldo calls it kidnapping, which is a title that will be very repulsive to guys who are on the snatch nowadays. Waldo Winchester claims that hundreds of years ago guys are around snatching parties, male and female, and holding them for ransom, and furthermore Waldo Winchester says they even snatch very little children and Waldo states that it is all a very, very wicked proposition.

Well, I can see where Waldo is right about it being wicked to snatch dolls and little children, but of course no guys who are on the snatch nowadays will ever think of such a thing, because who is going to settle for a doll in these times when you can scarcely even give them away? As for little children, they are apt to be a great nuisance, because their mammas are sure to go running around hollering bloody murder about them, and furthermore little children are very dangerous, indeed, what with being apt to break out with measles and mumps and one thing and another

*Guess who?

any minute and give it to everybody in the neighborhood.

Well, anyway, knowing that Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore are now on the snatch, I am by no means pleased to see them come along one Tuesday evening when I am standing at the corner of Fiftieth and Broadway, although of course I give them a very jolly hello, and say I hope and trust they are feeling nicely.

They stand there talking to me a few minutes, and I am very glad indeed that Johnny Brannigan, the strong-arm cop, does not happen along and see us, because it will give Johnny a very bad impression of me to see me in such company, even though I am not responsible for the company. But naturally I cannot haul off and walk away from this company at once, because Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore may get the idea that I am playing the chill for them, and will feel hurt.

"Well," I say to Harry the Horse, "how are things going, Harry?"

"They are going no good," Harry says. "We do not beat a race in four days. In fact," he says, "we go overboard today. We are washed out. We owe every bookmaker at the track that will trust us, and now we are out trying to raise some scratch to pay off. A guy must pay his bookmaker no matter what."

Well, of course this is very true, indeed, because if a guy does not pay his bookmaker it will lower his business standing quite some, as the bookmaker is sure to go around putting the blast on him, so I am pleased to hear Harry the Horse mention such honorable principles.

"By the way," Harry says, "do you know a guy by the name of Bookie Bob?"

Now I do not know Bookie Bob personally, but of course I know who Bookie Bob is, and so does everybody else in this town that ever goes to a race track, because Bookie Bob is the biggest bookmaker around and about, and has plenty of scratch. Furthermore, it is the opinion of one and all that Bookie Bob will die with this scratch, because he is considered a very close guy with his scratch. In fact, Bookie Bob is considered closer than a dead heat.

He is a short fat guy with a bald head, and his head is always shaking a little from side to side, which some say is a touch of palsy, but which most citizens believe comes of Bookie Bob shaking his head "No" to guys asking for credit in betting on the races. He has an ever-loving wife, who is a very quiet little old doll with gray hair and a very sad look in her eyes, but nobody can blame her for this when they figure that she lives with Bookie Bob for many years.

I often see Bookie Bob and his ever-loving wife eating in different joints along in the Forties, because they seem to have no home except a hotel, and many a time I hear Bookie Bob giving her a going-over about something or other, and generally it is about the price of something she orders to eat, so I judge Bookie Bob

is as tough with his ever-loving wife about scratch as he is with everybody else. In fact, I hear him bawling her out one night because she has on a new hat which she says costs her six bucks, and Bookie Bob wishes to know if she is trying to ruin him with her extravagances.

But of course I am not criticizing Bookie Bob for squawking about the hat, because for all I know six bucks may be too much for a doll to pay for a hat, at that. And furthermore, maybe Bookie Bob has the right idea about keeping down his ever-loving wife's appetite, because I know many a guy in this town who is practically ruined by dolls eating too much on him.

"Well," I say to Harry the Horse, "if Bookie Bob is one of the bookmakers you owe, I am greatly surprised to see that you seem to have both eyes in your head, because I never before hear of Bookie Bob letting anybody owe him without giving him at least one of their eyes for security. In fact," I say, "Bookie Bob is such a guy as will not give you the right time if he has two watches."

"No," Harry the Horse says, "we do not owe Bookie Bob. But," he says, "he will be owing us before long. We are going to put the snatch on Bookie Bob."

Well, this is most disquieting news to me, not because I care if they snatch Bookie Bob or not, but because somebody may see me talking to them who will remember about it when Bookie Bob is snatched. But of course it will not be good policy for me to show Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore that I am nervous, so I only speak as follows:

"Harry," I say, "every man knows his own business best, and I judge you know what you are doing. But," I say, "you are snatching a hard guy when you snatch Bookie Bob. A very hard guy, indeed. In fact," I say, "I hear the softest thing about him is his front teeth, so it may be very difficult for you to get him to settle after you snatch him."

"No," Harry the Horse says, "we will have no trouble about it. Our finger gives us Bookie Bob's hole card, and it is a most surprising thing, indeed. But," Harry the Horse says, "you come upon many surprising things in human nature when you are on the snatch. Bookie Bob's hole card is his ever-loving wife's opinion of him.

"You see," Harry the Horse says, "Bookie Bob has been putting himself away with his ever-loving wife for years as a very important guy in this town, with much power and influence, although of course Bookie Bob knows very well he stands about as good as a broken leg. In fact," Harry the Horse says, "Bookie Bob figures that his ever-loving wife is the only one in the world who looks on him as a big guy, and he will sacrifice even his scratch, or anyway some of it, rather than let her know that guys have such little respect for him as to put the snatch on him. It is what you call psychology," Harry the Horse says.

Well, this does not make good sense to me, and I am thinking to myself that the psychology that Harry the Horse really figures to work out nice on Bookie Bob is tickling his feet with matches, but I am not anxious to stand there arguing about it, and pretty soon I bid them all good evening, very polite, and take the wind and I do not see Harry the Horse or Spanish John or Little Isadore again for a month.

In the meantime, I hear gossip here and there that Bookie Bob is missing for several days, and when he finally shows up again he gives it out that he is very sick during his absence, but I can put two and two together as well as anybody in this town and I figure that Bookie Bob is snatched by Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore, and the chances are it costs him plenty.

So I am looking for Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore to be around the race track with plenty of scratch and betting them higher than a cat's back, but they never show up, and what is more I hear they leave Manhattan and are back in Brooklyn working every day handling beer. Naturally this is very surprising to me, because the way things are running beer is a tough dodge just now, and there is very little profit in same, and I figure that with the scratch they must make off Bookie Bob, Harry the Horse and Spanish John and Little Isadore have a right to be taking things easy.

Now one night I am at Good Time Charley's on Forty-eighth Street, speaking of this and that with Charley, when in comes Harry the Horse, looking very weary and by no means prosperous. Naturally I give him a large hello, and by and by we get to gabbing together and I ask him whatever becomes of the Bookie Bob matter, and Harry the Horse tells me as follows:

Yes [Harry the Horse says], we snatch Bookie Bob all right. In fact, we snatch him the very next night after we are talking to you, or on a Wednesday night. Our finger tells us Bookie Bob is going to a wake over in his old neighborhood on Tenth Avenue, near Thirty-eighth Street, and this is where we pick him up.

He is leaving the place in his car along about midnight, and of course Bookie Bob is alone as he seldom lets anybody ride with him because of the wear and tear on his car cushions, and Little Isadore swings our flivver in front of him and makes him stop. Naturally Bookie Bob is greatly surprised when I poke my head into his car and tell him I wish the pleasure of his company for a short time, and at first he is inclined to argue the matter, saying I must make a mistake, but I put the old convincer on him by letting him peek down the snozzle of my John Roscoe.

We lock his car and throw the keys away, and then we take Bookie Bob in our car and go to a certain spot on Eighth Avenue where we have a nice little apartment all ready. When we get there I tell Bookie Bob that he

can call up anybody he wishes and state that the snatch is on him and that it will require twenty-five G's, cash money, to take it off, but of course I also tell Bookie Bob that he is not to mention where he is or something may happen to him.

Well, I will say one thing for Bookie Bob, although everybody is always weighing in the sacks on him and saying he is no good — he takes it like a gentleman, and very calm and businesslike.

Furthermore, he does not seem alarmed, as many citizens are when they find themselves in such a situation. He recognizes the justice of our claim at once, saying as follows:

"I will telephone my partner, Sam Salt," he says. "He is the only one I can think of who is apt to have such a sum as twenty-five G's cash money. But," he says, "if you gentlemen will pardon the question, because this is a new experience to me, how do I know everything will be okay for me after you get the scratch?"

"Why," I say to Bookie Bob, somewhat indignant, "it is well known to one and all in this town that my word is my bond. There are two things I am bound to do," I say, "and one is to keep my word in such a situation as this, and the other is to pay anything I owe a bookmaker, no matter what, for these are obligations of honor with me."

"Well," Bookie Bob says, "of course I do not know you gentlemen, and, in fact, I do not remember ever seeing any of you, although your face is somewhat familiar, but if you pay your bookmaker you are an honest guy, and one in a million. In fact," Bookie Bob says, "if I have all the scratch that is owing to me around this town, I will not be telephoning anybody for such a sum as twenty-five G's. I will have such a sum in my pants pocket for change."

Now Bookie Bob calls a certain number and talks to somebody there but he does not get Sam Salt, and he seems much disappointed when he hangs up the receiver again.

"This is a very tough break for me," he says. "Sam Salt goes to Atlantic City an hour ago on very important business and will not be back until tomorrow evening, and they do not know where he is to stay in Atlantic City. And," Bookie Bob says, "I cannot think of anybody else to call up to get this scratch, especially anybody I will care to have know I am in this situation."

"Why not call your ever-loving wife?" I say. "Maybe she can dig up this kind of scratch."

"Say," Bookie Bob says, "you do not suppose I am chump enough to give my ever-loving wife twenty-five G's, or even let her know where she can get her dukes on twenty-five G's belonging to me, do you? I give my ever-loving wife ten bucks per week for spending money," Bookie Bob says, "and this is enough scratch for any doll, especially when you figure I pay for her meals."

Well, there seems to be nothing we can do except wait until Sam Salt gets

back, but we let Bookie Bob call his ever-loving wife, as Bookie Bob says he does not wish to have her worrying about his absence, and tells her a big lie about having to go to Jersey City.

Well, it is now nearly four o'clock in the morning, so we put Bookie Bob in a room with Little Isadore to sleep, although, personally, I consider making a guy sleep with Little Isadore very cruel treatment, and Spanish John and I take turns keeping awake and watching out that Bookie Bob does not take the air on us before paying us off. To tell the truth, Little Isadore and Spanish John are somewhat disappointed that Bookie Bob agrees to settle so promptly, because they are looking forward to tickling his feet with great relish.

Now Bookie Bob turns out to be very good company when he wakes up the next morning, because he knows a lot of race-track stories and plenty of scandal, and he keeps us much interested at breakfast. He talks along with us as if he knows us all his life, and he seems very nonchalant indeed, but the chances are he will not be so nonchalant if I tell him about Spanish John's thought.

Well, about noon Spanish John goes out of the apartment and comes back with a racing sheet, because he knows Little Isadore and I will be wishing to know what is running in different spots although we do not have anything to bet on these races, or any way of betting on them, because we are overboard with every bookmaker we know.

Now Bookie Bob is also much interested in the matter of what is running, especially at Belmont, and he is bending over the table with me and Spanish John and Little Isadore, looking at the sheet, when Spanish John speaks as follows:

"My goodness," Spanish John says, "a spot such as this fifth race with Questionnaire at 4 to 5 is like finding money in the street. I only wish I have a few bobs to bet on him at such a price," Spanish John says. ——————

"Why," Bookie Bob says, very polite, "if you gentlemen wish to bet on these races I will gladly book to you. It is a good way to pass away the time while we are waiting for Sam Salt."

"But," I say, "we have no scratch to play the races, at least not much."

"Well," Bookie Bob says, "I will take your markers, because I hear what you say about always paying your bookmaker, and you put yourself away with me as an honest guy, and these other gentlemen also impress me as honest guys."

Now what happens but we begin betting Bookie Bob on the different races, not only at Belmont, but at all the other tracks in the country, for Little Isadore and Spanish John and I are guys who like plenty of action when we start betting on the horses. We write out markers for whatever we wish to bet and hand them to Bookie Bob, and Bookie Bob sticks these markers in an inside pocket, and along in the late afternoon it looks as if he has a tumor on his chest.

We get the race results by phone off a poolroom downtown as fast as they come off, and also the prices, and it is a lot of fun, and Little Isadore and Spanish John and Bookie Bob and I are all little pals together until all the races are over and Bookie Bob takes out the markers and starts counting himself up.

It comes out then that I owe Bookie Bob ten G's, and Spanish John owes him six G's, and Little Isadore owes him four G's, as Little Isadore beats him a couple of races out west.

Well, about this time, Bookie Bob manages to get Sam Salt on the phone, and explains to Sam that he is to go to a certain safe-deposit box and get out twenty-five G's, and then wait until midnight and hire himself a taxicab and start riding around the block between Fifty-first and Fifty-second, from Eighth to Ninth Avenues, and to keep riding until somebody flags the cab and takes the scratch off him.

Naturally Sam Salt understands right away that the snatch is on Bookie Bob, and he agrees to do as he is told, but he says he cannot do it until the following night because he knows there is not twenty-five G's in the box and he will have to get the difference at the track the next day. So there we are with another day in the apartment and Spanish John and Little Isadore and I are just as well pleased because Bookie Bob has us hooked and we naturally wish to wiggle off.

But the next day is worse than ever. In all the years I am playing the horses I never have such a tough day, and Spanish John and Little Isadore are just as bad. In fact, we are all going so bad that Bookie Bob seems to feel sorry for us and often lays us a couple of points above the track prices; but it does no good. At the end of the day, I am in a total of twenty G's, while Spanish John owes fifteen, and Little Isadore fifteen, a total of fifty G's among the three of us. But we are never any hands to hold post-mortems on bad days, so Little Isadore goes out to a delicatessen store and lugs in a lot of nice things to eat, and we have a fine dinner, and then we sit around with Bookie Bob telling stories, and even singing a few songs together until time to meet Sam Salt.

When it comes on midnight Spanish John goes out and lays for Sam, and gets a little valise off of Sam Salt. Then Spanish John comes back to the apartment and we open the valise and the twenty-five G's are there okay, and we cut this scratch three ways.

Then I tell Bookie Bob he is free to go on about his business, and good luck to him, at that, but Bookie Bob looks at me as if he is very much surprised, and hurt, and says to me like this:

"Well, gentlemen, thank you for your courtesy, but what about the scratch you owe me? What about these markers? Surely, gentlemen, you will pay your bookmaker?"

Well, of course we owe Bookie Bob these markers, all right, and of course a man must pay his bookmaker, no

matter what, so I hand over my bit and Bookie Bob puts down something in a little notebook.

Then Spanish John and Little Isadore hand over their dough, too, and Bookie Bob puts down something more in the little notebook.

"Now," Bookie Bob says, "I credit each of your accounts with these payments, but you gentlemen still owe me a matter of twenty-five G's over and above the twenty-five I credit you with, and I hope and trust you will make arrangements to settle this at once, because," he says, "I do not care to extend such accommodations over any considerable period."

"But," I say, "we do not have any more scratch after paying you the twenty-five G's on account."

"Listen," Bookie Bob says, dropping his voice down to a whisper, "what about putting the snatch on my partner, Sam Salt, and I will wait over a couple of days with you and keep booking to you, and maybe you can pull yourselves out. But of course," Bookie Bob whispers, "I will be entitled to twenty-five per-cent of the snatch for putting the finger on Sam for you."

But Spanish John and Little Isadore are sick and tired of Bookie Bob and will not listen to staying in the apartment any longer, because they say he is a jinx to them and they cannot beat him in any manner, shape or form. Furthermore, I am personally anxious to get away because something Bookie Bob says reminds me of something.

It reminds me that besides the scratch we owe him, we forget to take out six G's two-fifty for the party who puts the finger on Bookie Bob for us, and this is a very serious matter indeed, because anybody will tell you that failing to pay a finger is considered a very dirty trick. Furthermore, if it gets around that you fail to pay a finger, nobody else will ever finger for you.

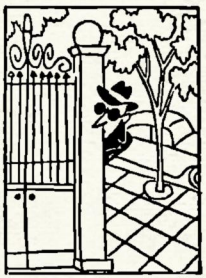
So [Harry the Horse says] we quit the snatching business because there is no use continuing while this obligation is outstanding against us, and we go back to Brooklyn to handle beer to earn enough scratch to pay our just debts.

We are paying off Bookie Bob's IOU a little at a time, because we do not wish to ever have anybody say we welsh on a bookmaker, and furthermore we are paying off the six G's two-fifty commission we owe our finger.

And while it is tough going, I am glad to say our honest effort is doing somebody a little good, because I see Bookie Bob's ever-loving wife the other night all dressed up in new clothes and looking very happy, indeed.

And while a guy is telling me she is looking so happy because she gets a large legacy from an uncle who dies in Switzerland, and is now independent of Bookie Bob, I only hope and trust [Harry the Horse says] that it never gets out that our finger in this case is nobody but Bookie Bob's ever-loving wife.

SPECIAL AWARD FOR THE BEST SPY STORY: LORD DUNSANY



Only a few months ago, we brought you Lord Dunsany's "Two Bottles of Relish" — in your Editors' opinion, one of the twelve best detective short stories ever written. "Two Bottles of Relish" is not an "unknown" tale: it has been printed at least four times in American books and magazines; but it has always been considered the only story about detective Linley which Lord Dunsany ever wrote. Imagine our surprise, therefore — our unbounded delight — when Lord Dunsany himself informed us that there are other detective shorts about Mr. Linley. Imagine our even greater amazement, our veritable 'tec transports, when Lord Dunsany submitted an original Linley story, never before published anywhere in the world, to EQMM's Sixth Annual Contest. For you realize that if Lord Dunsany had written only the first tale of detective Linley, "Two Bottles of Relish," without any "sequels" (to use Lord Dunsany's own word), that first tale would have earned Mr. Linley's creator a permanent seat at King Edgar's Round Table . . .

By the way, did we ever tell you how it happened that Lord Dunsany wrote "Two Bottles of Relish"? It seems that Lord Dunsany had become amused to notice that people were reading gruesome stories of murder in preference to his own more delicate tales. He wondered if he could write a story "gruesome enough for them." So, with tongue in cheek but writing with grim seriousness, Lord Dunsany fashioned "Two Bottles of Relish."

Well, the story proved "gruesome enough" — indeed, it far exceeded Lord Dunsany's original intent. Editors were fascinated by the tale, but they frankly confessed that it made them ill. As a matter of fact, no male editor in England or America would publish the story. Finally, a woman dared — Lady Rhondda, who printed it in "Time and Tide," November 12–19, 1932. Lord Dunsany has always thought that Lady Rhondda, a militant feminist, published the story as an example of sheer realism, saying to herself, "That is just how men do treat women." In case you haven't read the story, we need only add that its basic theme is — cannibalism . . .

Now, don't shiver. Lord Dunsany's prize-winning story, "The Most Dangerous Man in the World," although about detective Linley and

about the most dangerous man in the world, is not the type of story you should avoid reading while you are alone. No single woman is in danger, nor any single man. Don't put on all the lights, or lock the door. Don't look under the bed, or call the police. No, this is an altogether different type of story. It is merely a tale in which the lives of thousands of people are at stake — hundreds of thousands, if not the entire human race . . .

THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN THE WORLD

by LORD DUNSANY

IT'S SOME TIME NOW since I wrote about Mr. Linley, and I don't suppose anyone remembers the name of Smithers. That's my name. But the whole world knows Num-numo, the relish for meats and savories; and I push it. That is to say I travel and I take orders for it, or I used to, before the war upset everything. And some may remember the tale I wrote about that, about Num-numo I mean, because Mr. Linley came into it, and he's a man you don't forget so easily; and if you do, perhaps you don't forget Steeger and what happened at Unge. Horrid it was. I told about that in my story, *Two Bottles of Relish*. And then Steeger turned up again; that was when he shot Constable Slugger, and they couldn't catch him for either case. Funny too; because the police knew perfectly well that he had done both murders, and Linley came along and told them how. Still they couldn't catch him. Well, they could catch him whenever they wanted to, but what I mean is there'd have been a verdict of "Not Guilty," and the police were more afraid of that than a criminal is afraid of the other verdict. So Steeger was still at large. And then there came a case of a man that did three murders, and Linley helped the police over that. They got that man. And then the war came, and murder looked a very small thing, and no more had been heard of Steeger for a long time. Mr. Linley got a commission, and when they found out about his brains, he went to the War Office, to what they call M.I., and I went to be what I never thought I'd be, a private soldier, and Num-numo was heard of no more, except for a few little wails from the advertisers, saying what a good thing it used to be. Yes, I got called up in the summer of 1940, and was put in barracks near London. I used often to lay awake at night under my brown blankets, thinking of the battles the British army had been in, things I'd heard of at school, and more that the sergeants taught us about, and trying to picture what the battles were like and what

they sounded like; and all the while a battle was raging over the barracks. I got the idea that some of those old battles might have been fairly quiet compared to those nights. But I don't know.

Well, that battle was over in a year. We won it; I mean, our airmen did. But we hadn't much to spare. It was a nasty time. I don't think the Germans would behave quite like that now. They've spoken very nicely of late about not destroying culture and civilization; but they didn't quite understand in those days, and used to talk about rubbing our cities out; and they very nearly did. But I'm not going to write about the war: perhaps somebody will do that in a hundred years, beginning at 1914 and forgetting about the years from 1919 to 1939, and going on till it stops, and a very interesting tale he should make of it. I'm going to write about Mr. Linley again. That brings me to the year 1943. I had a day's leave, and got a lift on a lorry, and slipped up to London, and the first thing I did was to go round to Lancaster Street to have a look at the old flats. I wanted to have a look at them just to prove to myself that it was true that I hadn't always lived in a barrack room. Well, they'd gone, those flats had. There was a square of grass and weeds and flowers; and there was a lot of groundsel. And in a way I liked the look of it, though it wasn't what I had come to see. They were rather dingy and dark, those flats as I remember them, and they called them Clarence Gardens. Now they really were gardens; or at any rate there was sunlight there, and some sort of flowers. I suppose there's no one in London that doesn't sigh for the country a bit some time or another, and here was a bit of the country, wild as any bit of the country you could see, even wilder than some of it. And for a moment I was glad to see this bit of sunlight and grass among all those miles of pavement, till I thought of all the slaughter that had gone to growing that groundsel. I looked up into the air then to see if I could locate just where our flat had been, because it seemed odd to think that I should have once been walking about, or sitting and listening to Mr. Linley somewhere up towards the blue sky. And as I turned my eyes up from the groundsel I saw an officer standing near me and looking at me. I came to attention and saluted, and the officer said, "Why, it's Smithers."

And I said, "It's not Mr. Linley!" For he looked so different in uniform.

And he said: "Yes, it is." And we shook hands.

And in a moment we were talking about the old flat.

Then he surprised me by saying: "You are just the man we want."

Well, I'd had all sorts of jobs to do since they made me a soldier, all sorts of jobs, but nobody had ever said that to me. And here was Mr. Linley saying it, just as if it was true.

"Whatever for?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," he said. "That man Steeger is getting to work again."

"Steeger!" I said. "The man that bought the two bottles of Numnumo?"

"That's the man," said Linley.

"What's he up to now?" I said. "His old tricks?"

"Worse," said Linley.

"Worse!" I said. "Why, the man's a murderer!"

"He only murdered a couple of people, so far as we know," said Linley. "He was only a retail murderer. But now he's a spy."

"I see," I said. "He's got into the wholesale business."

"Yes," he said, "and we want you to help watch him."

"I'd be glad to help," I said, "in any way I could. Where is he?"

"Oh, he's here all right," said Linley. "He's in London."

"Why don't you arrest him?" I asked.

"That's the last thing we want to do just yet," said Linley. "It might warn a lot of others."

"What's he done this time?" I asked.

"Well," said Linley, "they found out only the other day that he has recently received a thousand pounds. Somerset House reported it."

"Has he been killing a girl again, and getting her money?" I asked.

"No, that's not so easily done," said Linley. "He found poor Nancy Elth with her two hundred pounds, but he can't find a girl with money every day."

"Then where did the thousand pounds come from?" I asked.

"The easiest money of all," said Linley.

"Spying?" I said.

"That's it," he said. "It's the best paid of all the crooked jobs in the world. Especially in the beginning: they'll give almost anything to get a new man into their clutches, provided he's likely to be of any use to them. And Steeger should be a lot of use. He's a really skillful murderer, and should be a skillful spy."

"And where is he?" I asked again.

"We've found him all right," said Linley. "There never was any difficulty in finding Steeger. The difficulty always was in proving he'd done it. Aye, there's the rub, as Hamlet remarked."

"And what has he given away?" I asked.

"Nothing as yet," said Linley. "That's why we want you to help watch him. A thousand pounds is good pay, and it must be for good information. And of course it has been paid by a German in this country, or a Quisling or some such cattle. But they've not been able to get the information out of the country yet."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Because there is only one thing that the Germans would pay that much for," said Linley, "and we know that they don't know it yet."

"What's the thing, might I ask?" I said.

"Where the second front is going to be," said Linley. "We think he has found it out somehow and the other spy has given him a down payment.

It's worth a million if he can get it to Germany. And a hundred million would be pricing it low, but they'd probably pay him fifty thousand pounds for it. Anyway, we know they don't know it, and the thousand pounds is a mere retainer. But the knowledge makes Steeger the most dangerous man alive."

"How in the world did he find it out?" I asked.

"We don't know that yet," said Linley.

"I see," I said. "And you want him watched so that he doesn't get out of the country?"

"Oh, he can't do that," said Linley. "But we want to see that he doesn't send the news."

"How will he try to do it?" I asked.

"By wireless, probably," he said.

"How will he do that?" I asked.

"Well, we've located all the sending-sets," said Linley, "that have ever spoken since the war began; but there may still be some silent ones hidden, and waiting to send big news like this. And I think we've located all the carrier pigeons, though there might be one or two of them somewhere that we don't know of; but it's easier to hide a wireless set than a pigeon, because you don't have to feed it."

"And you want me to watch him?" I asked.

"Only now and then," said Linley. "He's in London, and we know more about all the houses here than you'd think. We aren't really afraid of his working a sending-set anywhere in London, but we can't answer for the open country, and he has to be watched whenever he moves."

"What about the other man," I asked, "the spy who paid him?"

"He lies very low," said Linley, "and we haven't spotted him yet. But that's only because he lies so low, and if he went about and did odd jobs with a wireless sending-set, we should have spotted him long ago. For that reason we don't think he'll try to do this job, but will leave it to Steeger. After all, Steeger's a pretty smart man, and it isn't everybody that has committed two murders and is able to walk about at large in England, Scotland, or Northern Ireland."

"I'd be glad to watch him," I said, "if you think I can do it."

But I said it rather hesitatingly, because, though it was very nice of Mr. Linley to offer me such a job, I had begun to see by then that it was a pretty important one — to keep silent the most dangerous man in the world — and, to tell you the truth, I am not quite the kind of man to be given a big job like that. Maybe I might have been if I'd been brought up to it, and given the chance of handling big jobs early, but I spent all my time pushing Num-numo and was never given anything bigger, and somehow or other I seemed to grow down to the size of my job; or perhaps the job was only the size of me, and that's why I was given it, and never given anything bigger. And now here was Mr. Linley offering me a job that mightn't look

very big if I did it well, but, if I did it badly and let that man get out his news of where the second front was to be, why, it might cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of men. That's why I said, "if you think I can do it," and by the way I said it I sort of showed Mr. Linley that I couldn't: I thought it was only fair. But Linley said: "That's all right, you're just the man for it."

"Very glad to do my best," I said. "Do I go in uniform?"

"No," he said. "That's just the point. We don't want to give the idea that the British army is watching him. Or that anybody is, for that matter. But somehow or other, though you look the perfect soldier in that kit, in plain clothes you might give him just the impression we want."

Of course I didn't look the perfect soldier at all, even in uniform, nor I never will. It was nice of him to say it, but I saw his point.

"That's right," I said. "I'll just go back a few years to the Num-numo days and I'll hang about somewhere near him and I shan't look very military."

"Well," said Linley, "I'll let you know. We shan't want you just yet. We have him watched all right. But if he got anywhere near a wireless, we'd want someone extra to watch him. He'd have to be watched very close then. Five seconds might do it, and he might pretty well ruin Europe. That's to say, any of it that's not ruined already."

All this, I may say, was at the end of June, in 1943, when all the plans for the invasion of Europe were ready, and the Germans were still guessing. And while they guessed they had to strengthen a line of five or ten thousand miles. One word from Steeger, if he had got at the truth, would bring it down to a hundred miles, and save them a lot of trouble. That's how things were when I parted from Linley that day just after midsummer, and a very nice lunch he gave me before we parted, at a big hotel, in his smart uniform and all, and me no more than a private. We didn't talk any more about Steeger there, even when there was no one in hearing. He wouldn't say a word about that sort of thing indoors.

Well, I thanked him for all he had done for me, and for remembering me like that, and giving me such a fine lunch; and away I went on a bus back to my barracks. And a little later I got a letter from Linley. It just said: "That job is all fixed up, and your C.O. has been written to." And I was sent for to the Orderly Room next morning and given a traveling warrant, and told to report at the War Office on the same day, for special duty, which would be told me when I got there.

So off with me up to London and to the department of the War Office that I was ordered to go to, and there I was fitted with a suit of civilian clothes and given a ticket for a concert at the Albert Hall. What I had to do was to go to the seat whose number

was on the ticket and sit there and take as much interest as I could in the music, and at the same time watch the man who would sit there on my right.

That's all they told me while they were fitting me with my suit of clothes. And then Linley came in while they were brushing my hair, because they said it had too military a look; and Linley made everything clear to me. The concert, he said, was to be broadcast, and Steeger had chosen a seat right under the microphone, and that had been reported. They were still sure that he had got hold of the secret of the second front, and it was pretty certain that he would say something about it during one of the intermissions, and the whole world would hear him. Of course he had to be watched the whole time, but he would probably do it during an intermission.

"And how am I to stop him, sir?" I asked.

"Well, I'll be there," said Linley, "on the other side of him, and I think I'll be able to stop him, but I'll be glad of your help, especially if he starts to shout out the name of the country that is going to be attacked. You must shout him down then, or stop him any other way. But we don't think he'll do quite that; in fact, it's a thousand to one against, because he'd give away that we had been warned, and also he'd be hanged, which he has taken a good deal of trouble to avoid so far. What he is almost certain to do is to signal somehow, and I'll be watching for that, but I might be glad of your help."

Well, that was in the morning, and the same evening I was at the Albert Hall, sitting in a seat in the middle, right in front of the band, with a little thing slung on a wire just in front of me, only up in the air. That was the microphone. I knew it at once, because it was like nothing I'd ever seen before, and a microphone would be like that. And then in came Linley and sat down on my right in the next chair but one. He didn't even look at me: he looked to his right and he looked to his left, but when he looked to his left he looked miles beyond me.

And then Steeger walked in.

I'd never seen him before; but if I may say so without giving offense to anyone, I can always tell a murderer by a look at him. It was Steeger all right. And then the band struck up. It was what they call a symphony; by Beethoven; his fifth symphony, they said, and there were going to be three intermissions.

Well, it was all very nice, and Steeger sat there listening and doing nothing. All through the first tune he never moved at all, or even opened his lips.

And then the first intermission came. I watched him then like a cat watching a dog. For one moment I glanced at Linley, but he seemed only to be thinking of the music, turning it over in his mind like, with his right hand just inside his coat. He was in plain clothes too. Then I watched Steeger again. And then Steeger put

his hand to his breast pocket and opened his mouth and drew in a breath. He was going to cough. One or two other people were coughing a bit too, little coughs they had bottled up while the band was playing. But Steeger was going to give a great big cough; you could tell from the size of his breath. At the same moment Linley pulled out a red handkerchief. And then he gave me a quick look and a slight wave of his hand, to tell me not to do anything, for—I was just leaning forward and wondering if I should. Then Linley sat back and thought of the music again; at least, he looked very contented and comfortable. Steeger coughed all right, and I let him, having got that sign from Linley, and then he blew his nose rather noisily and then he blew it again and coughed again. Then he coughed once more and blew his nose once more, and put his handkerchief away.

Then he sat as quiet as Linley. And very soon the music began again. And Steeger never moved or opened his lips all through it. And when the second intermission came, I looked at Linley, but he just shook his head. And then Steeger took the deep breath and pulled out his handkerchief, and Linley pulled out his, and Steeger gave the one cough again and the one blast on his nose, and then another blast and another cough, finishing up with a cough and a blast, just as he had done before.

And then the band struck up again. A nice tune, I expect, if you could listen to it, but I was too busy for that: I was watching Steeger. Not that he did anything more, either during the tune or the last intermission, or any more during the show: he never even sneezed.

Well, there isn't really very much more to tell: Linley told me about it all afterwards; about what Steeger had done, I mean. A few days later there came the invasion of Sicily, and then Linley told me. He got me another day's leave, on account of useful work he said I'd done, though I'm afraid it wasn't as useful as all that; in fact, I'd really done nothing, but I took my leave in spite of that, and I went up to London and I saw Linley. And he gave me a lunch again, which was very welcome, as it reminded me of old times, before all this war began and one thing and another. And then he told me what it was that Steeger had signaled. He had done it in Morse code, he said. A cough meant a short, and a blast on his nose meant a long. And what he had signaled was *Etna*.

"Why Etna?" I asked.

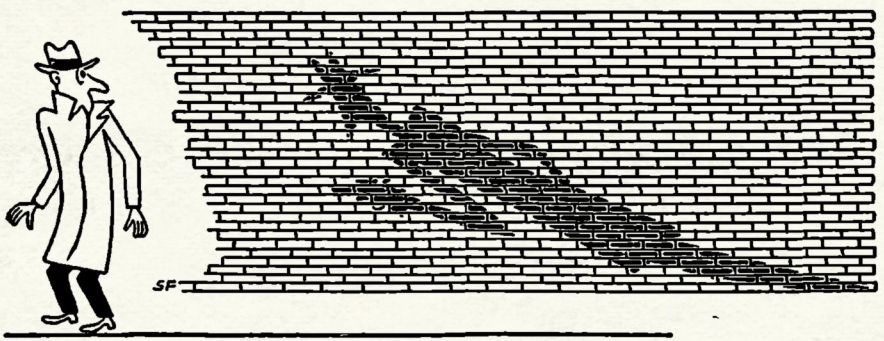
Because it was so much shorter than Sicily, Linley said. Only six dots and dashes, he said, whereas Sicily would be more than twice as many, and Etna, he said, would be quite good enough. But it never got through. There was a man on the platform with his finger touching a button and watching Linley the whole time; and the moment he saw Linley's red handkerchief, his finger went down on the button and that cut the broadcast off. Of course, they

started it again when the band struck up; and all that the audience missed — that is to say, the world — was the sound of people shuffling in their seats, and here and there a musician tuning up, and all the little sounds you hear during an intermission. So they didn't even have to explain what happened. But they had the explanation all ready in case they had to interrupt the music.

"What was the explanation?" I asked.

"A technical hitch," said Linley.

Oh, and there is one other thing to tell. They told me to be as inconspicuous as possible and not to look like a soldier, and not to seem as if I was watching him. So I thought the best thing to do was to give up being me at all — the me that I am now, I mean — and to go back to the older one, which is the real me really; that is to say, if you ask my opinion about it, but perhaps nobody really knows very much about himself, or what he really is. Well, I went up to Steeger as he was going away and I said how bad these times were for business, and for everything else, and you could get nothing nowadays, not even Num-numo; but that better times would be coming and Num-numo would be on the market again, and I was a salesman for it, which I was able to prove because I had one or two of the old forms in my pocket, and would he care to book an order? And he would get a bottle as soon as the war was over, and at the old price, and even below that price if he took half a dozen, and nothing to pay till the goods arrived. And I got his order for half a dozen, and he filled in his name and address on the form. Cornelius Westerhouse, he filled it in, 94 Bapham Road, Wandsworth. Of course I knew there was no such road, and there wouldn't have been anybody called Cornelius Westerhouse; but somehow it warmed my blood to be doing the old work again. . . .



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edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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Ben Ray Redman's "The Perfect Crime" is the sixteenth story of THE GOLDEN TWENTY *— the twenty best detective-crime short stories, by twenty different authors, as chosen by a special panel of critics, connoisseurs, and constant readers. To refresh your memory, here is a list of* THE GOLDEN TWENTY*:*

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Philomel Cottage . . . . . by Agatha Christie
The Perfect Crime . . . . . by Ben Ray Redman
Tragedy at Brookbend Cottage . . by Ernest Bramah
The Red Silk Scarf . . . . . by Maurice Leblanc
The Door Key . . . . . by Frederick Irving Anderson
Faith, Hope and Charity . . . . . by Irvin S. Cobb

Ben Ray Redman is a shining example of critic-turned-criminologist. Under the pseudonym of Jeremy Lord, he has written two full-length mysteries — THE BANNERMAN CASE *and* SIXTY-NINE DIAMONDS, *both published by The Crime Club. "The Perfect Crime" is Mr. Redman's one and only short story in the field. We almost wish that he decides to rest on his laurels: "The Perfect Crime" is as close to a classic as 999 writers out of a 1000 can hope to achieve. But we hasten to say — indeed, we stumble all over ourselves in our haste — that if Mr. Redman would consider writing a sequel to "The Perfect Crime," we open the doors of EQMM wide and roll out our deepest, reddest carpet of welcome.*

THE PERFECT CRIME

by BEN RAY REDMAN

THE WORLD'S GREATEST DETECTIVE complacently sipped a port some years older than himself and intently gazed across the table at his most intimate acquaintance; for many years the detective had not permitted himself the luxury of friends. Gregory Hare looked back at him, waiting, listening.

"There is no doubt about it," Trevor reiterated, putting down his glass, "the perfect crime is a possibility; it requires only the perfect criminal."

"Naturally," assented Hare with a shrug, "but the perfect criminal . . ."

"You mean he is a mythical fellow, not apt to be met with in the flesh?"

"Exactly," said Hare, nodding his big head.

Trevor sighed, sipped again, and adjusted the eyeglasses on his thin, sharp nose. "No, I admit I haven't encountered him as yet, but I am always hopeful."

"Hoping to be done in the eye, eh?"

"No, hoping to see the perfect methods of detection tested to the limits of their possibilities. You know, a gifted detector of crime is something more than an inspired policeman with a little bloodhound blood in his veins, something more than a precise scientist; he's an art critic as well, and no art critic likes to be condemned to a steady diet of second-rate stuff."

"Quite."

"Second-rate stuff is bad enough, but it's not the worst. Think of the third, fourth, fifth, and heaven-knows-what-rate crimes that come along every day! And even the masterpieces, the 'classics,' are pretty poor daubs when you look at them closely: a bad tone here and a wrong line there; something false, something botched."

"Most murderers are rather foolish," interjected Hare.

"Foolish! Of course they are. You should know, man, you've defended enough of them. The trouble is that murder almost never evokes the best efforts of the best minds. As a rule it is the work of an inferior mind, cunningly striving towards a perfection that is beyond its reach, or of a superior mind so blinded by passion that its faculties are temporarily impaired. Of course, there are your homicidal maniacs, and they are often clever, but they lack imagination and variety; sooner or later their inability to do anything but repeat themselves brings them up with a sharp jerk."

"Repetition is dullness," murmured Hare, "and dullness, as somebody has remarked, is the one unforgivable sin."

"Right," agreed Trevor. "It is, and plenty of murderers have suffered for

it. But they have suffered from vanity almost as often. Practically every murderer, unless he has been accidentally impelled to crime, is an egregious egotist. You know that as well as I do. His sense of power is tremendous, and as a rule he can't keep his mouth shut."

Dr. Harrison Trevor's glasses shone brightly, and he plucked continually at the black cord depending from them as he jerked out his sentences with rapidity and precision. He was on his own ground, and he knew what he was talking about. For twenty years criminals had been his specialty and his legitimate prey. He had hunted them through all lands, and he hunted them successfully. Upstairs, in a chiffonier drawer in his bedroom, there was a large red-leather box holding visible symbols of that success: small decorations of gold and silver and bright ribbons bore mute witness to the gratitude that various European governments had felt, on notable occasions, towards the greatest man-hunter of his generation. If Trevor was a dogmatist on murder he was entitled to be one.

Hare, on the other hand, was a good and respectful listener, but, being a criminal lawyer of long experience, he was a man with ideas of his own; and he always expressed them when there was no legal advantage to be gained by withholding them. He expressed one now, when he drawled softly, "All murderers are great egotists, are they? How about great detectives?"

Trevor blinked, then smiled coldly, clutching at his black cord. "Most detectives are asses, I grant you, complete asses and vain as peacocks; very few of them are great. I know only three. One of them is now in Vienna, the second is in Paris, and the third is . . ."

Hare raised his hand in interruption and said, "The third, or rather the first, is in this room."

The greatest detective in the world nodded briskly. "Of course. There's no point in false modesty, is there?"

"None at all. And it might be a little difficult to maintain such an attitude so soon after the Harrington case. The poor chap was put out of his misery week before last, wasn't he?"

Trevor snorted. "Yes, if you want to call him a poor chap; he was a deliberate murderer. But let's get back to that perfect crime of ours."

"Of yours, you mean," Hare corrected him politely. "I haven't subscribed to the possibility of it as yet. And how would you know about a perfect crime if it ever were committed? The criminal would never be discovered."

"If he had any artistic pride, he would leave a full account of it to be published after his death. Besides, you are forgetting the perfect methods of detection."

Hare whistled softly. "There's a pretty theoretical problem for you. What would happen when the perfect detector set out to catch the perfect criminal? Rather like the immovable object and the irresistible force busi-

ness, and just about as sensible. The fly in the ointment, of course, is that there is no such thing as perfection."

Dr. Trevor sat up rigidly and glared at the speaker. "There is perfection in the detection of crime."

"Well, perhaps there is." Hare laughed amiably. "You should know, Trevor. But I think what you really mean is that there is a perfect method for detecting imperfect crimes."

The doctor's rigidity had vanished, and now he was smiling with as much geniality as he ever displayed. "Perhaps that is what I do mean, perhaps it is. But there is a little experiment that I should like to try, just the same."

"And that is?"

"And that is, or rather would be, the experiment of exercising all my intelligence in the commission of a crime, then, forgetting every detail of it utterly, using my skill and knowledge to solve the riddle of my own creation. Should I catch myself, or should I escape myself? That's the question."

"It would be a nice sporting event," agreed Hare, "but I'm afraid it's one that can't be pulled off. The little trifle of forgetting is the difficulty. But it would be interesting to see the outcome."

"Yes, it would," said the other, speaking rather more dreamily than was his habit, "but we can never see quite as far as we should like to. My Japanese man, Tanaka, has a saying that he resorts to whenever he is asked a difficult question. He simply smiles and answers, '*Fuji san ni nobottara sazo tōku made miemashō.*' It means, I believe, that if one were to ascend Mount Fuji one could see far. The trouble is that, as in the case of so many problems, we can't climb the mountain."

"Wise Tanaka. But tell me, Trevor, what is your conception of a perfect crime?"

"I'm afraid it isn't precisely formulated; but I have a rough outline in my mind, and I'll give it to you as well as I can. First, though, let's go up to the library; we shall be more comfortable there, and it will give Tanaka a chance to clear the table. Bring your cigar, and come along."

Together the two men climbed the narrow staircase, the host leading. Dr. Trevor's house was a compact, brick building in the East Fifties, not far from Madison Avenue. Its picturesqueness was rather uncharacteristic of its owner, but its neatness was entirely like him. It was not a large house according to the standards of wealthy New York, but it was a perfectly appointed one, and considerably more spacious than it looked from the street, for the doctor had built on an addition that completely covered the plot which had once been the back yard; and this new section, as well as housing the kitchen and servants' quarters below, held a laboratory and workroom two stories high. An industrial or research chemist might have coveted the equipment of that room; and the filing cases that completely lined the encircling gal-

lery would have furnished any newspaper with a complete reference department. A door opened from the library into the laboratory, and the library itself came close to being the ideal chamber of every student. Dr. Harrison Trevor's house was, in short, an ideal bachelor's establishment, and he had never been tempted to transform it into anything else. More than one male visitor had found reason to remark, "Old Trevor does well for himself."

The same idea flitted across Hare's mind as he puffed at his host's excellent cigar and tasted the liqueur that Tanaka had placed on the table beside his chair. He, too, enjoyed the pleasures of bachelorhood, but he had never learned the knack of enjoying them quite so thoroughly. He would make a few improvements in the routine of his life; he could afford them.

"The perfect crime must, of course, be a murder." Trevor's voice broke the silence.

Hare shifted his bulk a little and inquired, "Yes? Why?"

"Because it is, according to our accepted standards, the most reprehensible of all crimes and, therefore, according to my interests, the best. Human life is what we prize most and do our best to protect; to take human life with an art that eludes all detection is unquestionably the ideal criminal action. In it there is a degree of beauty possible in no other crime."

"Humph!" grunted Hare, "you make it sound pleasant."

"I am speaking at once as an amateur and as a professor of crime. You have heard surgeons talk of 'beautiful cases.' Well, that is my attitude precisely; and in my cases invariably, as in most of theirs, the patient dies."

"I see."

Trevor blinked, tugged at his eyeglass cord, and then continued. "The crime must be murder, and it must be murder of a particular kind, the purest kind. Now what is the 'purest' kind? Let us see. The *crime passionnel* can be ruled out at once, for it is almost impossible that it should be perfect. Passion does not make for art; hot blood begets innumerable blunders. What about the murder for gain? Murderers of this kind make murder a means, not an end in itself; they kill not for the sake of eliminating the victim but in order to profit by the victim's death. No, we can't look to murder for profit as the type that might produce our perfect crime."

The sharp-nosed doctor paused and held his cigar for a moment between his thin lips. Hare studied his face curiously; the man's complete lack of emotion in discussing such matters was not wholly pleasant, he reflected.

Trevor put down his cigar. "Now, how about political and religious murders? They can be counted out almost immediately, for the simple reason that the murderer in such cases is always convinced that he is either serving the public or serving God and, therefore, seldom makes any attempt to conceal his guilt. But there is

another class to be considered — those who kill for the sheer joy of killing, those who are dominated by the blood lust. Offhand you would think that their killing would be of the purest type. But as I have said before, the maniac invariably repeats himself, and his repetition leads to his discovery. And even more important is the consideration that the artist must possess the faculty of choice, and that the born killer has no choice. His actions are not willed by himself, they are compelled; whereas the perfect crime must be a work of art, not of necessity."

"You seem to have written off all the possibilities pretty well," remarked Hare.

The doctor shook his head quickly. "Not all. There is one type of murder left, and it is the kind we are looking for: the murder of elimination, the murder in which the sole and pure object is to remove the victim from the world, to get rid of a person whose continued existence is not desirable to the murderer."

"But that brings you back to your *crime passionnel*, doesn't it? Practically all murders of jealousy, for example, are murders of elimination, aren't they?"

"In a sense, yes, but not in the purest sense. And, as I have said before, passion can never produce the perfect crime. It must be studied, carefully meditated, and performed in absolutely cold blood. Otherwise it is sure to be imperfect."

"You do go at this in a rather fish-blooded way," remarked the good listener as the doctor paused for a moment.

"Of course I do, and that is the only way the perfect crime could be committed. Now I can imagine a pure murder of elimination that would be ideal so far as motives and circumstances were concerned. Suppose you had spent fifteen years establishing a certain reading of a dubious passage in one of Pindar's odes."

"Ha, ha!" interrupted Hare jocosely. "Suppose I had."

"And suppose," continued Dr. Harrison Trevor, not noticing the interruption, "that another scholar had managed to build up an argument which completely invalidated your interpretation. Suppose, further, that he communicated his proofs to you, and that he had as yet mentioned them to no one else. There you would have a perfect motive and a perfect set of circumstances; only the method of the murder would remain to be worked out."

Gregory Hare sat bolt upright. "Good God, man! What do you mean, 'the method of the murder'?"

The doctor blinked. "Why, don't you understand? You would have excellent reasons for eliminating your rival and thereby saving your own interpretation of the text from confutation; and no one, once your victim was dead and the proofs destroyed, could suspect that you had any such motive. You could work with perfect freedom, you could concentrate on two essentials: the method

of the murder and, of course, the disposition of the body."

"The disposition of the body?" Hare seemed to echo the speaker's last words involuntarily.

"To be sure; that is a very important item, most important in fact. But I flatter myself," and here the doctor chuckled softly, "that I have done some very valuable research work along that line."

"You have, eh?" murmured Hare. "And what have you found out?"

"I'll tell you later," Trevor assured him, "and I don't think I would tell any other man alive, because it's really too simple and too dangerous. But at the moment I want to impress on you that the disposition of the body is perhaps the most important step of all in the commission of the perfect crime. The absence of a *corpus delicti* is curiously troublesome to the police. Harrington should really have managed to get rid of West's body, although it probably wouldn't have kept him from sitting in the electric chair two weeks ago. He was too careless."

Hare again sat up sharply and exclaimed, "Was he? Speaking of that, it was the Harrington case that I chiefly wanted to talk to you about tonight."

"Oh, was it? Well, we can get around to that in a minute. And, by the way, that came pretty close to being a murder of elimination, if you like; but the money element figured in it, big money, and gold is apt to have a fairly strong smell when it is mixed up with crime. Harrington's motive was easily traced, but his position made it impossible to touch him until we had our case watertight."

"Watertight, eh? That's what I want to hear about. You see I was abroad until last week, and didn't even know Harrington had been arrested until just before I sailed. The North African newspapers aren't so informative. I was particularly interested, you see, because I knew both men fairly well, and West's wife even better."

"Oh, yes, his wife, gorgeous woman. They were separated, and she's been in Europe for the last two and a half years."

"Yes, I know she has — most of the time."

"All the time. She hasn't been in the United States during that period."

"Hasn't she? Well, I last saw her at Monte Carlo, but that's not important at the moment. I want to hear how you tracked down Harrington."

Dr. Harrison Trevor smiled complacently, adjusted his eyeglasses, and then launched forth in his characteristic manner. "It was really simplicity itself. The only flaw was that Harrington finally confessed. That rather annoyed me, for we didn't need a confession; the circumstantial evidence was complete."

"Circumstantial?"

"Of course. You know as well as I do that most convictions for murder are based on circumstantial evidence. One doesn't send out invitations for a killing."

"No, of course not. Sorry."

"Well, as you probably know, Ernest West, Wall Street operator and multimillionaire (as the papers had it), was found shot through the heart one night a little more than a year ago. He had a shack down on Long Island, near Smithtown, that he used as a base for duck shooting and fishing. The only servant he kept there was an old housekeeper, a local inhabitant; he liked to lead the simple life when he could. Never even used to take a chauffeur down with him. The evening he was killed the housekeeper was absent, spending the night with a sick daughter of hers in Jamaica. She testified that West had sent her off, saying that he could pick up a light supper and breakfast for himself. She turned up the next morning, and nearly died of the shock. West was shot in what was a kind of gun room where he kept all his gear and a few books — cosy sort of place and the best room in the house. There was no sign of a struggle. He was sitting slumped in a big armchair. The bullet that killed him was a .25 caliber. Furst, of the Homicide Bureau, called me up as soon as the regulars failed to locate any scent, and I went down there immediately. West was an important man, you know." The doctor tugged self-consciously at his black cord. "I went down there at once, and I discovered various things. First of all, the house was isolated, and there was no one in the neighborhood who could give any useful evidence whatsoever. The body had been discovered by a messenger boy with a telegram at about seven-thirty; medical examination indicated that the murder had been committed about an hour before. Inside the house I found only one item that I thought useful. After going over the dust and so forth which I swept up from the gun-room floor, I had several tiny thread ends that had pretty obviously come from a tweed suit; and those threads could not be matched in West's wardrobe. But they might have been months old, so I didn't concentrate on them at first. Outside the house there was more to go on. The ground was damp, and two sets of footprints were visible: a man's and a woman's . . ."

"A woman's?" Hare was all attention now.

"Yes, the housekeeper's, of course."

"Oh, yes, the housekeeper's."

"Certainly. But it was difficult to identify them, for the reason that the man, apparently through nervousness, had walked up and down the lane leading to the road several times before finally leaving the scene of his crime; and he had trampled over almost every one of the woman's footprints, scarcely leaving one intact."

"That was odd, wasn't it?"

"Very, at first glance, but really simple enough when you think it over. The murderer had hurried out of the house after firing the fatal shot; then he hesitated. He was flurried and couldn't make up his mind as to his next step, even though he had an

automobile waiting for him at the end of the lane. So he walked up and down for a few minutes, to calm his nerves and collect his ideas. It was a narrow lane, and the obliteration of the other tracks was at once accidental and inevitable."

"He had a car waiting?"

"Yes, a heavy touring car. Its tire marks were plain, as were those of the public hack that West had ordered for his housekeeper that afternoon. And there was one interesting feature about the marks. There was a big, hard blister on one of the tires, and it left a perfectly defined indentation in the mud every time it came around."

"I see. And both sets of footprints ended at the same spot?"

"Naturally. The hack stopped for the woman just where the murderer later parked his car."

"Hum." Hare had now lighted a new cigar, and he puffed at it reflectively before asking, "And you are quite sure the woman did not get into the car with the man?"

Trevor stared at the speaker blankly and exclaimed, "You must be woolgathering, Hare. The woman was the housekeeper, and she went off in a public hack at least two hours before the crime was committed. In any event, Harrington confirmed the correctness of all my deductions when he finally confessed." Dr. Harrison Trevor was obviously nettled.

"Oh, yes, of course he did; I'd forgotten. Sorry. Let's hear how you nabbed him."

For a moment the detective looked at his companion doubtfully, as though he feared the other might be baiting him; for Hare's questions had not been the sort that his alert mind usually asked. He seemed to have something up his sleeve. But Trevor thrust his suspicions aside and returned to the pleasant task of describing his triumph.

"With the bullet, the footprints, the tire marks, and the threads, I had considerable to go on. All I had to do was to relate them unmistakably to one man, and I had my murderer. But the trail soon led into quarters where we had to move cautiously. With my material evidence in front of me, I set out to fasten upon some individual who might have had a motive for killing West. So far as anyone could say, he had no enemies; but on the other hand, he had few friends. He believed in the maxim that he travels fastest who travels alone. However, he had nipped some men pretty badly in the Street; and it was upon his financial operations that I soon concentrated my attention. There, with the facilities for investigation at my command, I discovered some very interesting facts. During the three weeks prior to West's death the common stock of Elliott Light and Power had risen fifty-seven points; four days after he had been shot it had dropped back no less than sixty-three points. Investigation showed that on the day West was murdered Harrington was short one hundred and thirty-odd thousand shares of

that particular stock. He had been selling it short all the way up, and West had been buying all that was offered. Harrington's resources, great as they were, weren't equal to his rival's. He knew that unless he could break Elliott Common wide open he was a ruined man, and he took the one sure way to do it that he could think of. He eliminated West. It was murder for millions."

Trevor paused impressively; Hare did not say a word.

"That's about all there is to the story; the rest of it was routine sleuthing. One of my men found four tires, three in perfect condition, which had been taken from Harrington's touring car and replaced on the day following the murder. They had been put in a loft of the garage on Harrington's country place. Three perfect tires, mind you; and on the fourth there was a large, hard blister. Harrington's shoes fitted the footprints in West's lane, and the thread ends matched the threads in one of Harrington's suits. And, to top it all off, after the man was arrested, we found a .25, pearl-handled revolver in his wall safe. One shot had been fired, and the weapon hadn't been cleaned since. Harrington's chauffeur testified that his master had taken out the big touring car alone on the afternoon of the murder; the man remembered the date because it had been his wife's birthday. It was all very simple, and even such elements of interest as it possessed were lessened by Harrington's confession. The press made much too much of a stir about my part in the affair." The doctor smiled deprecatingly. "It was really no mystery at all, and if the men involved had not been so rich and so prominent the case would have been virtually ignored. But we nailed him just in time; he was sailing for Europe the following week."

"What kind of a revolver did you say it was?" Hare asked the question so abruptly that Trevor started before answering.

"Why, it was a .25, pearl-handled and nickel-finished. Rather a dainty weapon altogether; Harrington was a bit apologetic about owning such a toy."

"I should think he might have been. Was the handle slightly chipped on the right side?"

Trevor leaned forward suddenly. "Yes, it was. How the devil did you know?"

"Why it got chipped when Alice dropped it on a rock at Davos. The four of us were target shooting back of the hotel."

"Alice!" exclaimed Trevor. "What Alice? And what do you mean by the four of you?"

Hare answered quietly, "Alice West, my dear fellow. You see, it was her gun. And the four of us were West, Alice, Harrington, and myself; we were all staying at the same hotel in Switzerland four years ago."

"Her gun?" The doctor was speaking excitedly now. "You mean she gave it to him?"

"I doubt it, much as she loved

him," drawled Hare. "He probably took it away from her, too late."

"You're talking in riddles," snapped the detective. "What do you mean?"

"Simply that that little weapon helped to execute the wrong man," said Hare wearily.

"The wrong man!"

"Well, that's one way of putting it; but in this case I am very much afraid that the right 'man' was a woman."

Trevor's apparent excitement had vanished abruptly, and now he was as calm as a sphinx. "Tell me exactly what you mean," he demanded.

Hare put aside the butt of his cigar. "It all began back in Davos, four years ago. Harrington fell in love with Alice West, and she fell in love with him. West played dog-in-the manger: he wouldn't let his wife divorce him and he wouldn't divorce her. They separated, of course, but that didn't help Alice and Harrington towards getting married. I was on the inside of the affair from the first, you see; accidentally to begin with, and afterwards because they all made me their confidant in various degrees. West behaved like a swine, because he really didn't love the woman any more. He simply had made up his mind that no other man was going to have her, legally at least. And he stuck to it — until she killed him."

"She killed him?" The great detective spoke softly.

"I'm as sure of it as though I had seen her do it. To begin with, it was her revolver that fired the shot, as you have proved to me. I've seen it a hundred times when we were firing at bottles and what not for fun. There was no reason for Harrington to borrow it; he had a nice little armory of his own, hadn't he?"

"Yes, we did find a couple of heavy service revolvers and an automatic."

"Exactly. He never would have used a toy like that in a thousand years; and besides he would never have committed a murder. He was too level-headed. Alice, on the other hand, is an extremely hysterical type; I've seen her go completely off her head with anger. Beautiful, Lord, yes! But dangerous, and in the last analysis a coward. She's proved that. I never did envy Harrington."

"But she was in Europe, man, when the murder was committed."

"She was not, Trevor. She was in Montreal that very month, to my certain knowledge, and Montreal isn't so far from Long Island. Harry Sands ran into her at the Ritz there; they were reminiscing about it at Monte Carlo the last time I saw her. She was in Europe before and after the murder, but she wasn't there when it happened. Anyway, that's not the whole story."

"Well, what is it?" Trevor's mouth was grim.

Hare's fingers were playing with a silver match box, and he hesitated a minute before answering. Then he spoke quickly and to the point.

"The rest of it is this. As I told you, Alice is hysterical, and during the past few years drink and dope haven't helped her any. Well, one night at

Monte, just before I left, she went off the deep end. We had been talking about her husband's death, and I had been speculating as to who could have done it. Harrington hadn't been arrested then. And I'd been asking her, too, if she and Harrington weren't going to get married soon. She dodged that question, obviously embarrassed. Then suddenly she burst out into a wild tirade against the dead man, called him every name under heaven, and finally dived into her evening bag and fished out a letter. It was addressed to her, and the postmark was more than a year old; it was almost broken at the creases from having been read over and over again. She shoved it at me, and insisted that I read it. It was from West, and it was a cruel letter if I've ever read one. It was the letter of a cat to a mouse, of a jailer to his prisoner: West had her where he wanted her, and he intended to keep her there. He didn't miss a trick when it came to rubbing it in. It was so bad that I didn't want to finish it, but she made me. When I gave it back to her her eyes were blazing; and she grabbed my hand and cried, 'What would you do to a man like that?' I hemmed and hawed for a minute, and she answered herself by exclaiming, 'Kill him! Kill him! Wouldn't you?' As calmly as I could I pointed out to her that someone had already done just that; and she burst into a fit of the wickedest laughter I've ever heard. Then she calmed down, powdered her nose, and said quietly, 'It's funny that you can shoot the heads off all the innocent bottles you like and no one says a word, but if you kill a human snake they hang you for it. And I don't want to hang, thank you very much.' "

Hare paused as though he were very tired, and then he added, "That's about all there was to it; it wasn't very nice. I left for Africa the next day, and I scarcely ever saw the papers there. But I hadn't any doubts as to who had bumped off Ernest West."

While the minute hand on the mantel clock jumped three times there was silence in the book-lined room. Then Trevor spoke, and his voice was strained. "So you think I made a mistake?"

Hare looked him straight in the eye. "What do you think?"

The detective took refuge in another question. "Have you any theory as to what really happened?"

"It's hard to say exactly, but I'm sure she did it. Her reference to the bottles showed that she knew what weapon had been used; she must have done in a thousand bottles with it at various times. My guess is that she and Harrington went down to see West together, to see if they couldn't make him change his mind after all, and that they failed. Then she pulled out that little toy of hers. She always carried it around in her bag. I used to tell her it was a bad habit. She shot West before he could move; she was a better shot than Harrington; he could never have found the man's heart. Then they left the house and drove off in Harrington's car; but first of all

he went back and thoughtfully trampled out every one of her footprints and, just to make sure he wasn't missing any, he walked over the housekeeper's as well. There were three sets of tracks there, Trevor, not two; I'll bet on that. Then Harrington took the gun away from her — if he hadn't taken it before — and drove her to wherever she wanted to go. She left him; she left him to stand the gaff if he was suspected, and it was like him to do what he did. He loved her if any man ever loved a woman; and she loved him in her own way, but it wasn't the best way in the world. She loved her own white neck considerably more." Hare smiled a wry smile. "She had forgotten that New York State doesn't go in for hanging. Altogether it is not a pretty tale. But Harrington, poor devil, wanted to save the woman even if she wasn't worth it. You see, to him she was."

"It's impossible!" Trevor snapped out the words as if despite himself.

"What is?"

"That I made a mistake."

"We all make mistakes, my dear fellow."

"I don't." The tight mouth was tighter than ever.

"Well, it's a shame, but what's done is done." Hare shrugged his shoulders.

Trevor looked at him with cold eyes. "Obviously you do not understand. My reputation does not permit of mistakes. I simply can't make them. That's all."

Hare mustered a genial smile; he was genuinely sorry that Trevor was so distressed and he sought to reassure him. "But your reputation isn't going to suffer. The facts won't come out. Alice West will be dead of dope inside of two years, if I'm any judge, and no one else knows."

"You do."

"Yes, I do; but we can forget about that."

Trevor nodded nervously. "Yes, we must. Do you understand, Hare, we *must*."

Hare studied him quizzically. "Don't worry, old chap, your reputation's safe with me; I'll keep my mouth shut."

Trevor nodded again, more nervously and more emphatically. "Yes, yes, I know you will, of course. I know you will."

"And how about a drink?" Hare swung himself out of his chair.

"On the table there. Help yourself. I'm going into the laboratory for a minute."

The doctor disappeared through the low door, and Hare busied himself with the decanters and the bottles in a preoccupied manner. He was sorry that Trevor was so upset; but what colossal egotism! Perhaps he should have held his tongue; nothing had been gained. He would never mention the subject again. It was a stiff drink of brandy that Hare finally poured himself, and he held it up to the light studying it, with his back to the laboratory door. But he never drank it; for he dropped the glass as he felt the lean fingers at his throat and the chloroform pad smothering his mouth

and nostrils. He managed to say only the two words, "My God . . ."

About fifteen minutes later, Dr. Harrison Trevor peered cautiously over the banister of his own stairway. There was no one below, and he descended swiftly. In the kitchen Tanaka heard the front door slam, and almost immediately afterwards his master's voice calling him from the first-floor landing. Tanaka responded briskly.

"Mr. Hare has just left," said the doctor, "and he forgot his cigarette case. Run after him; he may still be in sight."

Tanaka sped upon his errand. Yes, there on the corner was a tall man, obviously Hare *san,* but he was getting into a taxi. Tanaka ran, but before he was halfway down the block Hare *san* had driven off. Tanaka returned to report failure.

"Too bad," said his master, who met him on the landing, "but it doesn't really matter. Telephone Mr. Hare's apartment and tell his man that Mr. Hare left his case here, and that he is not to worry about it. You can take it to him in the morning."

Tanaka went downstairs to obey orders; and his master was left to wonder at the coincidence of the man who looked like Hare getting into the taxi. The accidental evidence might prove useful, but it was quite unnecessary, quite unnecessary; he had no need of accidental aid. At the door of his library the detective paused and surveyed the scene with a critical eye: everything was in place, comfortably, conventionally, indisputably in place. There were no fragments of the broken tumbler on the floor; only a dark, wet spot on the carpet that was drying rapidly. Brandy and soda would leave no stain. Dr. Harrison Trevor smiled a chilly smile and then walked resolutely toward the laboratory where his task awaited him. Once the door had been locked behind him, his first act was to switch on the electric ventilator fan which carried off all obnoxious odors through a concealed flue. After that he worked on into the morning hours.

The disappearance of Mr. Gregory Hare, eminent criminal lawyer, within a week after his return from abroad, furnished the front pages of the newspapers with rather more than a nine days' wonder. It was Dr. Trevor who was the first to insist upon foul play; and it was Dr. Trevor who worked fervently upon the case, with all the assistance that the police could give him. Naturally he was deeply concerned, for Hare had been an intimate acquaintance, and he had been among the last to see the man alive; but the body was never found, and there was no evidence to go on with. Tanaka repeated what he knew, reiterating the story of the taxi; and a patrolman on fixed post confirmed the Japanese's testimony. The tall gentleman had come from the direction of Dr. Trevor's house, and had driven off just as the servant had come running after him. All of which

helped not at all. A certain "Limping" Louie, whom Hare, years before when he was District Attorney, had sent up for a long term, was dragged in by the police net; but he had a perfect alibi. The mystery remained a mystery.

Dr. Trevor and Inspector Furst were discussing the case one afternoon, long after it had been abandoned. Furst still toyed with the idea that it might not have been murder, but the doctor was positive.

"I'm absolutely sure of it, Furst, absolutely sure. Hare was killed."

"Well," said the Inspector, "if you are so sure, I'm inclined to agree. You've never made a mistake."

The tight-lipped doctor spread his hands in a deprecating gesture. "Not yet, Furst, not yet; but overconfidence is dangerous. Have a cigarette." And he held out a gold case.

From the point of view of the criminologist it is a great pity that some years later, when Dr. Harrison Trevor was preparing his memoirs for posthumous publication, death should have snatched the pen from his hand just as he had written the heading for a new chapter.

For the chapter heading was: "The Perfect Crime."

"Now I wonder which one that would be?" pondered Furst when he saw the unfinished manuscript.

WHERE THE BODY IS BURIED

Where does a harassed and homicide-haunted editor discover fine old stories? — stories that for a decade or more, even a generation or more, have been forgotten, neglected, or otherwise ignored? Well, the sources are many, though few are called . . . Sometimes a grateful reader takes pen in hand and tells an even more grateful editor of a story the reader came upon years and years ago, and still remembers. This is always a red-hot tip: if the impact or larger meaning of a story sticks in your mind long, long after you have first read it, then the story has something — something that should be rediscovered and perpetuated; also, it is always a good bet that if one perceptive reader likes a story, other perceptive readers will also like it. So, with what clues the reader gives us, we start to track down that story . . . Then, writers themselves often call your Editors' attention to their past work; and writers too are generally good judges of their best efforts in the years gone by. When a writer has an affectionate spot in his or her heart for a certain old story, you can almost bank on the fact that that story is worth re-reading.

And, of course, there is the endless, infinite, perpetual reading that your Editors do in old magazines, old books, and old newspapers. This is usually heart-breaking work: for every story one finds that deserves reprinting, it may be necessary to read fifty, or even a hundred.

And then, every once in a while, your Editors come across a reference in an old textbook or in a book of literary criticism. That is how we found the story we now bring to you. It was listed in a Roll of Honor of Distinguished Short Stories, compiled nearly thirty years ago. First, we tried to find the old magazine — but no success; then we tried to locate the author, Valma Clark, and finally we found her — living in Paris.

Well, we were lucky: the author, to quote from her letter, skitted over to the rooms where all her possessions were stored during the German occupation. She had little hope of finding a copy of the story after all these years; but standing in an old curiosity shop of tea kettles, chairs, brooms, and the accumulated belongings of different households, she thrust her hand into a wooden box labeled Mss. *— and lo, up came her hand with a copy of the old magazine, which was IT.*

The author went on to say that murder, curiously enough, had got

itself mixed up with her Paris housing problem. For three years Valma Clark had been trying to find an unfurnished room where she and her sister could set up housekeeping again. The very week she heard from us, asking about her old story, the two sisters located a house in a little town out of Paris — St. Martin les Nogelles, in Normandy. True, it was a large, old, ugly house, but it had all the "comforts" — heat, hot water, bath tub; but there was something deeply sinister about the place — something in its atmosphere, in its aura. The windows looked out on one of the loveliest pastoral scenes imaginable, including a beautiful old church; the garden, however, was overgrown and rambling with gloomy pines, and the cellar of the house was a veritable Paris catacomb.

Valma Clark said to her sister that she would like to take a flashlight and explore that cellar — just once; probably she would find a body or two; then, her curiosity satisfied, she would bolt and double-bolt the cellar door, and never go down there again.

Then, just as the sisters were about to rent the house, an American friend in Paris warned them off. It seems that the man living over the garage was a notorious murderer-at-large. He had killed his mistress in cold blood — the police were sure of it; but the man had disposed of the body so cleverly and so thoroughly that, after spending six months in prison, he had to be released; the police could never find the corpse, and without that, according to French law, the man could not be convicted.

Well, Valma Clark bets that she knows where the lady lies . . .

THE MAN WHO LOVED THE CLASSICS

by VALMA CLARK

IT WAS ON Cape Cod one August, while I was browsing through antique shops in quest of a particular kind of colonial andirons for one of our patrons, that I stumbled onto the Old Scholar.

There, in a white farmhouse back from the King's Highway, among a litter of old Cape lanterns and great bulging liqueur bottles of green and amber glass, ancient teakettles and brass door knockers and the inevitable bayberry candles, I came upon painted book ends of heavy wood on which bright orange nymphs disported themselves against a velvet-black background. The details of face and hair were traced most delicately

in brown and purple, as though a brush with a single fine bristle had been used; the work was exquisite, and on the whole the effect was charming. Then it struck me: Jove, it was after the manner of the old, fine, red-figured Greek vases — classic, that was it!

The nymphs, too, were classic; this slim one was, without doubt, Nausicaa playing at ball with her maidens. There were other classical subjects: a graceful Aphrodite riding a quaintly stiff swan; nimble sileni frolicking on a see-saw. . . .

Pagan mythology running riot, within a small space, in this home of New England antiques — it was at least odd!

Even as I wondered, my eye fell upon a fresh subject, and the wonder changed to genuine admiration and sharpened to a very keen curiosity concerning the artist who achieved such arresting beauty with such crude materials. It was a broken painting, like a Venus with a missing arm. It showed the head and shoulders of Pallas Athena and the head and shoulders of a youth who played to her on a double flute. The goddess' head, which still bore the warrior's helmet, was bent in a listening attitude toward the music, and her pose was one of relaxation and peace after fierce combat.

It was a quiet thing, with quiet, flowing lines, for all the unfinished ragged edge which cut the figures off just above the waist. Somehow, it held the dignity and sincerity of great religious art. And now I noticed that there were other identical Athenas, that the fragmentary painting recurred on fully half of the book ends.

"But only a man thoroughly steeped in Greek mythology — loving it — could do that —"

"Pardon, sir?" said the young woman who kept the shop.

"This! It's rather remarkable. Who is he — tell me about him!" I begged of her impulsively.

"I can't tell you much. He lives alone over on the back shore, and he brings us these to sell. His name is Twining — 'Tinker' Twining, they call him."

"But this broken thing — what does it mean?"

She shook her head.

"He never talks; only says he hasn't the pattern for the rest, and it would be sacrilege to finish it without the true lines."

"Hm — reverence and a conscience," I muttered; "rare enough these days. I'll take the pair of them. How much?"

"Five dollars."

"And a pair of the nymphs," I added, since it seemed absurdly cheap.

"Sorry, but we've only one of those. It's used as a door prop, you see."

"No, not a *door prop!*" I lamented. "But I'd use mine as book ends, and I'd put the Romantic Poets between them."

"I'll tell you —" the girl turned suddenly helpful — "you might leave an order with us for Mr. Twining to paint you one. He'd be glad to do it."

"Or I might take the order to Mr. Twining, myself," I exclaimed eagerly. "I've a car outside and I've time to kill. How do I get to him?"

"But you can't drive. You follow the sand road to the end, and then take a narrow path across to the ocean side. It's three miles over, the only house —"

"No matter! I've a fancy to meet him. Oh, I see by your face you wouldn't advise it."

"It's only that he's — something of a hermit," she hesitated. "He's a very courteous old gentleman, but no one ever visits him."

"Then it's time someone started."

I thanked her, found a quiet inn, parked my car for the night, and started on a late afternoon ramble for the back shore and a Mr. "Tinker" Twining.

I followed a sand trail like a wind-white chalk line between growths of springy hog cranberry, scrub oak, and pine — a most desolate and forsaken country — until at last I stepped out abruptly upon a high cliff over the Atlantic Ocean.

Clouds had sponged out the blue sky, and instead of the late sunlight there was a strange yellow glow over everything.

The sea was very still, of dull purples and greens, and the broad cream beach, below the sand scrap upon which I stood, had a grayish tinge. Above me, on the highest point of the cliff and huddled too close to its shifting edge, was one of those low, weather-beaten, Cape houses. I climbed to it, and wading through beach grass and vines of the wild beach pea, came to the back door.

Then, against a further window which framed the lowering sea and sky, I saw the profile of an old, white-haired man.

He sat at a workbench and he held a brush poised in his hand, but he was not painting. His head was up and he was listening — it was almost as though he were listening to that strange electric yellow that permeated all the air. I was struck at once by the extreme delicacy and the fine-drawn suffering of the old man's face.

I tapped, and the old man stirred.

"Good afternoon," I called.

He came slowly to the door.

"They sent me from that antique place — the *Open Latch*. I'd like to get you to do me another book end."

"Book end?" he muttered.

"I hoped you might be willing to paint it and send it on to me."

"Ah, yes." Clearly he was following me only with his eyes; with his soul he was still listening to his own thoughts.

I found myself puzzled as to how to reach him. A baffling aroma of archaism hung about this elderly man: breathed not only from his worn black suit, which was not of this day, but also from his manner and the very inflection of his voice, which were somehow reminiscent of the old school.

"The nymphs," I insisted; "the one of Nausicaa."

There I caught him. "Nausicaa — you knew?"

"Well, I guessed."

"They don't as a rule; to the general public they are merely odd little maidens sporting at ball." His smile came out as pure gold filtered from the dross of suffering — a rare, lovable smile that immediately won me to the old gentleman. "I shall be happy to paint the Nausicaa for you, sir," he added formally, and awaited my further pleasure.

"The name," I said; "perhaps you'd better jot down my name and address."

"Of course — the name." Obediently he brought pad and pencil, and in a fine scholarly hand wrote, "Mr. Claude Van Nuys," with my New York address.

Absently, he permitted me to pay him and stood ready to bid me good afternoon.

Still I lingered. "The sileni; and the goddess on the swan — Aphrodite, isn't she?"

"You pass, my boy—grade A," he smiled.

"And the Pallas Athena — that's splendid work, only why —?"

"Ah, the Athena!" A flicker of pain touched the old man's face, and he grew reticent and vague again.

I would have given him up then, had not a terrific and absolutely unheralded blast of wind come to my assistance, striking up the sand in swirling clouds about us.

"Whew!" I whistled, covering my face against the cut of that fine shot. "We're in for a gale, yes? I say —"

But I was shocked to dumbness by the look of strained and unadulterated horror on old Mr. Twining's face.

"A bad night," he muttered; "wind and a sea. . . . It was just such a night —" He rediscovered me with a start, and with something approaching relief, I thought.

"But you couldn't stay out in this," he reasoned, more to himself than to me; "it then becomes necessary. . . . Sir —" he slipped easily into the role of courteous host — "will you accept the shelter of my roof until the storm passes?"

He waited for me to precede him into the house, saw me seated in the only comfortable chair in the dim living room, and, having first excused himself, sat down at his workbench and again took up his brush.

Slowly the room darkened. The old man forgot me and relapsed into mutterings, quivering under each shrill onslaught of the wind, pausing to listen for the moan of the surf below.

So he worked on until he could no longer see, and then he lit a candle, and turned to the tracing of a pattern from the colored plate of a book. There were several similar volumes at his elbow, and I dared to take one up and run it through. They were, as I had guessed, plates of the more famous Greek vases — mostly those of the red-figured period. "Douris — Euphronios — Hieron," I read aloud; "oh, and those exquisite old white lekythoi!"

The effect upon the old man was

instantaneous. Those names — *Hieron, white lekythoi* — were the magic passwords to him!

"Ah, you know them — the cup-painters!" And he loosed upon me a flood of scientific enthusiasm and technicalities and dates, with an undercurrent of reverence and love for the pure beauty of those old vases.

"You know, you know!" he exulted. "Now you recall the Douris Athena —"

"But I know nothing, really," I interrupted him, impelled to honesty by his own intense sincerity. "My knowledge of the classics is general. We deal only in period stuff at the House of Harrow, where I'm a buyer — English and French periods mostly — for a Fifth Avenue clientele."

He would not have it.

"You speak the language," he insisted. "And do you know that it is nearly half a century since I've talked to anyone who speaks my own tongue — nearly half a century since I've met a man who's ever heard of Euphronios, the master cup-painter? Lord, how it takes me back!"

The old man laughed. "You questioned about my Athena! You are the first man who would comprehend. Wait!"

Smiling like a child with a secret, he tiptoed to a chest of drawers, brought out something wrapped in tissue paper. Very tenderly he unwound the papers, and produced before me the broken half of a red-figured cylix, with one handle attached but with the standard missing. He waited triumphantly for my awed exclamation.

"Why," I said lamely, "the interior is that same Athena with her flute player. It seems — a very fine fragment —"

"Fine!" He scorned the adjective. "Fine! Sir, this is the best of its kind — the aristocrat of the Greek vase. See! The finished lines went something like this."

He caught up a pencil, laid the fragment flat on a sheet of white paper, and completed the broken figures of the Athena and the youth. I noted his hands as he sketched: fine, long-fingered hands, nervous, but sure at their work.

"You see?" he asked. "Now on the exterior of the cylix we have Athena mounting her quadriga after the battle. Is it not a contrast, that peaceful Athena and this Athena? Is he not, indeed, an artist of variety, the man who could do those two things, each so perfectly? You will note the horses — the bold, vigorous lines — the power and swing. It is naked, masculine drawing this — yes, scriptural. Euphronios —" Old Twining broke off, returned to his more precise exposition. "The other half of the cup — the exterior — showed Athena sending her spear into the giant Ankelados —"

"But where is the other half?" I wondered. "You must have seen it, since you hold the answer to the riddle."

"Yes," he returned slowly, "I have seen it; God knows I do hold the answer to the riddle. . . ."

But he came back to me — or rather to the beloved fragment of the cylix.

"The coloring!" he breathed. "That deep orange glow and the velvet-black and that fine gloss over all. . . . The secret of Greek potters, buried with them. Perfect to the very eyelashes. . . ."

Sitting there, he lost himself in reverent admiration of the shard. He did not touch it — it was as though the fragment were too precious to handle; but he gave his soul to it through his eyes. He was oblivious to the wail of a rising wind and the thunder of a rising surf.

"It is," he announced quietly at last, "the half of a genuine, unpublished Euphronios."

I stared. "You say this is — an unpublished Euphronios?"

"Yes. The signature was on the other piece."

"But, man alive, given that other piece — and you must know where it is to be so familiar with it — this fragment is worth a king's ransom!"

"The other half is gone," spoke the old man; "gone forever. But this piece itself is still worth more than a king's ransom; not in gold, but in the coin of knowledge — the knowledge it will give the world of Greek art."

His gray eyes widened to a vision; the poet was drowned in the farseeing scientist.

For that instant I felt myself in the presence of nobility — but the old man's dignity was abruptly shattered. With the rush as of an oncoming engine, the full blast of an Atlantic gale struck us: screamed and whined and groaned, and shook the old house until it rattled like a bag of loose bones.

In the same moment the rain came down in a deluge, swept the window-panes and beat a very devil's tattoo upon the roof. I flatter myself I am no coward, but I found myself clutching at the heavy workbench for anchorage. By the wavering candlelight I discovered my host crowded back against the wall, his hands pressed to his eyes. He seemed to be in physical agony.

I reached him in two steps:

"What is it? Sir — Mr. Twining!"

His mutterings were part of a disjointed prayer. I laid my hand on his shoulder, and suddenly he was clinging to me, like a child who finds an unexpected hand in the dark, and was speaking rapidly, incoherently:

"No, no, it's not the storm; it's the things it brings up here, in my head — images — scenes no human being should have . . . staged. I live it over again — over and over — like Macbeth. Don't leave me — *don't!* It's His will. He sends you, and the storm holds you here — impossible for you to reach the village this night. You shall stay with me, be my first guest in forty years. You shall hear my tale — and judge me."

"Yes, yes," I soothed him, drawing him to a chair, "of course I'll stay, Mr. Twining."

He subsided then, his head dropped to his arms which he had flung out on

the bench before him; as the wind died down a little, he slowly regained complete control of himself.

"It's mad of me," he sighed, facing me at last; "sometimes I fear I am growing a little mad. But I've a fancy to tell to you — an impartial stranger — the story of how I came by the Euphronios fragment. But you must be hungry; you shall first have supper."

He became again the solicitous but unobtrusive host. He moved expertly about the kitchen, set a meticulous table with white linen cloth and pewter utensils, and served me clam broth out of a blue bowl, and brown bread and honey, and some sort of flower wine of which Horace might have sung.

At last we settled to the story.

"I was abroad," he began, "in the middle of the eighties, on a year's leave of absence from my college, and with me was my friend — Lutz, let us call him — Paul Lutz. I may say here that I had no right to play friend to him, for at heart I despised him — despised his methods, his creeds. One of my college colleagues, a younger man than I, he seemed to have taken a liking to me.

"It was odd, for he was of a wealthy family, and beyond our common interest in archeology and classical subjects — an interest which was rather a fad with him, I suspected — we were at opposite poles. He was shrewd, brilliant even, but how shall I describe him — he had thick fingers. He was the handsome, spoiled, Byronic type: a full-blooded, dark man.

"Lutz and I were rivals in more ways than one. There was . . . a young lady in our college town; she received us both. Her name — it would do no harm to tell it now — was Lorna Story, and she was like her name, a fine, silver-gray girl. She had a beautiful mind . . . and a light shining through her gray eyes that was like the haunting line of a poem. . . ."

The old man sat silent for a time, as he had been silent before the fine beauty of his Greek vase, and his old, frail face was lit by the same inner glow.

"Lutz and I were in Athens together in the spring in the interest of our college-museum, which was then in its infancy. We had at our joint disposal a fund for any valuable specimens, and we haunted the excavation fields and the markets for antiquities. It was the merest chance which led us to the Acropolis at the time they had just started on the work of clearing out the debris which dated before the destruction of the Persians. And it was the merest chance which took us to the spot at the moment the workmen brought to light the vase, in two pieces.

"A vase by the potter Euphronios — and the signature was actually visible through the coating of white earth deposits — here in this debris which went back to the days before the Persian sacking in 480! Now Euphronios had long been fixed at a date considerably later. That difference in dates was important: the inferences

that followed — why, I had hit upon a tremendous, an epoch-making discovery! I saw my path to scholarly fame opening up before me.

"I talked with the young Greek who was directing operations there, and secured his promise that I should examine the specimen when it had been thoroughly cleaned. Lutz edged closer to me, and I saw that he, too, was excited by the vase though concealing his excitement under an air of indifference. But I had no time for Lutz. I got away from him. I pursued those inferences for miles through the streets of Athens, and then tested out my conclusions in the classical library out at the American School. There was no error in my facts, no flaw in my logic. Then, in the flush of masterly achievement, I turned back to the small hotel where we were stopping.

"I opened the door of our room to find Lutz bent low over the table. He was gloating over something:

" 'You beauty! And to fit with never a flaw —'

" 'Good Lord!' I discovered. 'It's the vase!'

" 'Right, old boy,' Lutz grinned up at me. 'I've finished giving her a bath with aqua fortis — oh, my caution was extreme, never fear. Now what do you think?'

"Think! What *could* I think? The colors were as you see them now, startling, like black and orange enamel. Forgetful of theories, I fell into rhapsodies with him.

"We were like two eager boys who have come upon Captain Kidd's treasure. We dropped into heated argument, I recall: Lutz preferred the strong, battling Athena who hurled her spear at the giant, while I maintained that the quiet Athena, who sat with her head bowed to the music of her flute player, was the greater art. Laughingly, I took possession of my favorite half of the vase and left to Lutz his savage goddess.

"Then the serious significance of the vase and my intended article intruded, and I returned to earth.

" 'But how under heaven did you come by it, Lutz?'

"He laughed, cast an apprehensive glance toward the hallway:

" 'It's a long story. I say, will you lock that door behind you? Thanks. Whether that Greek was a fool that he should let this slip through his fingers, or whether it was a question of drachmas or whether it was a little of both — idiocy *and* greed — what does it matter? The vase is here — mine. Well, then —'

" 'But it belongs by right to the Greek government — the Museum of the Acropolis,' I protested, weakly enough.

" 'Naturally, I know,' he smiled; 'but it does not go to the Greek government nor to the Acropolis. Now why quibble, Twining? You know those things are done every day.'

"I did know: in spite of laws, valuable classical pieces were continually turning up in the States; indeed, our own college had purchased specimens of doubtful past.

"Then the thrill of my discovery caught me again. 'Its value is greater than you realize, Lutz. You saw nothing strange in finding a vase by Euphronios in the Persian rubbish? Why, wake up, man! If Euphronios and his contemporaries lived and painted before the Persians, it simply means that the whole chronology of Greek vases must be pushed back half a century. And that's going to mean that Greek painting developed before Greek sculpture, instead of the contrary, as we've always believed. Now do you see! Do you begin to see how this one small vase is going to revolutionize all our concepts of Greek art? Why, it's colossal! When my article appears — when it's published and quoted and discussed and rediscussed in all the periodicals —'

" 'Hold on!' commanded Lutz. 'We'll not make a splurge of this vase yet. You'll hang off on that article a while — promise me?'

" 'I don't follow you,' I returned, stiffening. 'Why should I make promises — ?'

"Lutz's black eyes narrowed, his face tightened to an expression of hard shrewdness. 'As I see it, your theory depends upon your establishing the fact that the vase came out of that Persian junk; unless you can guarantee that, the whole theory goes smash. I think you'll find no one who'll swear to that. You'd have to swear to it alone. And if it came to a showdown, it would be your one word against our several words.

" 'But the vase was taken from the Persian debris; you yourself saw it, this very morning!'

" 'Perhaps.'

" 'Yet you would — lie?'

" 'Perhaps.'

" 'But why? You simply don't understand!'

" 'It's you,' said Lutz softly, 'who misunderstands. Did I neglect to tell you that I paid for the vase with a check on my own bank?'

" 'You didn't draw on the fund?'

" 'No. So you see, old top, you haven't been getting me quite straight: this cylix is *my* find!'

" 'What do you mean?'

"He colored then, beneath his dark skin. 'It's not for the college museum; it's for — my own private museum. I mean to make it the start of the very finest private collection in the United States.' He held out his hand for my half of the cup.

"But I drew back, hugged the fragment against my breast. 'Do you stand there and tell me that you're not a scientist at all, but a greedy sensualist? You will remember, Lutz, that you're here for the college, sent by the college —'

" 'And I've worked like the devil for the college!' he broke in roughly. 'I'll continue to work for the college through all the regular channels. But this thing's not regular; it's most — irregular; and the irregularity is my own doing. I'll keep this vase for myself, and I'll suffer my own damnation for it. If you'll kindly hand over that piece —'

"Then I flared: 'I'll do nothing of the sort. If you think you can gag me to silence — force me to sit still and blink at your dirty greed — No, I'll keep this half as a guarantee to us both that you'll see the light of day and do the right thing!'

"We had it hot then. He had paid for it with his own money, had not touched a penny of the college fund; he had me there.

"But I swore, if he insisted upon taking the fragment from me, that I should report him to Greek authorities who watched that no Greek treasures should go from the country without government sanction.

"That held him. He desisted, even tried to square himself with me. Probably Lutz merely delayed the issue until we should be safely out of Greece. For myself, I was firmly resolved that I should finally prevail upon him.

"Meantime, we sailed for home, taking passage, as we had planned, on a small trading vessel that wound a leisurely circle about the Atlantic islands and certain South American ports on its way to New York. The truce still held. Each of us guarded jealously his half of the vase, and each kept aloof from the other.

"There was an implicit understanding between us that the reckoning would come when the ship landed us on home soil. But the ship was destined not to land.

"We were in mid-Atlantic, some eight hundred miles off the Cape Verde Islands and bound for Porto Seguro, when the crash came. It was night, with a heavy gale blowing, and at first I thought the sudden wrench which almost jerked me from my upper berth was a particularly violent wave. Then a grinding and shuddering through all the ship's frame and an abrupt cessation of the engine's throbbing pulled me stark awake. I hung over the edge of my berth:

" 'What is it?'

" 'Don't know,' yawned Lutz below, struggling from luxurious sleep. 'Better find out — what? 'S a damn nuisance —'

"I groped for the light, and we got into clothes, the ship pitching now so that it was impossible to keep a footing. We spoke no further word, but Lutz paused in drawing on his trousers to take from beneath his pillow the box which contained his half of the precious vase; and I reached for my own piece, and kept it by me while I finished lacing my shoes. Each of us eyed the other suspiciously; and Lutz was quick to follow me when, with my treasure, I mounted to the ship's deck.

"Apparently the crew had gone wild, and the captain, too, had completely lost his head, for we passed him sobbing on the deck, unable to give us a coherent word. The men were fighting like freshmen in a college rush over lifeboats which they were attempting to lower to the water.

" 'No chance here,' growled Lutz; 'Lord, let's get out of this mess!'

"I trailed him forward, battling against the wind and the waves which broke over the deck.

"Once I stumbled over a big brute who was on his knees blubbering like a child. I shook him:

" 'What did we hit?'

" 'Reef. She's a-goin' down, sir — a-goin' down. May the good, kind Lord have mercy —'

"Lutz was far forward by now, clinging to a rail, staring over the ship's side. I reached him, clung with him, and followed his gaze.

"There below us, close against the ship, bobbed a little white dory, looking as frail as an eggshell upon the dim, surging mass of waters; it had been launched probably in the first wild moment, and then abandoned for the more seaworthy boats.

" 'A chance,' spoke Lutz; 'I'll — risk it!'

"He turned to me then, and his eye rested speculatively upon the pocket of my coat which held the vase.

" 'No, you don't!' I said sharply. 'I'll take that risk with you.'

"We stood measuring each other. All about us was the terror of the storm — the same wash and slap and snarl that you hear now about this very house; and concentrating upon him, probing him, my heart filled with intense hatred of him, slowly and surely, as a jug that is held under a single stream fills with water — such a hatred as threatened to overflow — a *killing* hatred! There, on just such a night as this, murder was born in me — murder, I tell you!

"The crisis passed. Unexpectedly Lutz gave in.

" 'Oh, all right; together still — for a little time —'

"A wave drenched us. We recovered, strained into the darkness to determine whether the little dory had been swamped. But no, she still rode the sea, miraculously right side up.

" 'Come along then!' snapped Lutz. 'There's no time to waste.' Lutz took the oars. Some way he had maneuvered us about the bow of the ship, and now we were clear of the sinking vessel, carried swiftly away from it by the sea.

"The rest is a blur. I recall dark shapes — bits of bobbing wreckage — and the white circle of an empty life saver. I did not see the ship go down.

"With the breaking of a sullen dawn, the wind died. The rain settled to a steady downpour, and the waves, as the day wore on, subsided to the long, low rollers that last for hours after such a gale. . . .

"Anyway, to cut it short, we drifted that day without sight of a single vessel. Wet through and numb with cold, I was glad to take a shift at the oars while Lutz slept. Provisions in the boat were found to consist of half a pail of soda biscuits, a lantern without oil, some miscellaneous ropes and tarpaulins — and that was all!

"We ate sparingly of the biscuits, drank rain water caught in the cracker pail. Our boat, we discovered, was leaking badly through seams in the bow; so we crowded as much weight to the stern of the craft as we could, and

I was kept busy bailing out the water.

"Late in the afternoon, when the situation looked worst, we perceived a black speck upon the horizon. The speck grew into a pile of dark rocks — bare and uninhabited, we saw, as the current carried us close. Somehow, we gained the sheltered side of the island, and there, in a narrow inlet, achieved a landing. The mass of rocks was perhaps fourteen hundred feet long and half as wide. The only life was sea gulls, insects and spiders, and a few fish in the surrounding waters. We were together there on the island for four days.

"Through all those four days, half-starved and suffering from exposure as we were, Lutz and I nursed each his own half of the cylix and kept a watchful eye upon the other half. The strain of the situation grew intolerable. Now, through what follows, I don't know how to account for myself; before that crisis I had never in my life been a vicious man.

"You see, figuring our location from the ship's map as near as I could remember it, I came to believe that this solitary rock was one visited and described by Darwin in his investigation of volcanic islands. If it was the island I believed it to be, then it lay off the ocean lines and was very rarely passed by ships. Our chance of being rescued, if we stayed on the island then, was slight.

"I did not mention these deductions to Lutz. Nor, after Lutz had eaten our last cracker, did I tell him of my own small reserve supply of concentrated meat, which I carried always in my pocket at that time to save the trouble of too frequent meals. . . .

"Then, on the second night, while Lutz slept under a tarpaulin and while I fought off a twisting hunger, I saw the event quite clearly. Lutz would be the first to succumb to weakness; I would hold on longer than he could. The boat was our best risk, but in its present leaky condition it was unseaworthy for two men. Now *one man*, crouched back in the stern . . . there was just a chance. And the vase — the *whole* vase — in my possession; and my article secure. . . .

"Deliberately I broke off a piece of the dried meat, which I had not touched until that moment.

"Perhaps I should have weakened in my course and divided my slender provision with him — I do not know. But on the following morning Lutz, sprawled on his stomach over the rock's edge, with his pocketknife tied to a pole, managed to spear a small fish. He did not share with me. Desperate for food, he devoured the thing raw, and the sight nauseated and hardened me.

"I begrudged him the strength he was storing up; but I did not doubt the issue. For all his athletic build, Lutz was soft with soft living.

"Meantime, I kept up some pretense of friendship and good cheer with him. He insisted upon piling up wet driftwood for a fire in case a ship should come our way, and I encouraged him to the effort; though

we had no matches, he thought he might manage a spark, and while I knew that this rock was too soft to serve as flint, I agreed with him.

"I watched him burn up energy and grow hourly weaker, and waited . . . waited. . . .

"Murder was in the air between us, and since those things breed, I wondered that a murdering hatred of me did not spring up in his heart to match my own.

"But no — though I sometimes fancied he looked at me oddly, he remained amiable. Lutz was as determined as I to have his way about the vase; beyond that, he was still my friend in his loose, selfish way — my friend as much as he had ever been. As my friend, Lutz, gross and unscrupulous as he was, could never have guessed the thing that was going on in my mind. That was my great sin, the crime that makes me doubly cursed: it was my friend whom I betrayed — a man who was bound to me in friendship.

"When, on the fourth day, the rain ceased, and a hot, tropical sun blazed out and dried up the pools in the rocks which had furnished our water, I felt myself slipping. The heat on these naked rocks was worse than the chilling rain. A fever grew in me. I could not afford to wait longer. While my companion drowsed in a kind of stupor, I gathered a few things into the boat, stowed my own precious fragment in a concealed nook far up in the bow, and then moved cautiously toward Lutz.

"A dizziness seized me . . . but I went on . . . I had rehearsed it all fifty times, you understand, so that I knew every move by heart; and though my memory of the actual events is not clear, I must have gone through with it as I had planned. I suppose I may have awakened him in shoving off the boat, for I have a hazy recollection of a fight.

"And when I came to, alone in the dory, on a calm blue sea, I felt a soreness at my throat, and afterward I was to find black fingermarks there, which I carried with me for days. Perhaps I had actually killed him, left him in a heap on the rocks — I couldn't remember. But whether I had murdered him outright with my own hands or not, it did not matter; I had murdered him as surely by abandoning him there on that forgotten island and taking the one chance for myself. I was a murderer by intent and by cold calculation — a murderer of my friend and colleague!"

"And your own fate?" I prompted old "Tinker" Twining gently.

"I was picked up several days later, in a state of semiconsciousness, by a small passenger steamer, just as I had foreseen. In the long voyage home, I lived through nightmares. I felt impelled to confess the truth and to beg the captain to turn back for Lutz, but I knew that it was now too late. I suffered alone, as I deserved to suffer.

"There were nights when I felt my fingers sinking into the flesh of his throat . . . other nights when I

looked at my own hands and could not believe it. My half of the vase — did I tell you that I must somehow have failed to secure Lutz's half, strong as my determination had been, since only this fragment was found in the dory, hidden under the bow where I had placed it? This piece, though I hated it in my reaction, I kept always before me as the reminder, the sackcloth and ashes of my sin.

"The steamer landed me in Boston, and I wandered up here to the Cape. Since the *Agricola* had gone down with all souls reported lost, I was dead to the world. That was well, for, having murdered my friend for a piece of pottery, I was unfit for human society. The penalty of my crime followed as a natural sequence: to drop out of the world and the work I loved; to read no new books and to take no periodicals on my own subject; in short, to give up the thing that was most vital to me. That would be prison for me — a prison worse than most criminals ever know.

"I found this remote house, got in touch with my lawyer at home, and, having pledged him to secrecy, arranged that my small, yearly income should be paid regularly to a T. Twining at this address.

"So I settled here, and eked out my income with this painting. Though I fixed my own terms of imprisonment, I have lived up to them. In all those forty years I have permitted myself no inquiries and I have heard no news of anyone I ever knew in the old days. I have virtually buried myself alive.

"Ah, you are thinking it wrong of me to have buried, too, the half of this valuable cylix, since, fragment though it is, it would have been sufficient to establish the fact. Perhaps it *was* wrong. But, don't you see, I could establish nothing without first revealing my identity and giving my word as a scientist that the shard came from the Persian debris? That way lay danger — the danger of being drawn back into the old life; there, too, lay honor for me who deserved nothing but contempt.

"And always in the background there was Lorna Story. No, the temptations were too many; I could not risk it. But I have bequeathed that knowledge to posterity; I have left a written confession and a statement. Tell me — you have recently come out of the world — you don't think it will be too late after my death, do you?"

Though I had some shadowy idea of what extensive discoveries had been made in the classical world of recent years, I assured the old man that it would perhaps not be too late.

"And so," he concluded his story, "you see before you a murderer! Your verdict would be — ?"

"But how can you be sure?" I countered. "If you slipped up on the vase, you may have slipped up on other details of your program. Besides, his chance on the island was as good as yours in a leaking dory. Who shall say?"

Old Twining merely shook his head.

The wind rose up again, and the old man's head dropped to his hands. I was with him all that night and I saw him suffer the tortures of an eternally damned soul with a razor-blade conscience.

The storm over, he was the kindly, considerate host when he bade me goodbye on the following morning. I left him with the feeling that I had been in the presence of as fine a gentleman as I had ever met; that his story of the preceding night was utterly incongruous to the man as he was. I believed there was some factor to his story which I had not got hold of, and I promised myself to visit him again.

But time passed. I was abroad in England and in France. Then two years later, back again in New York, I picked up the missing link in the old scholar's story.

It was inevitable, I suppose, that, as buyer for the House of Harrow, I should sooner or later stumble into Max Bauer. At a private sale I lazily bid against the wealthy collector for a jade bowl and good-naturedly lost to him. I talked with him, and when he urged me to dine with him that evening and see his treasures, I assented.

I don't know why I accepted his invitation, for I did not like the man; but I was mildly curious about his collection, and alone in the city in midsummer, I welcomed any diversion.

So he dined me and wined me — especially the latter — to repleteness in the ornate dining-room of his luxurious apartment.

The meal over, still keeping the decanter by him, he trailed me through rooms littered with Oriental junk. He bragged and boasted, told the history of this piece and that: how he had robbed one man here and tricked another there. His voice thickened, as his enthusiasm grew, and I turned thoroughly uncomfortable and wondered when I could break away.

Clearly the man attracted few friends of a caliber to appreciate his art treasures, for under my perfunctory approval, he became increasingly garrulous, until at last he invited me into the inner shrine, the small room which held his most private and precious possessions.

We stopped before a water color painting of a slim girl in gray.

"My wife," said old Bauer with a flourish; "her last portrait."

I turned incredulously from that white-flower face, with its fine, subtle smile, half-ironical and half-tired, to my gross-featured host — and I shuddered.

"A handsome woman," he mumbled; "picture doesn't do her justice. Face so-so, but a body . . . a body for an artist to paint. . . ."

I looked away from him — followed the gray girl's eyes to the object below her upon which she ironically smiled: it was a red-figured Greek vase.

Then something familiar in the vase struck me — like the broken pattern of a forgotten dream. . . . It was the fragment of a vase, the half of a cylix, on which an orange goddess stood with uplifted spear.

"Ah," I breathed, "the Athena — Euphronios!"

"So you're up to it!" chuckled old Bauer. "Not many of 'em are. Classic stuff: I used to aim for a collection of the pure Greek, but I've grown out of that; not that I wouldn't have achieved it if my taste hadn't changed, y'understand, for I'm generally successful — I get the things I set out for. This" — he scowled at the vase — "is my one failure. But there's a story —" he poured himself another whisky — "want to hear it, eh?"

I looked at him carefully: the plump fingers; the full, sensual lips; the dark skin. What was the name? — Lutz, that was it!

Decidedly I did want to hear his story!

"My one failure," he emphasized it, slumping into a chair. "Not my fault, either; the fault of a stuffy old fool. He doted on me, played the fatherly role, and I tolerated him as you will such folks. I cribbed a lot off of him; I was keen on the classics at that time, and he knew a thing or two.

"Besides, he was sweet on Lorna, and you never could tell about her — odd tastes; it was best to keep track of him. We traveled together for the college — you'd never guess I'd been a college professor in my day, would you? I happened onto this thing quite by luck — a genuine Euphronios, broken clean in two pieces. I wanted it, and I managed it. This fellow — old Gooding — had a notion of turning it in to the college museum; he had some other fool's idea of proving something-or-other — a rare old bird, a pedant, you understand. It was a shaky business; I'd no intention of publishing my Euphronios at this time. But he was set — you'd never believe how set! — and since I couldn't afford to stir up a row there in Athens, I humored him.

"Once we were clear of Greece — once we struck home ground — But we never struck home ground on that ship. She went down!" — with a flourish of his glass. "Yes, blast it all, regular desert-island stuff. We were hung up on a rock in mid-ocean, the two of us, old Gooding hugging tight to half the vase, and me nursing the other half. Can't say I ever was more uncomfortable in my life."

Again Bauer fumbled for the bottle, spilled whisky into his glass.

"The old idiot — you'd think he'd've seen what he was driving me to, but not him. I had a couple of matches in my pocket — I'd held out on him, y'understand. And I'd built up a pile of driftwood for a signal fire to the first ship that passed. But I'd no notion of saving *him* too. No, I had a contrary notion of setting him adrift in the dory.

"Oh, it was easy: he'd gone weaker than a cat, y'understand — all gray

matter an' no physh — physhique, ol' Cheever Gooding. I'd take my chances on the island with a heap of dry wood an' two matches for a li'l bonfire, an' with the c-cup, both pieces of it safe.

"*Murder?*" — Bauer laughed. "'S'n ugly word, eh?" He pursued with an uncertain finger an injured fly which crawled across his trousers leg. "Bah, they say this man kills for hate, that for love — all good, noble motives. But your true collector — you 'n' me — kills for a c-cup. Killing's natural — th'easiest thing in the world — when you're preshed for time.

"'N I was preshed for time, see? There was a ship out there — I saw the smoke. I got him into the dory, but it was a fight; there was life in the ol' bird yet, though the sun'd laid him low. Leaky boat — not much chance for him — still I'd be sure. I choked him gently — oh, quite gently — like thish" — Bauer demonstrated by crushing the fly very thoroughly between his thumb and forefinger — "till the breath was gone from him. Then I looked for th'other half of the vashe — couldn't find it. The smoke was close — couldn't wait. P'raps he's hid it in the rocks, I shay. So I shoves him off, an' the tide carries him 'way from the ship's smoke — bob-bobbin' away.

"I runs up an' sends my twigs a-blazin' to the sky. 'N I searches everywhere for the c-cup — in every crack — an' no luck! Guns shalute — ship's comin'; li'l dory bobs off there a mere sun spot; still no luck. Can you beat it? All my work for nothing! 'Cause, see, I'd murdered him — an' what for? Blast him, his skin's too cheap —

"Say, you're not leavin'? My one failure — I've had everything else: Lorna an' thish here c-c'lection — everything! But this one li'l broken c-cup — too bad — too bad —"

I left him caressing the vase with his hands as old "Tinker" Twining had caressed it with his eyes. But before I went, my gaze fell again upon the painting of Bauer's wife, and I remembered the other man's words for her: "A beautiful mind, and a light shining through her gray eyes that was like the haunting line of a poem:"

"Body love and soul love," I muttered.

Bauer sought me out the following morning.

"What did I tell you last night?" he asked.

I told him briefly.

"Fiction!" he shrugged with an uneasy laugh. "I get to running on. You'll — forget it?"

I was ready for him.

"Yes," I agreed, "I'll forget it — on one condition: that you run down to the Cape with me to — pass judgment on an antique; to give me your honest, expert advice — free of charge."

He consented at once, the connoisseur in him aroused.

So we came down to the Cape on a clear blue morning after rains.

I made inquiries at the village concerning old "Tinker" Twining, and was prepared for what I found. I had come in time, a woman told me; she was troubled about him, though, since he would allow no one to stop in the house and care for him.

We took the trail over to the back shore; and I held Bauer off, answered his questions vaguely. It was a different day from that sullen one on which I had first walked this path: an exquisite morning.

This meeting I had planned solely for the sake of the old scholar; if, in aiding Twining to clear his conscience, I also cleared the conscience of Max Bauer, that I could not help. But Bauer, I assured myself, had no conscience; one way or the other, it would not matter to him.

Still, it was a situation without parallel, I thought: two men, each living, and each believing himself to have murdered the other. And to bring those two men together, face to face . . .

But life is seldom as spectacular as we anticipate; my fireworks fizzled. Beyond a stretch of beach grass — running silver under the sunlight — and humped up there precariously over sands, stood the same little rusty gray house. The door was half open, and the work bench was deserted. We found the old man in a bedroom over the sea, lying in a black walnut bed under a patchwork quilt.

He was propped up on pillows, and the worn face was silhouetted against the ocean, blue today with pale sweepings, and flowing out to silver under the sun. The elderly scholar was delirious, his mind wandering over that old sin; he was still paying the penalty for a murder of the imagination.

"My friend," he muttered; "the man who was bound to me in friendship — certain death —"

"Listen!" I said. "This is Max Bauer, the man you thought you killed! You didn't murder him; you only *thought* you did. He's here safe!"

But the other did not grasp it; only repeated the name "Max Bauer," and turned away with a long shudder.

Then Bauer was chattering at my shoulder:

"*Gooding* — old Cheever Gooding himself!"

"Perhaps that's what *you* called him — the man you strangled. It's no use — no earthly use; he's still under the illusion — we can never make it clear to him now."

"But how —"

I turned impatiently at Bauer's insistence, gave him curtly and succinctly the clues he had missed.

He sat there. "So he tried to murder me! The old — skunk!"

And later, "B'God," he whispered, "how he's gone! A shadow. . . "

I looked at Bauer, sitting corpulent and gross.

"Yes," I replied, "a shadow."

But already Bauer's eyes had roved from Twining to a thing on the quilt which he had missed in the patchwork colors, a thing of orange and black.

"Lord, it's the missing half!" he exclaimed, and now there was genuine feeling in his voice.

I stood between Bauer and that object, guarding Twining's treasure. And still I tried to give old Twining back his clear conscience.

"It's Max Bauer," I insinuated.

I must have got it across, for as Bauer edged closer and as I seized the shard, the old man stared at that sensual, dark face with an expression of recognition. There must have come to him then some inkling of the situation.

"Yes," he whispered, "let him have it."

He took the fragment from me, held it up tenderly for a moment in his two frail, fine old hands, and then placed it in the thick hands of Max Bauer. Bauer closed upon it greedily.

"Murdered him!" moaned Twining.

"Murdered me nothing," chuckled Bauer, who could now, with the vase in his grasp, afford to be generous. "'S all right, old man; we're quits."

But Twining was fumbling for a piece of paper.

"This!" he breathed. "Tell them where — painting before sculpture —"

"But great Caesar, they've known all this for forty years!" exploded Bauer, scanning the written statement. "Why, they found fragments of another Euphronios in that same Persian dirt heap; someone else proved that very thing, and the Lord knows how many other things. Just fragments though, y'understand — not a perfect one like this." Bauer let the paper flutter from his hands; I quietly picked up Twining's written confession and later dropped it into the stove. The old man relapsed into his former state of wandering misery, with apparently no recollection of the episode.

Bauer left soon after that.

"A good day for me, and I owe it all to you, Van Nuys. My thanks," he made genial acknowledgment from the doorway.

I choked on my disgust of him. So Max Bauer, whom only circumstances outside of himself had saved from actual murder, went up to the city, successful and carefree, to add to his many treasures old "Tinker" Twining's one treasure.

I stayed with the old scholar, whose every instinct would have held him from the murder he had planned, and watched him wear himself out, suffering to the last breath for his one mental sin.

That is why I hope, at the final reckoning, God will take some account of the sensitiveness of the souls he weighs, and will fix his penalties accordingly.

THE FALLEN ANGEL

by ELLERY QUEEN

THAT EVERLASTING CICERONE of the world forum, Marcus Tullius, somewhere tells us amicably that Fire and Water are "proverbial"; which is to say, these ancient elements of life are truly elementary. If it is further presumed that where life burns, death with his sprinkler cannot be far behind, the case of Miles Senter *et alii* may be considered classic. In that case there was Fire to the point of pyrotechnics, for though the New York summer was officially a mere ten days old, the sun was already baking the Senter garden to the charred crispness of an overlooked piecrust and barbecuing the stones of the garden walls in a temperature more commonly associated with the Underworld. As for Water, below the east wall flowed a whole stream of it, for the Senter house was one of those marginal Manhattan affairs clinging splendidly to the island's shore and staring with hauteur at the untidy commercial profile of the Borough of Queens across the commonplace swells of the East River.

Nor was antique harmony restricted to geography and the season. Mythology shared in the Senter case, and art. The house had been designed in the highfalutin era, when architecture was cathedral and structural decoration full of monsters. The Senter pharmaceutical fortune had been baptized in the font of a purgative whose pink-on-black prose still illuminated the barns and jakes of rural America; and in building his mansion the progenitor of the Senter wealth — possibly in extenuation of its ephemeral source — had turned his eyes heavenward and builded for eternity. Or at least for greater permanence than was promised by cathartic pills. He had had his architect go for inspiration to the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. Unfortunately, for all the laxative riches at his command, the architect had neither an *Île de la Cité* on which to build nor the papal resources of the 12th century; consequently the astonished neighbors found themselves rubbing walls with a sort of gigantic architectural dwarf, an ecclesiastical Quasimodo of a building, vulgar, ugly, and unbelievably uncomfortable. Miles Senter, who had been born in it, once spent an uneasy two weeks on his psychiatrist's couch recollecting all the horrid Gothic dreams which it had visited on his childhood. The most frightening of these concerned the grotesque stone carvings which stuck out from the tower roofs like abnormal growths. These were the Senter architect's versions of the *chimères* of Notre Dame cathedral. And the Chimaera, if you remember your Bulfinch and Bellerophon, breathed a particularly effective kind of fire. Thus Fire again. As for Water,

unhappily the architect had confused chimaeras with gargoyles, and the monsters he had had hewn and installed on the cornices of the Senter towers, while they had the lion's head, goat's body, and dragon's behind of the true Chimaera, served the traditional gargoyle purpose of providing outlets for the rain which collected on the roof. In a word, they were waterspouts. To complete the chaos, the founding Senter to his dying day persisted in calling them "angels," and his grandson Miles, as he settled substantially into the Founder's shoes, canonized the heresy. Not so Miles's younger brother, David, who broke images as easily as he made them. David was a painter, with a studio on the roof of what — to his brother's vague annoyance — he would call "the Cathedral." David unfailingly remarked before guests, when Miles referred to the waterspout monsters as angels, that it gave an educational insight into their grandfather's view of heaven . . . if not Miles's.

But these are trifling, if pleasant, divagations. We were at a more serious business in the Senter garden on a recent broiling summer evening, with the East River lapping thirstily at the wall.

Two young ladies were perspiring under the sun-lamp moon. One was Miles's wife, the reigning Mrs. Senter — all others of the blood were dead; the other was Nikki Porter, who had exercised the private secretarial right of deserting her employer in his evening of direst need — it had something silly to do with a book publisher, and a deadline. But Nikki had run into Dorothy the day before, after a separation of years, and could auld acquaintance be forgot? Thus desertion, and the garden by the river. The reunion was scented for Nikki with the aromatic news that Dorothy was now Mrs. Miles Senter, which she had certainly not been when Nikki had known her last, and with a something else that defied analysis and so challenged it. There were moribund shadows under otherwise lively eyes and a kind of "To the barricades!" gaiety which had struck Nikki as out of tune with recent wedding harmonies. Indeed, dinner had had a faintly royal *émigré* flavor — a taste of *noblesse oblige* and tumbrils at the door. Even Miles Senter's confidential secretary, a Mr. Hart, a college-type man with a crew cut and the well-greased manners of an advertising agency junior executive, took the first opportunity to make a discreet — and relieved — retreat to his room. And thereafter the young matron, with a female smile, had sent her husband packing and steered Nikki into the dark garden and immediately burst into tears.

Nikki let Dorothy cry, wondering if it might not be the house. The house was frightful — musty and catlike, with great clanging rooms, bedrooms uniformly exposed to the noise and damp of the river, and a colossal dinginess; it had not seen decorators for a generation. It was

evident that Miles Senter, though kindly and agreeable, was a man of uncompromising conservatism and no imagination. In fact, Nikki had been rather shocked by him. He claimed forty-five, looked sixty, and was probably in mid-fifties. And Dorothy was twenty-six years old. Of course it could be that, although Dorothy had always been a practical girl, with no nonsense about her and a wonderful respect for accomplishment; it was quite like her to fall in love with a rich man twice her age. Or was it David? Nikki had heard a great deal about David Senter at dinner, although the artist had not joined them — "Has a water color on his mind," Miles Senter had said. "David's always up to something in his studio." Nikki had gathered that David was a lovable scamp, with all the absurd ideas of extreme youth — "the Greenwich Village type," his brother had said fondly. So she was surprised to learn — from Dorothy — that David was thirty-five years old. To Miles, he would evidently always be a teenager, to be indulged or spanked by the hand that held the purse strings. There was a self-portrait of David in oils in the living room — "the Nave, David calls it," Dorothy had laughed as Miles frowned — and he certainly looked Byronic enough to explain Dorothy's tears in the garden. He was a dark handsome fellow with the devil in his eye, or at least he had painted the devil there. Yes, it might well be David.

And apparently it was. For when Dorothy began to explain her tears, the first thing she did was to praise her husband. Miles was the finest, tenderest, most considerate, most generous husband in the world. And she, Dorothy, was the most ungrateful, confused, irresponsible woman who had ever lured a good man into marriage. Oh, she'd thought she was in love with him, and Miles had been so . . . *solid*. And persistent, of course. . . . She really hadn't lured him, he'd sort of lured himself; but then it was equally true that she hadn't been true-blue honest with herself, she'd only thought she was being . . . "Oh, Nikki, don't think horrible things of me. I've fallen in love with Somebody Else."

So there it was.

Nikki sipped her Bombay Cooler, which she had had the providence to take into the garden with her. "Well, suppose you have," she said, as brightly and illusively as the long reflections on the river. "Those things happen, Dorothy."

"But Nikki, what shall I do? I don't want to hurt Miles. He's a little limited, of course, but salt of the earth, really a darling, and I'm afraid if I ran out on him now . . . so soon . . . I mean, I'm afraid —"

"You're afraid what?"

Dorothy began to cry again.

"See here, Dotty," said Nikki. "You've eaten your cake and now you want it back. That's bound to be messy."

"What a horrid way to put it," said Dorothy, wiping her eyes.

"It's the man I work for," said Nikki, taking another sip. "Spells out every spade, and it's catching. Dotty dear, we're a couple of the girls, and no men around. How much do you want this character S.E.?"

"S.E.?"

"Somebody Else."

"Nikki, I love him! I do!"

"And what is Somebody Else's view of the situation?"

"He says —"

"Wait." Nikki put her hand on her friend's bare arm. She said suddenly, "Smile, Dotty. Someone's coming."

Miles Senter's broad figure appeared from around the northeast corner of the house. The lights from the front of the building silhouetted him as he paused in the path, dabbing his half-bald head with a handkerchief, peering into the gloom of the garden.

"Dorothy?" he called uncertainly. "You out there with Miss Porter?"

"Yes, Miles!" said Dorothy.

"Oh," said her husband, and he was silent. Then he cleared his throat. "So stifling indoors . . . radio says there's no relief in sight . . . I thought maybe you and Miss Porter might like to play some Canasta . . ." Senter took a slight step toward them, handkerchief in hand.

Nikki found herself thinking aqueously that the poor fish was out of his natural element, and it occurred to her that Miles Senter might be not entirely insensitive after all. And because she felt sorry for him, Nikki looked away as he stepped forward, and that was how she happened to glimpse the descent of the angel — one of the gargoyle-throated chimaeras which had thrust its unlovely form from the tower roof over the garden for three-quarters of a century. The glimmering mass was falling straight for where Miles Senter's head would be in another step. And Nikki cried out, and the mass fell, and Senter fell, and Dorothy began to shriek with an automatic vitality, as if she were possessed. The burden of her dark litany was death and disenchantment, and the response from the Senter physician, old Dr. Grand, who lived next-door and had been dozing in his garden, was more in the nature of a retort. Devil or angel, Dr. Grand remarked as he stooped over the fallen man, it had missed its mark; and he instructed Miles Senter to get off his backside and onto his knees, in a more fitting attitude to thank his Maker.

At this Dorothy's husband scrambled to his feet, paler than the stone monster in the path, and turned his eyes to the heavens. But it was not out of gratitude for his deliverance. A black head projected from the roof, another gargoyle against the moon, and its owner was demanding in a curious voice what the devil all the noise was about. When neither Miles nor his wife replied, Dr. Grand explained in his crickety voice, and there was a silence from the roof, and then David Senter's dark head vanished. To Nikki the air seemed suddenly chill, and she took no pleasure

in it. And when David bounded around the corner to help his brother into the house, Nikki found him even more Byronic-looking than his portrait. And this gave her no pleasure, either.

The next day Ellery patiently pointed out that he made his livelihood inventing far cleverer crimes than Nikki was ever likely to encounter among her acquaintances, and would she please stick to his typing, for her social life was interfering with his contractual obligations — not to mention his publisher's advance, which was not payable until delivery of the finished manuscript.

"But Ellery, it wasn't an accident," said Nikki.

"It wasn't. I suppose," said Ellery, falling back helplessly on irony, "that's a demonstrable conclusion, like most of your conclusions?"

"I've been trying to tell you. I examined that tower roof last night, where the thing fell from —"

"With Lens and Calipers Among the Lotus-Eaters. And you found?"

"I told you. Weren't you listening?"

"You found that the cement holding the doodad to the whatsis was worn as friable as Roquefort. Astounding! And the waterspout weighed — how much, did you say?"

"About a hundred pounds, Mr. Senter said."

"I refer you to Sir Isaac and the law of gravity. Shall we get back to mere fiction?"

"Be logical, but I still say it was no accident," declared Miss Porter, unmoved. "And that's why I suggested to Miles Senter last night —"

The doorbell trilled, and Nikki stopped.

A terrible suspicion darkened her employer's countenance. "Nikki," he said in a Basil Rathbone voice, "you suggested *what* to Miles Senter?"

Nikki glanced mutely toward the foyer, which was in full cry.

Ellery groaned.

"You angel, I knew you wouldn't mind!" and Nikki flew. A moment later Ellery heard her assuring someone that Mr. Queen could hardly wait.

To his astonishment Ellery found himself immediately feeling sorry for the fellow. The president of Senter Pharmaceuticals all but crawled into view. It was a sort of nervous slither, and it went perfectly with his windy eyes and graying stubble; in fact, Miles Senter gave a creditable imitation of a dope peddler about to consummate a sale. He offered a trembling hand, refused a drink — "on principle, Mr. Queen" — accepted a cigaret, failed to puff on it, and through it all he was grateful, abjectly grateful that Mr. Queen was bothering to see him at all. The fact was . . . it was so blamed awkward . . . Miss Porter's being Dorothy's friend and so on . . . if she hadn't saved his life the night before . . .

"Mr. Senter," said Ellery, "what are you trying to say?"

Senter studied the dead cigaret

in his hand, then he crumpled and crushed it between his fingers. "Queen, I think my wife and my brother are in love with each other." There was an ashtray at his elbow, but rather remarkably he placed the remains in his pocket. "In love with each other," he repeated, and he stopped as if he expected Ellery to say something devastating.

But Ellery said nothing at all. And Nikki was finding one of her fingernails interesting.

"Nothing I've been able really to get hold of," Senter mumbled on. "It's just that Dorothy's been acting . . . well, I can't quite name it, but something's come between us lately. She's too darned polite to me!" he blurted. "And David's a handsome young artist and a devil with the women. Suppose I oughtn't to have expected much else — what do they say about old fools? — but why didn't they come to me? Instead of . . . Well, Mr. Queen," cried Miles Senter, "what would *you* think?"

"Using your major premise? Let's see. Your brother and your wife are in love, and last night a heavy waterspout parted from the roof where your brother has his studio and missed braining you by a hair. It would seem, Mr. Senter, that your brother tried to murder you."

"Then you agree with me." He sagged against the chair.

"Oh, no," said Ellery, smiling. "I've drawn a possible conclusion from a pair of facts, one of which is not a fact but an opinion."

"Well, there's a third fact I failed to mention," said Senter, and now his voice was hard, "and this one would satisfy a bank examiner. My father left the Senter enterprises to me during my lifetime. But when I die, David gets them."

Ellery sighed. "People will do odd things, won't they?" He rose. "While I can't share your certainty, Mr. Senter, I certainly appreciate your fears. How and when can I examine the roof without your brother David's knowledge? The sooner, I should say, the better."

Miles Senter promised to notify Ellery when the condition could be met, and later that day he telephoned naming that very night for the investigation. "I'll have my secretary meet you at the side gate at midnight," he said, and he hung up before Ellery could raise his brows.

Ellery left his car on First Avenue and he and Nikki walked toward the river, slowly, for they were a few minutes early and the night steamed. There was a simmering lambency over the world that made straight lines fluid, so that when they came to the Senter house the whole incredible mass seemed in motion, as if it were about to change into something else. Ellery felt his arm clutched and he murmured something soothing about heat waves and optical illusions, but Nikki's hold did not relax until a man stepped from the wrought-iron gateway and she recognized Miles Senter's secretary.

"I'm certainly glad it's you, Mr. Hart, and not some priest of the Black Mass!"

Mr. Hart looked baffled. But then he shook hands footballishly with Ellery, made a hearty remark about the heat, and ushered them across the front lawn. Ellery walked rubbernecking. But at the skyline the mansion was still doing tricks.

Nikki clung.

"I take it you know why I'm here tonight, Mr. Hart?"

"Mr. Senter's just told me." The secretary sounded secretarial.

"What's your opinion?"

"Fellow in my spot has no opinions. Right, Miss Porter? . . . David? Oh, David has a shack in Westport where he gets away from it all when we poor goofs bore him or he wants to paint Connecticut barns. He was to leave tonight for over the holiday, but Mr. Senter didn't know what train he was making, so he set midnight as . . . I'm sure he must have. I haven't seen him — just got in from a party — but it's so late . . . This way, please. Mr. Senter's waiting upstairs for you. His own rooms. He's given the servants the night off, so you'll have a clear field. Mrs. Senter? I really couldn't say. I'd assume Mr. Senter's seen to, er, that arrangement personally." Mr. Hart, it appeared, was urbanely determined to be the most confidential — and uninvolved — of secretaries.

There were three doors, as in Paris, little early Gothic imitations surmounted by twenty-eight reduced kings of Israel and Judah, a skimpy rose window, and other shrunken wonders. Having passed through the central door, they entered a sort of medieval never-never land which was mercifully in darkness, or at least in that curious negation of light passing for illumination by which material objects are guessed at rather than seen. No one was about, and the great hall was as deeply hushed as a Hollywood sound-stage; in fact, Ellery would not have been surprised had someone suddenly appeared in puttees and in a loud voice ordered the set to be struck. For all its age, blackened oak, and inky iron it looked as insubstantial as a backdrop.

They were halfway up the grand staircase and Ellery was just remarking respectfully, "Is that a bona fide suit of Norman armor, Mr. Hart, or are we in the Metropolitan Museum?" when from somewhere above, slightly damped, came a short explosive *kwap* like a little clap of thunder.

It brought them to a military halt, and for a moment they listened. But the angry sound was not repeated, and they looked at one another.

"What," asked Nikki in the strangest voice, "was *that*?"

"It couldn't be," said Miles Senter's secretary, with an uneasy laugh, "what it sounded like."

"Why not?" snapped Ellery; and he was away.

They found him a moment later in a sitting room upstairs, kneeling beside an outstretched man who seemed to

have run head on into a copious quantity of tomato purée.

"Oh, no," said Hart idiotically.

"Oh, yes," said Nikki. "I was right. He was right. Murdered."

"Not quite." Ellery glanced quickly about. "Head wounds are often a bloody mess. No sign of the gun. . . . I don't think it's fatal. Nikki, poke your head out the window and yell."

"Yell?"

"For that doctor! Next door, didn't you say? Hart, you come with me." Ellery was already in the hall.

"But Mr. Senter," began the secretary.

"Don't touch him!" Hart blundered into the hall. "Whoever shot Senter can't have got far. Hart, where's the other way down?"

"Other way down?"

"Blast it, Hart! We came up the front stairs and didn't see anyone, so Senter's assailant must have escaped another way! Isn't there a second stairway?"

"Oh! Yes, Mr. Queen. Back stairs. Up the hall there —"

Ellery ran, and Hart trotted dismally after. Behind them Nikki's demoniac voice shrieked for Dr. Grand.

The backstairs went gloomily down to an iron-clasped oak door which opened on the rear of the great hall.

"Hart, you search the front — lawn, shrubbery, street. I'll take the rear." He gave the man a shove.

The kitchens were dark. Ellery blundered through several coppery caverns, bumping into things and cursing. Finally he sighted a star, set a straight course, and in a moment was plunging through a doorway. He found himself in a stingy strip of back garden, and the first thing he spied was a spidery figure not ten feet away, clinging to the top of the wall separating the Senter property from its neighbor.

Ellery jumped, clutching. His hands closed triumphantly about a bony ankle.

"Oh, thank you," said a testy voice. "I'm not as spry getting over this wall as I used to be when Elmo Senter imagined himself dying, which was regularly once a week. Catch me, please," and Ellery received in his arms first a medical bag and then a panting old gentleman. "Well, well? What's happened now? Speak up, man! That woman yelled bloody murder. And who, by the way, are you?"

"Miles Senter first, Doctor — his upstairs sitting room. Gunshot scalp wound. You'd better hurry."

Dr. Grand looked incredulous. Snatching his bag, he scurried into the house.

Ellery followed the Senter-Grand wall toward the river. When he met the river wall he turned north and toed his way among the Senter flowerbeds. Two upper windows glared out of the dark mass on the other side of the garden; Ellery saw Nikki swoop across one of them like an agitated fly. Then his hand encountered the splintery side of a wooden structure, which interrupted the river wall ap-

parently for some distance. Exploring it cautiously, he discovered that it was a long low shed, with its back to the garden and a flight of wooden steps along its north side that went down to the river. A boathouse . . . It struck him that a guilty man fleeing the scene of his crime might find it irresistible.

Taking a grip on his slippery flashlight, Ellery began to edge down the steps. But the steps squeaked and groaned abominably, as he had known they would, so he jumped the rest of the way, scrambled around the corner of the boathouse, found a doorway, and went in sidewise to sweep the interior with his light and catch in its beam the frightened face of a young woman. There was no one else in the building, and it was stifling, so Ellery sat down on a coil of nylon rope and he asked, "Has anyone come this way in the last few minutes? Besides yourself, I mean?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I take it you're Mrs. Miles Senter and, if you are," said Ellery regretfully, "it's my melancholy job to inform you that your husband has just stopped a bullet upstairs. And now would you mind answering my question, Mrs. Senter?"

"No one."

"You don't seem surprised, Mrs. Senter."

"Is Miles dead?"

"I couldn't wait for the returns. So you've seen no one, Mrs. Senter. In that case, may I ask —?"

"You needn't," said Dorothy Senter. "I shot him."

When Inspector Queen arrived, there was blood in his sleepy eyes. "You can take this homicidal high life," he snorted to his son, "but I'm old enough to be your father. Couldn't you have let the local men handle this?"

Ellery said thoughtfully, "I thought it was a case that called for more elevated skull-work," and the Inspector immediately looked wakeful and went to work. Ellery followed him about, remaining thoughtful.

In proper course Dorothy Senter and Nikki Porter had hysterics and got over them, Inspector Queen had settled what facts there were to his peculiar satisfaction, men came and went, telephones rang and were silent, and at last they waited upon the pleasure of old Dr. Grand. At a few minutes before 2 A.M. Dr. Grand opened the door of Miles Senter's bedroom, drying his hands on a monogrammed towel. "Nothing to it," he chirruped. "It's going to give him an interesting part in what hair he's got left, and that's about all, gentlemen. Wonderful constitutions, these Senters. Takes a lot to kill 'em." Then he saw Dorothy Senter's face, and his own changed. "Short as you can make it, Inspector Queen." He stepped aside.

There was an odd illusion of headlessness in the man who lay on the great testered bed, but when they came near they saw that it was only

the effect of bandages against the pillows and a face from which all color had been washed.

Miles Senter looked at his wife with a sort of feeble eagerness, but after a moment the eagerness died and he shut his eyes.

"Mr. Senter," said Inspector Queen, "can you tell us what happened?"

"I don't know. I had been talking to my secretary, Mr. Hart, and I sent him downstairs to wait for Mr. Queen. I was alone. The door opened. I was about to turn around when something exploded and everything went black."

"Then you didn't see who fired at you?"

"No." The man on the bed sounded remote.

"Well, then, Mrs. Senter," said the Inspector, "suppose you tell your husband what you told me."

Miles Senter opened his eyes quickly.

Dorothy Senter said in a high singsong, "I left the house after dinner saying I was going to visit some friends. I walked over to Central Park and sat down on a bench. After a while I got up and walked some more. Then I walked back to the house. It was almost midnight. I went up to my room, passing Miles's sitting room. He was in there talking to Harry Hart; they didn't hear me. I waited till Harry went downstairs. Then I got a gun from my room that I have had for a long time and I went to Miles's room and I shot him." The man on the bed made a slight movement, then he was still again. "I ran down the backstairs to the garden. I saw the boathouse. I threw the gun as far as I could out into the water and I ran to the boathouse and stayed in there. I don't know why."

Miles Senter was squinting, as if the light hurt him.

"And now about the gun, Mrs. Senter," said the Inspector, swabbing his face. "A .22 revolver, didn't you tell me?"

"Yes."

"The kind that has a cylinder that turns — that holds the bullets? That's the kind it was, Mrs. Senter?"

"Yes. But I threw it into the river."

"And a .22, you said," said the Inspector, reaming his collar. "That's really interesting, Mrs. Senter. Because when my son found your husband on the floor, he also found the shell of the cartridge. Mrs. Senter, revolvers don't eject shells on being fired; the shell stays in the chamber. It's automatics that eject shells, Mrs. Senter. And another interesting thing . . . this shell didn't come from a .22, it came from a .38. So I regret to say you've been lying your head off, Mrs. Senter, and now what I would like to know is: Whom are you covering up?"

Dorothy gripped the foot-rail of her husband's bed.

"I'll tell you whom she's covering up," said her husband, staring at the canopy of his tester. "She's covering up my brother David. Instead of going to Westport, David hid somewhere

and then shot me. And Dorothy saw him do it. And because she's crazy in love with him —"

"*Harry, no!*" screamed Dorothy.

But Miles Senter's secretary was shaking his head. "It's no use, Dotty. I can't let this go on. Senter, David isn't the man. I am."

Miles Senter involuntarily raised himself. He stared at Harry Hart as if for the first time he was aware of more than a suit of clothes. In that stare he seemed to see everything at once, like a camera. When the wounded man sank back he turned his face away.

Hart was pale to the roots of his crew cut. "We tried our best to avoid it. But how can you stop a thing like that? It happened, and there it was. I wanted to tell you —"

"But there was always the salary," said the man on the bed. "Eh, Harry?"

Hart went on with an effort. "Dorothy thinks I tried to kill you tonight because of it. That's why she said she did it herself."

"Noble."

The other man was silent.

"So this has all been for love, Harry?"

"All for love," said Hart steadily.

"Touching. But I'm a businessman, Harry. I have the commercial mind. The way I see it, you knew I'd willed my estate to Dorothy. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of idle luxury — that's what I think you were after, Harry, and all that stood in the way was a simple-minded husband who's losing his hair. One shot, and the problem was solved —"

"If it only were," said a voice; and, startled, they looked around, even Senter. But it was Ellery, looking thoughtful still. "Harry Hart is unquestionably a talented fellow, Mr. Senter, but to have shot you tonight he'd have to have been a wizard. Hart was coming up the stairs down there between Nikki Porter and me when we heard the report of the gun over our heads. So maybe it's true love, after all . . . Human interest in quantity, dad, but homicidally a famine. Could we have been right in the first place?"

"Looks like it," said Inspector Queen grouchily. "Well, Mr. Senter, I think you've had enough of us for one night, and Dr. Grand's looking fidgety. We shan't disturb you again unless we get a line on your brother."

"My brother?" repeated Miles Senter painfully.

"On your death, I understand, Senter Pharmaceuticals goes to David Senter by the will of your father. And from what I've heard of Senter Pharmaceuticals, that's a goal worth shooting for . . . so to speak. I'm afraid, Mr. Senter, we're going to have to start looking for your brother."

That was an unmarked night, and when Nikki drifted into the garden she had no idea how much time had passed, if time had passed at all, except that the darkness was grayer, a boiling grayness that reduced every-

thing to a glutinous mass, tasteless and unrecognizable. She groped for one of the bamboo chairs and a human hand clamped on her wrist.

Nikki squealed.

"It's only me," said a voice; and after a moment Nikki made out the long lines of Ellery, lying on the bamboo chaise on one elbow. "Nikki —"

"You fool," said Nikki angrily. "Does failure bring out the card in you?"

"I wanted action," said Ellery. "Nikki, look at those stars . . ."

"I've had all the action I want for one night," said Nikki, dropping into the bamboo chair. "Yes, and romance, too. I finally got Dorothy to sleep with a pill Dr. Grand gave me, and I didn't neglect to tell Mr. Hart a thing or two, either. I know *his* type. Plays golf like a professional — and women — and the stock market like a yokel. Do you suppose New York will ever stop cooking?"

"It looks," said Ellery intently, "as if it's only just begun." He pointed. "The stars, Nikki, the stars."

"*What* stars?" Nikki sighted along his ghostly arm. "Oh, I'm in no condition for games!"

"Nor I." Ellery was still squinting obliquely skyward. "But this game has its points. I was lying here simmering away, waiting for you and wondering how a man who was merely going to Westport could disappear as thoroughly as David Senter seems to have done, when I began to realize there was something new under the moon. Nikki, look at the roof . . . Over there. Above the . . . the apse, I suppose you'd call it. That penthouse thing."

"That's David Senter's studio," said Nikki. "What's come over you?"

"See his chimney?"

"Of course I see his chimney."

"What's hovering over it?"

"A . . . sort of haze, it looks like."

"It's smoke."

"Well, of all things," sniffed Nikki. "What should come out of a chimney?"

"Not smoke, Nikki. Definitely not smoke, when we're a week and a half into what can be described with perfect decorum as a hell of a summer, the hour is almost 3 A.M., and the thermometer sticks at ninety-one. Or are you sitting there gasping like a television wrestler because you find my proximity overpowering?" Ellery rose from the bamboo chaise, still craning. "Nikki, someone's been playing with fire up there and I'm feeling just deep-fried enough to want to know why. Coming along?"

"Yes," said Nikki. "Maybe it's cooler on the roof."

A few minutes later Ellery was on his hands and knees on David Senter's hearth, inspecting the smoldering remains of a fireplace fire with the jerky fixity of an aroused hound. The studio, which was in Byronic disorder, was otherwise dedicated to thermal science and Gabriel Fahrenheit; but Ellery's perspiration hissed onto the grate unnoticed in the profounder

concerns absorbing him. Nikki, hung up in the doorway, thought she could see him dwindling by the inch. The roof was not cooler, Nikki had learned; it was merely less infernal than the studio, whose door and windows they had found shut.

"Who the devil would start a fire in this heat?" moaned Nikki.

"Exactly," said Ellery, turning his nose this way and that. "Therefore heat wasn't the desideratum. Leaving combustion. Leaving ashes. And the ashes tell me this curious conflagration," said Ellery, "was set in motion around three hours ago. It was green wood and slow-burning. Also, the damper is partially closed —"

"What," said Nikki wearily, "no Trichinopoly cigars?"

"No," said Ellery, his tone glinting like his skin, "but there's this," and he held up what Nikki thought for a horrified instant was a severed, charred human hand. But it was only a thick white cotton glove, one of those sexless mitts which are purchasable at the gardening counter of any emporium. It was singed, soot-streaked, and spattered with mysterious-looking black specks, and immediately upon relieving Nikki it depressed her. For it sustained the crime story of the long night and made the unspeakable fire not merely devilish but, what was possibly worse, irrelevant. And when Ellery tasted several of the black specks, savored them like a gourmet, and pronounced them grains of gunpowder, Nikki nodded gloomily.

"Then that's the glove he wore when he shot his brother. Had a fire laid, ran up here, tossed the glove on it, and a match, and got away while we were finding Miles. Trust an artist to be inefficient. The least he could have done was make sure it burned up."

"He was in a hurry." Ellery replaced the burned glove meticulously. "He was also unlucky. Look there, Nikki."

Nikki looked. But all she could see were some tiny red scraps of paper or cardboard, clinging like confetti to one of the side walls of the fireplace.

"What are they?"

"Unholy relics, Nikki. A rather perverted miracle. Stay here a minute, will you? I'll send dad up. Some fur's going to fly around here. The roof's supposed to have been searched."

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be in the garden," said Ellery, and he went out so quickly Nikki had no time to assure him that she wasn't going to stay up on the roof alone and he could put *that* in David Senter's fireplace and smoke it. As it was, she had to stay until the Inspector appeared, roaring, and then she left quickly, too, with her hands over her ears.

She found Ellery at the northeast corner of the mansion, prodding the path and nearby shrubbery with the beam of his flashlight, like a man who has lost something.

"Where is it, Nikki?" Ellery demanded without looking around.

"Where is what?"

"The waterspout. That gargoyle that almost conked Miles Senter."

"Well, for heaven's sake," said Nikki crossly. "How should I know?"

"Wasn't it here that it fell?"

Nikki recognized a certain urgency in the casual Queen manner. It certainly wasn't there. "It was right here on the path last time I saw it. Night before last. See? Where the flags are chipped?"

"I see where the flags are chipped," said Ellery, suddenly austere, and he went back into the house.

The next hour bubbled. Ellery went about demanding the waterspout, waking people up, whipping them to feats of memory and muscle, and generally making himself unpopular. Why he was so bent on locating an object which, after all, had failed to be lethal he chose not to explain, and the victims of his inquisition went about muttering while they searched. Harry Hart was roused, Dorothy Senter was slapped awake, Dr. Grand was routed from his aged bed next door; not even Miles Senter was spared, although his questioning was executed with tactful dispatch. In the end, the waterspout was not found, although the house was gone over from cellar to roof and the grounds inch by inch. Nor could anyone remember having seen it since late afternoon of the day before, when the butler had stumbled over it on the spot in the path where it had crashed the night previous and, being the butler and not the gardener, had merely cursed and gone about his business. The gardener, a hickory-necked Irishman with the succinct philosophy of his profession, merely said, "Nobody told me to take the dom thing away," and went back to bed.

So there it was, or rather wasn't, as Inspector Queen said, and what difference its presence or absence made —

"Except that it's absent," said Ellery absently.

"All *right*, Ellery. So whoever tried to knock Senter's brains out took the blasted thing away because somehow it left a clue to his identity —"

"His fingerprints," said Nikki with a flicker of life.

"On stone, Nikki? And anyway, if that was it, why didn't he just wipe it off? And anyway, if he used a glove once he'd use it twice, and that reminds me of something a lot more important than missing angels, which is missing brothers who try to burn up evidence in fireplaces. Velie!" shouted the Inspector.

Sergeant Velie came wearily, drying his vast face with a crib-sized handkerchief.

"What did you find out?"

"From the Westport police nothin' except a couple of new cuss words. They swear there's no evidence he's been to his shack in a month. Anyway, he ain't in Westport. The N.Y.N.H. & H. trains stopping at Westport that left New York beginning last night can't remember anyone of his description. The New Haven ticket sellers at Grand Cen-

tral can't remember ditto. Our taxi investigation —"

"You satisfied now?" demanded Inspector Queen, turning around. "Now where the devil did he go?"

"Miles Senter's study," said Nikki.

At this moment the study door opened and Ellery appeared.

"Senter's definitely missing. You satisfied now?"

"That he's definitely missing? Definitely."

"Velie, general alarm for David Senter. Put it through and then let's all go home and take a shower. I'm not coming back till he's found, and that's that."

"Make it . . ." Ellery glanced at his wristwatch. "Make it seven or eight hours, dad. Take some time at this hour to get the equipment here that I phoned for in your name . . . oh, say, noon."

"Equipment? Noon?"

"You want David Senter, don't you?"

"Certainly I want David Senter!"

"Noon."

"*Here?*"

Ellery sat down on a settee, his knees apart and his palms supporting him, like an old lady who had been climbing stairs. "It's the old arithmetic," he said. "Two and two, no trick to it . . . A solid stone object weighing one hundred pounds is missing. A man is missing. And beside the house runs a river. Missing man, missing weight, deep water. David Senter was murdered and his body sunk in the East River, and as soon as the harbor police can get their diver and dragging apparatus here . . . Does anyone mind if I catch my forty?"

They fished David Senter out with twenty-five minutes to spare; and Inspector Queen, who had not gone home after all, stamped in to announce with bleary wrath that Miles Senter's artist-brother had an artistic bullet-hole through his head and had had same, from all the superficial signs, for at least twelve hours.

"They're still looking for the gun," said the Inspector, glaring about Miles Senter's bedroom, where everyone was congregated. "But we'll get it, we'll get it, and when we do —"

"I don't think," said Ellery, "we'll have to wait that long. Mrs. Senter, wouldn't you prefer a chair? The evidence of who murdered David and almost murdered you, Mr. Senter — the logical evidence — is all in; we merely have to assemble it. And by the way, Mr. Senter, are you sure you're feeling well enough to go through this? It consists of four elements: the grains of gunpowder peppering the cotton glove which failed to be consumed in David's fireplace; the little scraps of red cardboard clinging to the fireplace wall; the shot that was fired in the upper part of the house while we were coming up the stairs; and, of course, the date."

"The date?" said Inspector Queen.

"The date?" said Nikki.

"That's very nearly the best part of it," Ellery said enthusiastically.

"Summer became official as usual on June twenty-first, a week and a half ago, so the holiday David Senter meant to spend reproducing a Westport barn was obviously the Fourth of July, as it's hardly necessary to point out. And putting an incipient Fourth of July holiday together with gunpowder grains, pieces of red cardboard, and a loud noise, you can scarcely avoid getting . . . a firecracker.

"Now it was midnight when we got here, Nikki," said Ellery, "and I told you at 3 A.M. that the fire in the roof studio was about three hours old. So that noise we heard coming up the stairs on our arrival, Nikki, which we took to be a revolver shot, must have been a firecracker exploding in David Senter's studio fireplace. And since there was only one explosion that we heard, you couldn't have been shot at that time, Mr. Senter. You must have been shot a few minutes earlier."

"Then why didn't we hear the real shot?" Nikki demanded. She knew she looked like the wrath, her clothes felt leprous, and her friend Dorothy insisted on reminding her of something repulsive at Madame Tussaud's. So there was a snap in her voice. "Everything was so quiet we'd certainly have heard it."

"The answer to that, I think," said Inspector Queen grimly, "is coming this way right now. The gun, Velie? And equipped with a silencer." And now he said, an amiable old gentleman: "*All* right, Sergeant. Wrap it up, and shut the door behind you."

And there was nothing to be heard in that room but Sergeant Velie's weighty tread and the life-cutting switch of the closing door. And the Inspector patted himself under the left arm, looking around.

"An explosion that was planned to be heard," said Ellery pleasantly, "and a prior explosion that was planned not to be heard. What was achieved? A miracle. The firecracker going off was taken to be the revolver shot. A simple illusion designed to make us think you were being shot while we were coming up the stairs, Mr. Senter, when actually you'd been shot a few minutes before. A falsification of the time of the shooting which could have had only one purpose: to seem to give the shooter an alibi, an alibi for the false time, when the firecracker went off.

"And who had an alibi when the firecracker went off?" Ellery went on, smiling. "You, Dorothy Senter? No, you were alone in the boathouse. You, Mr. Senter — to be absurd? No, you were alone in your sitting room with a well-creased scalp. You, Dr. Grand — to be fantastic? No, even you were alone, dozing in your garden. And David Senter was also alone — alone at the bottom of the East River.

"So I'm afraid," said Ellery, and now he was not smiling, "I'm afraid that leaves you, Hart, and by a curious coincidence you did have an alibi for the time when the firecracker went off. A very strong alibi, Hart; in fact, the strongest possible.

You were walking up the stairs between Nikki Porter and me.

"But as a technician I find you wanting. You had two tries at Miles Senter and you flubbed both. First, you loosened the gargoyle waterspout and pushed it off the roof while Miles Senter was passing along the path below. You chose that method because his brother David's studio was on the roof, and David, with his money motive, would be the natural suspect. When that didn't work, you rather extended yourself. Yesterday you hid the waterspout and last night you shot David to death, weighted his body with the waterspout, and sank it in the river, thinking he would make the perfect scapegoat, since he would presumably never be found. Then you went to Miles Senter's sitting room, had your chat, walked out, and immediately walked back in and shot him in the head with the same silencer-gun — and did you witness that, Mrs. Senter? Yes, I think you did — and you left your heroine's husband for dead, Hart, which was criminally careless of you. The rest was timing. You hurled the gun into the river from one of the windows, dashed up to the studio where you had a firecracker ready on a fuse, dropped the glove with which you'd handled everything into the fireplace, tossed a match on the prearranged fire which was to destroy all the evidence — and didn't — and you hurried downstairs to meet me and Nikki at the gate and copper-rivet your alibi when the firecracker went off. Clever, Harry, clever; but a little on the intricate side, don't you agree . . . *post mortem?* The hard ones are the simple ones."

Thus Fire, and Water, in a case which *aficionados* say will become proverbial. Should time bear them out Ellery will be pleased, for he has always considered Marcus Tullius Cicero one of the soundest old earbenders in the business.

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FOUR ladies disappear. The p
lice aren't disturbed. Hilc
garde Withers is sure it w
MURDER! Soon she mee
FIVE suspects If she keeps pc
ing around among those bodi
the *next* one is likely to be HI
OWN!

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