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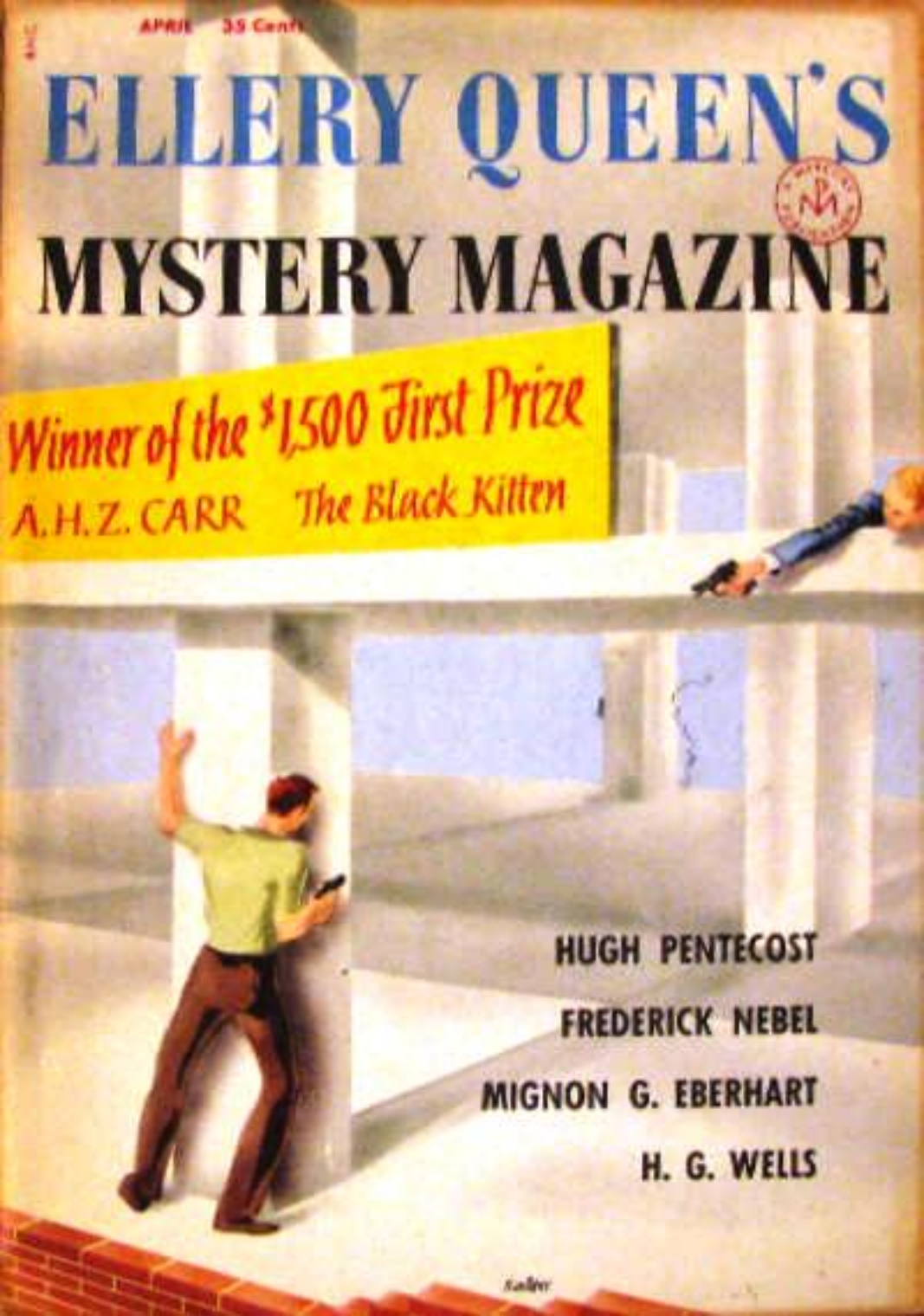

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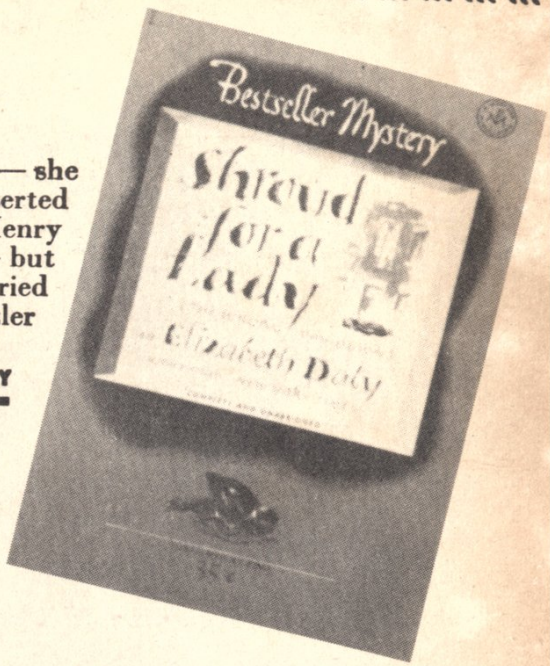

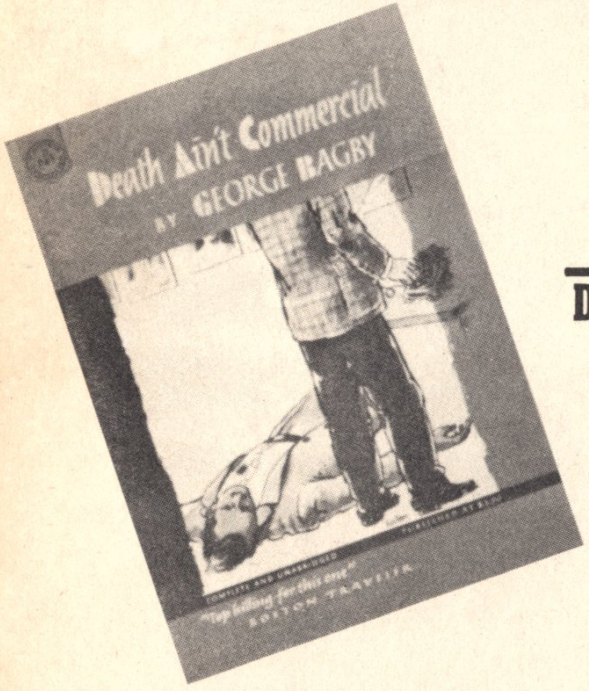

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Complete List of the 56 Prize-Winning Stories in EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest

THE BEST DETECTIVE-CRIME-MYSTERY SHORT STORIES OF 1956

FIRST PRIZE

The Black Kitten by A. H. Z. Carr

SPECIAL AWARD OF MERIT

The Blessington Method by Stanley Ellin

SECOND PRIZES

(*alphabetically by authors' names*)

The Man Who Went to Taltavul's by David Alexander
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One-Tenth Man by Michael Gilbert
From the Mouse to the Hawk by Dion Henderson
Mr. Hyde-de-Ho by Veronica Parker Johns
Miami Papers Please Copy by Rufus King
A Bad Time of Day by Wade Miller
Try It My Way by Frederick Nebel
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HONOR ROLL

(*alphabetically by authors' names*)

A Telegram for Miss Phipps by Phyllis Bentley
Danger — Women at Work by Miriam Allen deFord
You Don't Argue with the Captain by Donald McNutt Douglass
The Hills Cried Murder by Paul W. Fairman
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The Mischief-Maker by Arthur Gordon
Compliments of Caliph Bernie by Charles Green
Don't Believe a Word She Says by William Lindsay Gresham
An Adventure of Stately Homes by Arthur Porges
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Tour de couleur	by Nedra Tyre
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Only on Rainy Nights	by Mark Van Doren
A Toy for Jiffy	by Roy Vickers
Square-o-Rooney	by Joseph Whitehill
The Catch Dog	by Vinnie Williams
Who Killed Cock Robin, Jr.?	by Joseph Zderad

SPECIAL AWARDS FOR "FIRST STORIES"

BEST OF THE YEAR

Gifts to My People	by Michael Forrestier

RUNNERS-UP

(*alphabetically by authors' names*)

The Seventh Murder of Henry's Father	by Elizabeth Anthony
The Watcher	by Emilee Berger
The Tools of Magic	by Lyle G. Boyd
The Fog Closing In	by Martin Brooke
Last Swap	by Ray Chesson
Letter Writing As a Fine Art	by Martin Dardis
Young Man in a Hurry	by Tom Karsell
Nothing Is Black and White	by Harry Kelly
Light in Darkness	by Roland F. Lee
The Apartment Hunter	by Jack & Mary McDonald
The Hollow Family	by Theodore Mathieson
Like a Plum Ripening	by C. E. Parker
The Folding Knife	by Cecil E. Parson
Sucker's Game	by Paul Peach
Mr. Diamond's Diamonds	by Marvin Rossman
A Victim Must Be Found	by Henry Slesar
King of the Meat Cleavers	by Ron Stevens

Sunday in Our Town	by Margie Swann
Blue, Blue Lagoon	by Ralph M. Thurlow
The Clementine Caper	by Larry Van Benthuysen
$100,000 a Pint	by Paul E. Walsh

Since 1949, A. H. Z. Carr has written one original story each year for EQMM's annual contests. Every single one of Mr. Carr's tales was a distinguished example of the modern detective story, including such memorable reading experiences as "The Trial of John Nobody," "Tyger! Tyger!" and "If a Body . . ." For EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest — last year's — Mr. Carr submitted his seventh story in seven years, and this time we are indeed proud and privileged; for Mr. Carr's newest story is so fine, so sensitive in detail, so rich in texture, that it has won the highest honor EQMM can give to any author in any year — the award of First Prize in our annual contest.

According to the author, "The Black Kitten" began as a chapter in a novel that Mr. Carr had been working on for years. But in the writing, some new characters walked in without asking so much as a "by your leave," and what was meant to be a chapter turned into a complete and self-contained short story. When Mr. Carr asked some of his closest friends and severest critics to read "The Black Kitten," he was startled at the intensity of their reactions: the story seemed to cause a great deal of inner turbulence in every reader, young and old, male and female. One of them insisted that Mr. Carr had created a "new kind" of detective story; the author himself does not agree — he says he will settle for the more modest appraisal of "unconventional."

Now, most of you will probably have entirely different reactions, and some of you may even go so far as to perceive, in Mr. Carr's crime-concept, a high philosophic plane. But none of you, we think, will fail to respond to the power and meaning in this unusual story. For "The Black Kitten" can be read, and should be read, on more than one level of understanding. On one level it is a heart-gripping yet deeply compassionate story, and on another level it will move you by its racial symbolism and religious significance, both of which you will find to be profound and disturbing in their "inner turbulence."

THE BLACK KITTEN

by A. H. Z. CARR

THE REVEREND DR. WALTER SLOANE sat in the little book-crammed room that he called his study, composing a sermon on Religion and the Fight Against Crime. The process of creation was not aided by his seven-year-old daughter Ellen, who was tramping up the stairs of the house sounding like a regiment, and calling, "Little Black Sambo! Here, Little Black Sambo!" Her adored kitten was lost regularly several times a day — one of Elly's dark schemes, he suspected, for creating a small but noisy crisis to compel his attention. He knew where the tiny thing was — somewhere in the study; he had heard its plaintive mew a little while before. To open the door and invite Elly in to find the kitten, as she expected, would utterly derail his train of thought, so he decided to finish at least the paragraph he was working on before capitulating.

"Sambo-scrambo!" yelled Elly in the corridor. Her father smiled and winced at the same time — a complicated facial gesture that summed up his feelings of the moment about Elly. After a while Elly galloped away, miaowing lustily. "We must recognize," he wrote, "that the police are a punitive, not a preventive, force in the fight against crime. We cannot expect them to assume the whole burden of . . ."

He reached for his stubby briar pipe, which had gone out, debated for an instant whether to go through the ritual of emptying, cleaning, filling, lighting, and tamping, and compromised by putting a match to what tobacco remained in the bowl; but the first whiff was acrid, and before laying it aside he looked at the pipe as if it had betrayed him. Taking up the pen, he wrote down some words: "Throughout history there has been only one power . . ."

"Little Black Sambo is a dambo!" Elly, who herself had the wide-eyed willfulness of a spoiled kitten, would often bring the syllable "dam" into her soliloquies; she had learned that it made adults look at her. He focused on the slow sentence before him: "Throughout history only one power has consistently struck at the roots of criminality — the power of religion, reaching the masses of mankind with its great moral principles . . ."

It would not be a popular sermon, he realized. Too abstract. A dangerous adjective in his profession.

His lean, big-boned face grew taut. A certain polite restlessness in his congregation had of late suggested that they were finding these large, remote subjects somewhat tiresome. They had liked him better when he encouraged them to think that God took a friendly interest in their im-

mediate problems. He recalled remarks overheard as people were leaving church the previous Sunday. Not one word had been said about the sermon; they were all talking about a sour note struck by the organist in the closing hymn, and he could have sworn that they were almost grateful for it. Not that he blamed them. He knew, better than they, that the power to fill the church with the flutter of angel's wings had left him. It would be sheer hypocrisy on his part to try to recapture that vein.

Elly was now singing, "I love little Sambo, his coat is so warm." It had been several days, he remembered guiltily, since he had last joined her in play. But in a few minutes he would let her in, and they would find Little Black Sambo together.

The kitten was the first living thing that was completely Elly's. Her life at home had revolved around it ever since Miss Wylie, her schoolteacher, had telephoned him to say that Elly had earned a prize for the best drawing in the class. "Do you think a kitten would make her happy? My cat has just had three, and Elly is the right age to have a pet."

"A good idea," he had said.

But Miss Wylie had evidently sensed a reservation, for her voice grew cool. "Please don't think that I'm foisting unwanted cats on my pupils. There'll be no problem in finding homes for these kittens. They're utterly charming. If it's the slightest bit inconvenient . . ."

"Not in the least," he had reassured her quickly, "I've been thinking about getting Elly a pet. Thank you very much." And this time his voice had carried conviction.

The kitten had taken over the house, a scurrying little black comet on unsteady legs, romping, mewing, appearing in unexpected places, making small messes when it was too far away from its box, ready to play endlessly with Elly, scratching at Dr. Sloane's shoes, demanding attention, falling downstairs, laboriously clambering up again — evoking laughter one moment and dismay the next. Elly really ought to look after it more carefully, the minister supposed, but it would do no good to tell her so. Since the death of her mother two years earlier, the child's pixie sense of power had grown to the point where he could no longer depend on obedience from her unless he was seriously angry. When they played together her chief enjoyment seemed to come from asserting her will, and he thought it significant that among all the characters in *Alice in Wonderland* her favorite was the Duchess.

Which of them, he wondered, had suffered more from the loss of Frieda's warm white bosom and gift of tenderness — the child who hardly remembered her, or he who remembered her too vividly? If, in his pastoral counseling, he had been called on to advise in a case like his own, he would unhesitatingly have stressed Elly's need, would have pointed out the dangers of prolonged asceticism for a full-blooded widower, not yet forty. Yet

when several eligible women in his congregation made unmistakable their readiness to remedy his single state and Elly's mother-lack, he became filled with alarm. Work had become his refuge from their attentions and from his own thoughts — committee meetings, sick visits, preaching, lecturing, fund-raising, corresponding, organizing Scout work, remodeling the church, supervising the social and athletic programs, joining civic groups to combat juvenile delinquency. Where was the time for courtship, even if he had known the right woman?

Dr. Sloane shrugged fretfully and kept his fountain pen spinning out its spidery blue trail on the white paper: "Today, more than ever before, we can see that society is paying a gruesome penalty for its prevailing indifference to religion . . ."

A strident peal from the telephone in the hall below arrested his hand. This was Saturday; Mrs. Hughes, the elderly woman who came in weekdays to keep house for him, was not there. It was an absurd economy not to have a telephone extension in the study, but the life of a minister — certainly the minister of a small and impecunious church — was made up of absurd economies.

He got up hastily.

He saw it at the last instant — as his right foot was descending. The sight of it paralyzed not his muscles but his will. For that instant his foot hovered helplessly, then the piercing squeal and the soft crushing sensation under his heel came together, and he looked down with horror at the wreck he had made of the little black kitten. Bright blood gushed from its mouth as it lay twitching on the wood floor. Almost simultaneously he heard Elly's voice, now from her playroom: "Daddy! The telephone!"

Instinctively he acted to stop her from running into the study. He opened the door, and in a voice which he managed by prodigious effort to keep casual, he called, "Elly, dear, will you answer it? Talk to whoever it is until I get there."

She loved to answer the telephone, and her footsteps thudded downstairs. He spread out a newspaper and his face twisted as he gently lifted the kitten. Its soft warm body was broken beyond hope, but the agonized eyes looked at him, the irises black and enormous. When he put the kitten down on the newspaper there was blood on his shaking hands. He wiped them with his handkerchief.

"Daddy! Daddy! It's somebody for you."

He needed time. Drawing a deep breath he said, too loudly, "Who is it, Elly?"

"A lady. Mrs. Somebody." She probably knew the name, but pretending not to know was one of her teasing games. The kitten's tiny legs jerked feebly. He could not leave it there for her to discover, and a closed door was only an invitation to Elly. Panicky, he lifted the bed of paper on which the dying kitten lay and put it into a desk drawer.

"Daddy?"

"Coming, dear." There was a small hooked rug in the room; he spread it over the blood on the floor before he hurried downstairs.

"He's coming," he heard Elly say. Conscious of her dark eyes staring at him curiously, he avoided looking at her. A glimpse of his face in the hall mirror showed how pale and distraught he looked.

The call was from Miss Agatha Goss, the church organist. "Oh, Dr. Sloane, I do hope I'm not disturbing you. I'm calling to find out whether the new hymnals have arrived — for the choir rehearsal tonight."

He had to clear his throat several times before he could say, "I don't think they've come." As he spoke he looked at his right shoe and saw a smear of blood on the rim of the sole. *If thy right foot offend thee cut it off*, his thoughts paraphrased. He said, "If they arrive I'll let you know," and hung up rudely.

Elly was at the foot of the staircase, waiting for him. Her round little face, under its helmet of dark, straight hair, cut in a Dutch bob, wore an expression of intense solemnity. For a heart-stopping instant he thought of telling her the exact truth. *Darling, there has been an accident. Little Black Sambo is badly hurt. Try to understand, Elly dear. To prevent him from suffering he will have to be put away. We will have him put out of his pain, we will get a new kitten, and maybe a new puppy dog, and in time we will love them just as much . . .*

The trouble was that she would insist on seeing the kitten — he saw no way to prevent that, once she knew — and his image of her shock and horror blotted out every other consideration. Later, not now, he would tell her the truth, console her, make up to her for everything . . . later, when the kitten was disposed of, and the blood had been washed away.

"Daddy, have you seen Little Black Sambo?" Elly asked. "He's lost again."

"Not in the last little while," he evaded. "Would you like to do something for me, Elly?"

"What?" she said cautiously.

"I feel like hearing some nice music on the radio." It was a suggestion to which she might assent; she loved to fiddle with the radio, usually a forbidden pastime.

"Oh, yes," she said.

"Some *nice* music," he repeated. As soon as she went into the living room, he sped upstairs. When he opened the bottom desk drawer the little body was still struggling to live. He could not suppress a groan. Hastily he picked up the newspaper, wrapped it loosely all around the kitten, and carried it down the stairs walking as quietly as he could. The radio was beginning to chatter wildly; Elly's idea of great fun was to race through the wave bands touching every station on the way.

If Mrs. Hughes were here to keep an eye on Elly he could steal out to the garage, drive over to the veterinary hospital, and have the poor

little thing put to sleep. It was painless and quick. If . . . But Mrs. Hughes was not here, and to leave Elly alone in the house was unthinkable.

The stairs creaked loudly under him — he was a big man — and Elly must have heard him or sensed something peculiar in his absence. She poked her dark head into the hall and shouted above the blast of a commercial, "Where you going, daddy?"

"There's something I have to do," said Dr. Sloane. "How about that music?"

". . . the tastiest, biggest bottle of thirst-quenching pleasure," the radio gibbered. Elly was staring at the crumpled newspaper in his hands.

"Is that a surprise? For me?"

Surprise presents were a frequent enough occurrence in her life so that she no longer snatched at them. "No," he said. "I spilled something."

"What?"

"Just some gluey stuff. A mess." Firmness now might prevail. "Elly, either you get some music on that radio or shut it off! That's a terrible noise."

She made a face. "You look funny," she said. As she ran back to the radio and began again to course through the wave bands, Dr. Sloane went down into the cellar, knowing the heart of a murderer who has almost been caught redhanded.

The thought of what had to be done appalled him.

Unwrapping the newspaper, he prayed that the kitten was dead. But he saw that blood still trickled from that tiny mouth; there was still life in the glazed eyes. Drowning, poison — they were too slow, too cruel. And he could never bring himself to wring the kitten's neck. Ether, chloroform — he had none . . . A blow on the head? Yes, one quick, merciful blow . . .

The radio upstairs had been tuned over to a cheerful crooner, who was confiding that he loved to get a loving letter, but there was one that he loved better, the one that said enclosed find check. The hammer in the tool kit . . .

With sick loathing, Dr. Sloane put a heavy fold of the newspaper over the head of the dying kitten and brought the blunt weight down. "God forgive me!" he said aloud. He forced himself to look, to make sure the kitten was dead, and he died himself a little at the sight. Breathing with his mouth open, as if he had been running hard, he looked around for a place to hide the body until Elly should be asleep and he could dig a grave in their small garden.

The cellar door opened, and Elly bounced down the steps.

"Elly!" he cried. "Go upstairs!"

She began to say, "Daddy, what are you — ?" — and then she saw the dead kitten on the bloody newspaper.

Her scream ran all through his body like a flash of pain. As he took a step forward, she backed away, and he realized that her eyes, big and black like the kitten's, were fixed in terror on the hammer in his hand.

"Oh, no!" he whispered, and flung the hammer away as if it had bitten him. The crash that it made on the concrete floor touched off another scream, thin and frightening, like the soughing of a wild wind, such as he had never heard before. "Elly, darling," he said, and tried to take her in his arms. She fought him, kicking, pummeling, scratching, and all the while that thin reedlike scream went on and on, broken only by the sobbing intake of her breath.

"Elly, listen," he begged. "You don't understand!"

She mumbled, "Sambo, you killed Little Black Sambo," and tried to go to the kitten's smashed body. Dr. Sloane caught her by the shoulder and swung her into his arms. Her small fists struck him in the face repeatedly, with all her might, as he carried her upstairs. He did not try to stop her blows. The despairing thought in him was that he had failed her utterly, else how could she think that he would deliberately kill her kitten? His nose began to bleed as they reached the hall, and several drops of blood fell on Elly's yellow dress. The crooner's gay lilt made an eerie accompaniment to her crying.

"Elly," Dr. Sloane begged. "Elly, baby. It was an accident—"

But against the terrible evidence of her eyes his protests were useless.

He set the struggling little figure on a chair. Instantly she broke away and ran shrieking to the front door. She was out of it before he could stop her.

"Elly!" he called in agonized pursuit.

And when he caught her she screamed, "You killed him! You killed him!" and kicked at her father's legs.

It was a gray misty day, and there was a cold wind. Several passersby stopped. One, a stout fur-coated woman, said, "Why, there's blood on that child's dress."

"Who got killed?" said a man.

"What's happened?" another asked, joining the little group.

"Somebody's been killed!"

"It's her kitten . . ." Dr. Sloane tried to explain and hold Elly at the same time. Her fierce little shoes kept pounding at his shins. *She hates me*, he thought with dread.

At last he succeeded in pinioning her legs and carrying her toward the house. She shuddered convulsively in his arms.

"What have you been doing to the child?" an indignant male voice asked.

The woman in the fur coat looked at his clerical collar and gasped. "And him a minister!" she said.

"The things that go on," said the man. "It ought to be reported."

Dr. Sloane carried Elly inside and swung the door shut behind him. She stopped struggling, but her sudden limpness was more alarming than her frenzy. Her breathing now had a faint rasping note. He put her down on the sofa in the living room, where she lay inertly on the soft green cushions. After a few moments he mastered his trembling body, shut

off the blaring radio, moved to the telephone, and dialed the number of Dr. Harris, the physician who had attended Elly since her birth.

The first slow rings were cords of sound tightening round his diaphragm. Presently a detached female voice said, "Dr. Harris's office."

"This is Walter Sloane," he said. "Is Dr. Harris — ?"

"Who did you say is calling?"

"Walter Sloane. I must speak to Dr. Harris at once!"

"Sorry, I didn't get the name."

He tried desperately to remain calm. "Sloane — Dr. Sloane of the West Side Community Church."

"Oh, yes. I'm sorry, Dr. Sloane, but Dr. Harris will not be in until late this afternoon. Can I give him a message?"

"It's my daughter. She is —"

"One moment, please." Dr. Sloane heard a murmur of female voices; it was perhaps half a sick minute before the receptionist brought her attention back to him. "I'm sorry, you were saying?"

"I think it's a state of shock. There was an accident."

"Can you describe her injuries?"

He said, "The accident was to her kitten. The child has had a brutal shock and hysterics."

"I see." The composed voice implied that he was another fussy parent without a sense of proportion. "I will tell the doctor when he comes in."

"You don't understand," Dr. Sloane said with quiet rage. "This is serious. If you can possibly reach him —"

"Dr. Harris is at the hospital. I don't think I can get him now, but I'll leave a message for him to call —"

"Call him now! Without delay! And tell him to call me!" Dr. Sloane hung up.

He returned to the sofa and looked down at the crumpled, bloodstained little figure. How long would she carry with her the nightmare memory of her father standing guiltily over a dead kitten with a hammer in his hand? The question filled his mind as he stood watching her little chest rise and fall with each long breath.

He dared not carry her to her bed for fear she would wake, so he spread his topcoat over her and turned up the thermostat of the oil burner.

When the telephone sounded he sprang to it and spoke in a low voice. "Harris? Thank God." He tried to be terse and direct as he explained.

"The way things happen," Harris said feelingly. "Don't blame yourself. You couldn't help it. How is she now?"

"Sleeping, but it doesn't sound like natural sleep."

"That's often the way after hysteria. Much better than having to knock her out with drugs. Keep her warm."

"Yes, I've done that."

"Now listen, Dr. Sloane. I'll get there as soon as I can, but there's an emergency here at the hospital and it may take some time. The child will probably sleep for an hour or two anyway, if I know these cases. If she wakes up before I arrive, there ought

to be someone else in the house. Someone besides you, I mean. It might be better if she doesn't see you until she has had a chance to — to adjust."

Dr. Sloane said dully, "Yes, I see."

"A woman would be best. Do you know some motherly type whom Elly likes? It ought to be a friendly, familiar face. And she will have to talk to the child."

"I'll think of someone." Dr. Sloane's family were a thousand miles away. And old Mrs. Hughes had never been able to cope with Elly. His mind quested doubtfully among the wives of his friends, seeking one gentle and wise enough to serve the child's need.

"Something else you might think about," said Harris, "is another kitten. Best way to take Elly's mind off the one she has lost. If you can get her to accept another you'll be halfway over the bridge."

Instantly, as Harris disconnected, Dr. Sloane thought of Miss Wylie, Elly's schoolteacher. He fumbled with the telephone book. There were a number of Wylies, but only three women's names among them. The second of these, Miss Carla Wylie, answered the ring, and she had the calm voice that had spoken to him before. When he identified himself, she said with the hint of a laugh, "I suppose you're calling about the kitten."

Startled, he said, "Yes. I'm afraid —"

"Oh, don't worry about it. I'll gladly take it back."

"It isn't that. The kitten has had an accident. I'm sorry to have to tell you this. A fatal accident."

Her voice, when it came through, was even and controlled. "Is Ellen all right?"

"I'm not sure. There has been a crisis here, which is my only excuse for telephoning you. Little Black Sambo — that's what Ellen called the kitten — met a tragic death. My fault, and Ellen has had a terrible shock."

"Anything I can do to help?"

"I have no right to ask this —"

"Of course you have. I like Ellen. What is it, Dr. Sloane?"

"Dr. Harris thought another kitten would be a good idea."

"I understand. That's all right. I've got Little Black Sambo's twin brother — or maybe sister, I never can tell with kittens. When do you want him?"

"The trouble is, I'm alone with Elly and can't get away. I'd like to have the kitten here, if possible, when she wakes up. It could be very important to her. Is there any way — ?"

"Of course. Just let me have your address." He gave it, and she said, "I'm not far. I'll have the kitten there in a few minutes."

She struck him as intelligent and competent; and as he replaced the telephone, he wondered if he might persuade her to stay with Elly through the awakening. Tiptoeing back to the living room, he saw with relief that Elly was still asleep.

He sank into a chair.

A few seconds later the sharp ring

of the doorbell jolted him, and he hurried to the door.

A thickset policeman with a fat, friendly face stood on the stoop; there was a squad car at the curb. "Sorry to bother you, Reverend," the officer said, "but some woman's made a complaint at the station. Doesn't seem to make much sense, but she said you were beating up a little girl on the sidewalk."

Dr. Sloane could feel his face flushing. "That's nonsense, of course!"

The policeman grinned. "We get these crank complaints. But she said the child was screaming and bloody all over, so we had to look into it."

"Just a misunderstanding. There was an accident." The expression on the policeman's face changed. "You had better come in."

The officer entered, removed his visored cap, and reached for his notebook. He said slowly, "My name's Kogan. You know how it is, when they file a complaint we got to make a report. Better give me the facts, Reverend."

Dr. Sloane pointed to the sofa. "I don't want to wake her up. Let's go into the kitchen. We can keep an eye on the living room from there."

Hesitating, Kogan said, "Is she okay?" He walked softly to the sofa and gazed at Elly for a moment. Then he followed the minister down the hall.

Dr. Sloane sat down wearily on a kitchen chair, motioned the policeman to another, and explained. Kogan, making notes, interrupted only once. "Let me get this straight. You didn't tell the kid about the accident right away?"

"No. I felt that the shock . . . I didn't want her to see — to see the body."

But the question had startled Dr. Sloane and it gave rise to others. Was it true that he had been thinking only of Elly? Or had he wanted mainly to avoid a scene? If he had been sure of her love and trust, would he not have gently broken the news to her at once? He shook off these confusing thoughts and grimly completed his account.

"That's tough," said Kogan, and went down into the cellar to see the kitten's body. On his return, his plump face was crinkled into a compassionate squint. "I know how you must feel. I got kids of my own." He scratched his nose. "Excuse me, Reverend, but is there a Mrs. Sloane?"

"No, I'm a widower."

"I see. Got somebody to make sure the kid's all right?"

"Yes, the doctor's coming. Dr. Henry Harris, in the Medical Building."

"Okay." Kogan put his notebook away. "Sorry I had to bother you. Hope the little girl gets over it fast. I know how it is with kids. They got to be loved all the time to make up for the rotten things that happen. It could just as easy have been one of mine. We got dogs and cats both."

At the front door the policeman stopped and said in a low voice, "Listen, I can see where you wouldn't

want some reporter to pick this up for a news story. A crank files a complaint, next thing it mushrooms into a rumor. In your business that wouldn't be good — always some guys ready to believe the worst. I'll talk to the sergeant. He's a good guy, he'll handle it." He waved away Dr. Sloane's thanks.

As Kogan reached the sidewalk, an old but neat convertible drew up behind the police car and a young woman got out quickly. She was carrying a small kitten on one arm, holding it securely with her other hand. The kitten, mostly black, with a white chest, white paws, and a clownish white nose, was miaowing lustily. The policeman watched as Dr. Sloane descended the steps.

Miss Wylie was not much more than thirty, a small slender woman. She smiled briefly. "Here we are, Dr. Sloane."

"Thank you for coming," he said.

Kogan leaned out of the window of his car. "That the new kitten for the kid? Good idea." He drove away, and Miss Wylie looked curiously after him. Dr. Sloane felt constrained to explain the policeman's presence as they entered the house.

"You're having a bad day," Miss Wylie replied. She was a clear-skinned woman with high cheekbones, a wide mouth, and brown hair worn in a casual crop. "How is Elly?"

"Sleeping. In there, on the sofa."

"What do you want me to do? Hush, Punkins," she whispered to the squalling kitten in her hands.

Elly moaned a little, but did not wake. He led Miss Wylie through to the kitchen. "I'd better tell you all about it." he said.

Repetition, he found, made the story no easier to relate. Upon hearing the way of the black kitten's death, Miss Wylie caught her lower lip with her teeth. But her intent brown eyes never ceased to study his face.

"Of course I'll stand by," she said, when she had heard him out. "I think the best thing would be to have the new kitten right in the room with Elly when she wakes up. I'll judge what to say by how she reacts."

"You feel I'd better stay away?"

"Until she's prepared, yes." As if she felt this to be harsh, she added a word of reassurance. "Once she understands, she'll adjust quickly. They do at that age, thank heaven."

Behind his awareness of her there was something gnawing at his mind. It came to him — a phrase the policeman, Kogan, had used: "They got to be loved all the time." Yielding to an impulse, he said abruptly, "Miss Wylie, I'd like to ask your opinion of Elly. As a personality, I mean. How does she strike you?"

She thought for an unsmiling second. "Elly seems a pretty stormy little girl inside."

"Stormy? You mean temperamental? Or bad-tempered?"

"I think perhaps unhappy. I've seen it in other children when they feel — rejected. They burst out, the way Elly often does, to get recognition."

He stared at her. "Rejected?"

"I'm sorry," she said. "You asked me."

The words, "Why, I love Elly," were on the tip of Dr. Sloane's tongue. But he suppressed them with the irritable reflection that he did not have to justify himself to this woman, this stranger. At the same time, he had the disturbing impression that she was thinking much more than she was saying. He decided to challenge her. "Miss Wylie," he said, "there's no doubt in your mind, is there, that it *was* an accident?"

With just the slightest hesitation before she spoke, she replied, "I'm sure it was an accident."

They looked at each other, and he forced a smile. "I suppose the Freudians would say that the accident represented a subconscious intention on my part. Thank God, I don't accept that."

She answered him carefully. "Yes, it's a rather terrifying idea."

He felt as if he had been struck. She believed, she actually believed that at some primitive level of his unconscious mind he had wished the kitten dead. But even while resentment worked in him, he could not help pursuing the notion with a kind of fascinated horror. Could some inner motive, unknown even to himself, have paralyzed his will while his right foot was in midair? Could he have stopped his foot from coming down on that little body? He shook his head angrily. "I loved that kitten," he said.

Her eyes widened at the intensity of his voice. "I'm sure you did."

With stiffened lips he said, "You can carry psychoanalytic theory too far." His voice sounded shrill to his own ears, and he forced it lower. "Why," he said with an unsuccessful attempt at casualness, "if I accepted your view —"

"Please," she objected. "It's not my view."

He felt that he had to make himself understood. "Before the accident I was feeling a little annoyed at Elly — I grant that. Would you suggest that there was some psychological connection between that fleeting irritation and Little Black Sambo's death? Why, if I thought that, I would have to regard myself as a spiritual criminal instead of a minister of God."

"You're exaggerating, aren't you?"

He leaned against the wall to conceal his tension. "Exaggerating? When you've practically accused me of murdering the kitten? Worse, of symbolically murdering my own daughter?"

"Dr. Sloane! I've accused you of nothing!" She rose, frowning, but her voice was full of concern. "You've been under great strain. Why don't you try to rest while I stay with Elly?"

He looked at her without answering. After a moment she went into the living room, still carrying the black-and-white kitten, which had fallen asleep.

Dr. Sloane resisted an impulse to sit down and bury his face in his

hands. In an effort to stop thinking he forced himself into physical action: he went down into the cellar, put the dead kitten's body in a small box, took it out to the garden, dug a tiny grave, interred the cardboard coffin, and scooped back the loose dirt. He wanted to say some words for the vanished little life, but the only thing that came to him was an inward plea, stark and formless. "God, have mercy on all living things. Help us, oh, help us, God."

Returning to the house he found a sponge, filled a pail with water and soap flakes, and went upstairs. As he passed the living room he saw that Elly was still sleeping, while Miss Wylie sat relaxed in a deep chair, the new kitten on her lap. Their eyes met, but they did not speak.

The hooked rug in the study showed a dark moist spot at its center, and he worked at it, and at the stain on the wood below, until he was satisfied that Elly would notice nothing.

When the job was finished, he felt very tired. He sat down at his desk and began to leaf through the pages of his unfinished sermon.

A sound from below reached him, and he froze in his chair. It was Elly's voice, her small waking-up voice. But he could not make out the words. Then he heard Miss Wylie's contralto murmur. There was a silence, and for one bottomless instant he waited for that terrifying scream. It did not come.

The warm womanly tones resumed. An impulse to go to the landing and listen was checked by an unaccountable feeling that he had no right; yet he was aware of being hopeful, of having shaken off despair. A quick, strange thought came to him: the kitten had died for Elly and him, its blood had opened the way for his redemption. He wanted to take Elly into his arms, hold her tight, and tell her that she would never again want for love. He wanted to expiate with love his crime of not having loved enough.

With an abrupt movement he flung the sermon into the wastebasket. The thing was a bore. He owed his congregation a message with more God in it than that.

Picking up his pipe, he cleaned and filled it carefully, lighted the tobacco with a minimum of flame.

The trouble with the sermon, he recognized, was that he had been thinking of crime in the abstract, as something remote from himself, as something on the outside. Now what he wanted to talk about was the criminal within, the criminal lurking in the soul of every man — the hidden criminal whom only love can hold in check. And his heart would be in every word.

From below he heard a faint miaow, an exclamation from Elly, and Miss Wylie's cheerful laugh. Not since his wife's death, it occurred to him, had he heard a woman's laughter in this house. He stayed quiet, puffing at his pipe with a sense of growing serenity, waiting patiently now for Miss Wylie to call him.

Hugh Pentecost is a real "pro." He sold his first story when he was twenty years old, while he was still an undergraduate at Columbia University. The story was bought by that great editor, the late Bob Davis, who was then editing "Munsey's." And from that wonderful day when he saw his first story in print — more than 30 years ago — Hugh Pentocost has been a professional writer, earning his living exclusively from writing fiction. His work has included novels, novelettes, and short stories, and all bearing the mark of distinction that is Hugh Pentecost's personal hallmark; and his work has appeared in most of the leading magazines — "American," "Collier's," "Cosmopolitan," and "Saturday Evening Post," to mention only a few.

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A MATTER OF JUSTICE

by HUGH PENTECOST

FEAR HAD NOT YET TAKEN HOLD OF Macklyn. He was lost and it was absurd and it made him angry, but he wasn't afraid. He knew that a mile or two from where he was were houses and farms and traveled highways. Not five minutes ago he had paused to listen to the sound of a train whistle, and by some trick of the wind or atmosphere, the click of the freight-car wheels had seemed to be only a few hundred yards away. He remembered reading, as a boy, how people who got lost in the woods found themselves moving in ever-tightening circles, suddenly coming on the same tree, the same clump of rocks, the same pool of water. Macklyn didn't know one tree from another, and if he had retraced his path he certainly hadn't recognized it.

One point was certain. Everybody was going to have a hell of a fine laugh at his expense when he got back to the Crowder place. He was lost in the wilds of Connecticut, probably within hailing distance of Larry Cuyler's ornate swimming pool! He imagined that some of the less determined hunters were already back at Lib Crowder's, toasting their feet in front of the big fieldstone fireplace in her

living room, and laughing at the idea of the blind leading the blind. One thing, Macklyn thought bitterly, was a sure bet: Dicky Crowder was at home and sound asleep in his bed.

Macklyn remembered riding, when he was about sixteen years old, on a train with his grandfather. They had been going in from the old man's Dutchess County home to see the circus at Madison Square Garden. Somewhere around Ossining, the old man had a severe heart attack. Macklyn, paralyzed with fright, tried to help him without success.

A man sitting across the aisle had seen what was happening. "See if you can find a doctor on the train," he ordered Macklyn.

Macklyn had started walking back through the crowded cars. People looked at him as he swayed along the aisles, looked at him with glazed eyes, their heads bobbing slightly with the movement of the train. All Macklyn had to do was raise his voice and ask if there was a doctor in the car. He couldn't make a sound come out of his throat.

The bobbing heads and sightless eyes seemed forbidding, terrifying. He walked to the very end of the train and then back, cramps agonizing his stomach, sweat pouring down inside his clothes. He couldn't call out for help. By the time he got back to his grandfather, help had arrived. One of the train crew had found a doctor up forward.

The incident came back to Macklyn now. All he had to do was call out. He knew there were forty-five or fifty men in the woods, hunting for the cattle killers. All he had to do was to attract attention to himself, and he would get help. But somehow that same sickening embarrassment he had felt fifteen years ago was on him. It was not merely that he would be the butt of laughter when they learned that he'd set out to find six-year-old Dicky Crowder and had got lost himself. It was as though crying out for help was an admission of some kind of secret and terrible guilt. It was absurd, but he just couldn't yell!

More exasperated with himself than with anything else, he finally sat down on a rock and fished in the pocket of his trench coat for a cigarette, after gently placing Lib's shotgun on the ground beside him, the barrel pointed away from him with elaborate care. The moon appeared fitfully. The woods would be quite light for a minute or so at a time, and then pitch dark for a longer spell.

Macklyn was cold. In the open country where the sun could get at it, the winter's snow had melted completely, but here in the woods it still lay in a thin film over leaves and shrubs. Macklyn had come for the weekend at the Crowders' with a city man's idea of country clothes — slacks, a couple of tweed jackets, his trench coat with the zipped-in lining, and his heaviest pair of shoes. The shoes were heavy and hand-sewn, but despite the advertisement they were *not* waterproof, Macklyn's feet felt clammy and damp. His right thumb

throbbed slightly from the pain of a stubborn thorn that had punctured his inadequate suède glove. He was, simply stated, not dressed for the woods. He didn't like the woods. He had lugged that blasted shotgun with him for over three hours, the shells still in the pocket of his coat, because Lib had insisted that he take it. He'd never fired a shotgun in his life; he wasn't even sure he would know how to load it. He'd been embarrassed to ask Lib. "Some of these dogs are more dangerous than wolves," Lib had said. "They don't wait to be cornered."

There had been much talk of the wild dogs that were the object of the night's hunt, stories that Macklyn had listened to with some amused cynicism — Paul Bunyan tales. Nobody seemed to be quite clear where the dog packs came from. Perhaps they had come over the hills from another town. Pigs had been killed, flocks of chickens decimated. Worse than that, the dogs were now running cattle. One of Digby March's Angus steers had been run down, hamstrung, and his throat eaten out. A milch cow on the Anderson farm had had her tongue torn out of her mouth and had bled to death in the pasture, the dogs feeding off her flesh while she still lived. A prize bull on the Cuyler place, staked out in the south pasture, had been attacked; he'd torn the imprisoning ring out of his nose and plunged into the swimming pool after a hard run to save himself. Wood choppers had been stalked for hours, and finally had to beat off the attacking dogs with the butts of their axes.

One of the theories was that summer people went off and left pet dogs to forage for themselves. The dogs would gravitate toward the town dump and eat the garbage. A bitch would have puppies and out of these grew the beginnings of a pack of wild dogs, animals that had never known human affection or training. As the winter came and the dump froze over, the dogs would begin to live off the dump rats and other wild life, and finally they would move, in a pack, toward a lusher diet of warm flesh.

It was all quite horrifying and hair-raising, Macklyn had thought as he listened, but probably pretty well exaggerated. To him a dog was a dog. You just let him know you were his master, didn't act frightened, and you were in control. Macklyn wasn't afraid of dogs, and the stories didn't make him afraid.

The local fish-and-game club had arranged for a hunt to exterminate the dogs, and everyone in the countryside had set out to find the marauders. Macklyn, a weekend visitor, hadn't joined in. He didn't have the clothes for an all-night tramp in the woods; he didn't own a gun and couldn't have hit a barn door with a handful of rice.

Anyway, he was delighted to think of an evening alone with Lib. He had questions to ask her, questions he had kept buried deep in his heart for a long time. The dog hunt promised him a few hours of privacy, free from

the neighbors who seemed to have made a sort of club of the charming remodeled farmhouse where Lib lived. Then Dicky had disappeared.

The hunters had been gone about an hour, and twilight was just fading out into darkness, when Dicky was missed. For nearly an hour the six-year-old boy had been greatly distressed by the absence of a beagle pup named Sorrowful which was the apple of his eye. Dogs of any kind would not be safe in the woods that night. The countryside had been warned to keep its pets at home. Trigger-happy hunters were not going to hold their fire to look for license tags. Sorrowful had gone AWOL, and Dicky was near tears. And then suddenly Dicky was among the missing. The inference was clear: he'd gone off on his stumpy legs to find Sorrowful.

Lib would, under ordinary circumstances, have headed the search for her small son, but Lib was anchored in the big chair before the fire because of a broken ankle. Macklyn, secretly cursing Dicky and Sorrowful, was the only person who could go. Every other able-bodied man was off in the hunting party.

"He can't have got very far," Macklyn said reassuringly to Lib Crowder.

Taking the shotgun on Lib's insistence, Macklyn set out, first around the barns and sheds, and then finally circling wider until he reached the edge of the woods, always calling Dicky. Just as he was about to retrace his steps he saw, at the edge of the woods, the tiny imprint of Dicky's overshoes in the unmelted snow. He started to follow the trail, lost it after five minutes, continued on until here he was, three hours later, hopelessly lost, exasperated, and indignant.

He flicked on his lighter, lit a cigarette, and inhaled the smoke deep into his lungs. At the same time he thought he heard something moving in the brush directly in front of him. He tried holding the lighter above his head, but it didn't do any good.

And then the moon came out from behind a cloud, and Macklyn saw the killer.

Catching the wild dogs was serious business. The Cuylers, Digger March, Van Anderson and a half dozen others had drawn lots to see who would sacrifice a calf as bait for the dogs. Two young calves had been taken out into the woods, butchered, and left there in the hope that the winter breezes would carry the smell of warm blood to the hungry pack and bring them from their hiding place into ambush. What Macklyn saw, or thought he saw, was the dark shape of a black Angus calf, lying in its own blood in a patch of snow, with the killer's nose at the throat.

Macklyn felt the hair rising on the back of his neck. He had never seen such an animal before in his life. The dog had raised its head from the dark, bleeding mass in front of it, evidently attracted by Macklyn's cigarette lighter. It didn't move or start. In the moonlight its eyes, set in grayish-

brown fur, were a baleful yellow. Its lips were drawn back slightly along a row of murderous white fangs.

Across a space of fifteen yards, man and dog stared at each other, and the fear was all in the man. The animal was, Macklyn guessed, some kind of sinister cross between great Dane and German shepherd. For a few seconds Macklyn waited expectantly for the roar of gunfire. He had stumbled on an ambush where the hunters would be waiting for the sight of dog or dogs, But there was no sound except an ominous rumble in the throat of the beast staring at Macklyn.

Macklyn had no experience to call on in this moment. He was not a hunter. He could not turn the woods to his advantage. He had no skill with a gun, and the gun which lay on the ground beside him was not loaded and he hadn't bothered to familiarize himself with its mechanism. The moon would be gone in an instant and he couldn't hope to load the gun in the dark. He couldn't do it till he had this much light again and then he'd have to concentrate on the job. That monstrous dog could be on him in a flash — while he simply reached out his hand for the gun.

The cigarette scorched Macklyn's fingers, and he dropped it in the snow. The rumble grew louder in the dog's throat, and it seemed to Macklyn that the animal crouched a little, as if preparing to spring. Macklyn's behavior then wasn't thought out; it was instinctive. If he remained absolutely motionless, the dog might decide there was no danger and go back to his feeding. So Macklyn sat there, his mouth and throat so dry they ached, his heart pounding against his ribs.

The dog seemed to be thinking it out, too. The yellow eyes never left Macklyn. And then an extraordinary thing happened: the bait moved. Instantly the dog pounced at it, pinioning it with his paws, worrying at it with his mouth.

Macklyn was too frightened to think clearly. The calves had been killed for bait early that day, hours and hours ago. How the dead animal could move was a matter Macklyn didn't stop to consider. The movement had distracted the killer which was all Macklyn cared about. Slowly he reached down with his right hand, feeling along the ground for the shotgun. He heard another sound, bloodcurdlingly human, from the dog.

Then Macklyn was on his feet, the gun gripped in his right hand, and he thought: I'm going to faint, and instantly thought again: I'm going to die!

The sense of undiluted horror was so great that Macklyn felt he must burst open with it.

The gurgling human sound did not seem to come from the dog but from the bait. Something thrashed out in the snow as the dog pounced again, gnawing and slavering. *A man's hand and arm!* The bait was no calf. It was a man — a man who still lived, a man at whose throat the dog snarled and ripped.

A sound that had been bottled in Macklyn since he was fifteen years old split the night. He screamed at the top of his lungs.

Lib Crowder was not yet afraid. She sat in her chair before the fire, which had burned down to a few red ashes on the hearth. It was too difficult for her to move her injured ankle off the pillow on which it rested, wrestle with her crutches, and try to get fresh logs on the irons.

She wasn't too anxious about Macklyn, only ruefully amused at the way her plans had gone awry. Lib Crowder's world had been whirling dizzily around her for almost two years now, too complex to handle, and most of her basic sense of values was obscured. She needed an anchor, and she had reached out into the past for Macklyn. Macklyn imagined that Lib hadn't the slightest idea that he was in love with her, and had always been in love with her. He had always been entirely circumspect, a friend of the family, his affection placed in a carefully hidden niche that Lib would never see. But Lib was a woman, and a sensitive one, and she had always known, from the very first day, how he really felt. It was right and proper that how he felt should never be brought to the surface, or he would have had to give up his friendship for her and for Lucian.

She had met them both, Lucian and Macklyn, at the same cocktail party. Crowder and Graves were the fair-haired boys of Broadway then. Lucian Crowder had money, and Macklyn Graves had taste and wisdom about the theater. Between them they had set up a producing firm that had three hits going that season and several plays in the works. The two men had great respect for each other, and their talents meshed perfectly. Lucian was a complete extrovert, could charm his way through any situation, could handle the most temperamental actress, author, or director. "I'm old Joe Public Relations himself," Lucian conceded.

Macklyn was the member of the firm who knew the theater, who could find gold in a new script, who could sweat it out with the author, whose taste was impeccable, who knew theatrical technique backward and how to keep its slip from showing.

Jointly Lucian and Macklyn had the Midas touch. Mutual respect was a basis for mutual fondness. But no two men could have been basically more different. Lucian was a sportsman — a polo player, crack golfer, a man who had lived most of his life outdoors and loved any sport that could be played under the sun. Macklyn was a frustrated artist who had had the good sense to turn his talent to promoting the arts instead of trying to be in them. He was quiet and controlled, and his feelings were deeper than those of Lucian, who was always protesting how deep his feelings were. But it was Lucian who had swept Lib off her feet, married her, and made her, with only the vaguest reservations, happier than

she had ever dreamed of being. There had been the duplex apartment in New York, and the model farm here near Sharon. There had been Dicky.

And then there had been the day when Lucian, currently a mad amateur aviator, had flown his private Cub plane, against advice of airport officials, out over Long Island Sound into an approaching thunderstorm and had never been seen again.

For months after that Lib clung to the hope that Lucian would be found — even after bits of the Cub's wreckage had been picked up by yachtsmen off Westport. Of course, Macklyn had stood by. But so had her many newly made friends near Sharon: Grace and Larry Cuyler, Van Anderson, Digby March, and others. Finances hadn't been quite what everyone thought. Lucian had had money to start with, and he had made money, but he had also spent it freely on their living and on polo ponies, planes, and foreign sport cars. Lib found, as she gradually made adjustments, that it was now a case of this *or* that, not this *and* that. She decided, for Dicky's sake, to give up the apartment in town and settle down on the Sharon farm. That was when her life had begun to whirl dizzily. After a very short time, she rediscovered the fact that she was extremely attractive to men, that she didn't like living alone, that she had to consider Dicky when it came to choosing a stepfather for him and that the one man for whom she had a really deep and abiding affection, Macklyn, was making no move in her direction.

She understood Macklyn. She knew he felt that there would have to be a considerable passage of time before she could choose anyone without loneliness being a strong factor in the choice. She knew he felt that her tastes in life had developed away from his during her marriage to Lucian, that he couldn't change his own way of life for her, and that he wouldn't ask her to change hers for his. But if Macklyn chose to wait, others did not, and that fact forced Lib's hand.

Fred Fowler was the final forcing element. He was a feature writer for a big newspaper syndicate, and he turned up as a house guest of Digby March's. March owned the big, model black Angus farm which bordered Lib's property to the north. At first glance Fowler seemed an unattractive bear of a man. He was tall, almost obesely fat, his clothes sloppy and apparently bought off the rack in a second-hand shop. But he had a great, warm heart, a brilliant mind, and he was almost a genius with Dicky. He could tell endless stories and he seemed somehow to be able to get on a footing of equality with the small boy. Fowler was staying with Digger March to recuperate, he said, from pneumonia, which had nearly carried him off. Digger March, a bachelor who was some sort of power behind the throne in state politics, was only at home weekends, and Fred Fowler had developed the habit of aiming for Lib's about cocktail time every afternoon. It became apparent to Lib, after a very short time, that he was

not simply flirting with her. Fred Fowler had fallen hopelessly in love with her. She knew that any day now the moment would come when Fred would ask her the question that was in his eyes every moment they were together.

It was not a question she could answer lightly. With every word, with every awkward gesture of his big body, Fred Fowler was pleading with her to love him, to marry him, to let him take care of her and Dicky. Without the definite proposal having been made, Lib knew that a refusal from her would be a crushing blow to Fred. He was like a man who had never really loved before. He had a full and exciting life to offer her, a more than comfortable income, and there was Dicky's frank idolatry of him. Lib knew that she had to make sure about Macklyn. Until she was sure of him, she could not say yes to Fred.

And so it was that on a certain day three events happened. She telephoned Macklyn Graves in New York and invited him for the weekend, an invitation he accepted with alacrity. Coming downstairs after making the call, she caught her heel on the stair and fell, fracturing her ankle. And it was that night, while the whole neighborhood came in to console her, that she first heard of the appearance in the valley of the marauding wild-dog pack.

Macklyn was arriving Friday night, and Lib had very much wanted to see him alone that first evening. She was not a little annoyed when Grace and Larry Cuyler barged in with the announcement that Van Anderson, another neighbor, was bringing half a dozen partridges which had been left over in his freezer from last fall's hunting, and that they were going to have a party.

"We can't let the invalid languish on the vine, darling," Grace said. "Digger and Fred Fowler are coming too."

"I'm not languishing on the vine," Lib said, "and I have a house guest coming who —"

"Macklyn Graves!" Grace said. "He's not a house guest. He's a member of the family."

Sitting in the big armchair with her foot propped up on the pillow in front of her, Lib felt as though some perverse and antic leprechaun had stage-managed the evening. She was to make a choice, and all the choices she had made before this were on hand to pass in review. It was dark and boyish Larry Cuyler who had first reminded her, after Lucian's death, that she was still an attractive woman — Larry, who had a perfectly good wife of his own. Or perhaps that was not quite the right word for Grace, who drank too much, dashed around the countryside in a yellow convertible, was talked about by everyone, and was really not "a perfectly good wife."

"Grace and I go our own ways, and no questions asked," Larry had told her. His technique was to appear just

a little helpless and in need of understanding. In a way, Lib was grateful to him for reminding her that she was alive, so she thanked him, figuratively spanked him, and sent him home to Grace — or to where Grace should have been.

Digby March, with his prematurely white hair and his air of distinction, his great wealth and his political affiliations, had been the next serious bidder for Lib's affections. Digger would have ended any financial worries Lib and Dicky had. They would have moved from a small model farm to a huge, highly profitable model farm. There were two difficulties about Digger that made his suit hopeless. Lib admired his positiveness and his vitality, but she felt not the slightest affection for him. And Dicky openly hated him. Digger had never learned not to be patronizing with children.

Finally there had been Van Anderson, intense, tragic, and with nothing to offer but his heart. There was a Mrs. Van Anderson, and it was generally known that she was in a "retreat" somewhere and that she would never return from it. It was a situation which had pushed Van Anderson slightly off center himself. He had nothing to offer but his desperate need for affection and companionship.

Somehow it seemed as though Van and Digger and the Cuylers were all aware that her relationship with Fred Fowler was reaching a critical point, and that they wanted to be on hand to see the result. Her broken ankle was an excuse, it seemed, never to leave her alone with anyone!

Bob Streeter, a dour man who ran the farm for Lib, had gone to the station to meet Macklyn. By the time Macklyn arrived, the party was going full swing. Larry Cuyler had made the Martinis. Grace, managing to look very attractive with an apron over her dinner dress, had done herself proud with canapés. Van and Digger were consulting on whether to roast the birds or broil them in the electric broiler. Fred Fowler had perched his huge bulk, possessively, on the arm of Lib's chair, having spent a half hour telling Dicky stories until the lad went to sleep.

Macklyn was like a breath of fresh air. He knew everyone, except Fred Fowler, from past visits, and he greeted them casually. Fowler was something else again. They spotted each other across the room and began shouting at the top of their lungs.

"Fred! Well, I'll be darned."

"Macklyn, baby!" Fowler turned to Lib. "Why didn't you tell me *he* was your house guest?"

"Well, I never dreamed —"

Macklyn and Fowler pounded and swore at each other.

"Army," Macklyn explained to Lib, a little breathless.

"Army, my foot!" Fred Fowler bellowed. "Paris, London, Berlin — dancing girls —"

"I do have a hostess to greet," Macklyn managed to say. He came over and took Lib's hand, and for a moment their eyes met, and Lib saw

that it was still there — all he had ever felt for her.

Somebody grabbed Fowler and sent him to the kitchen for more ice.

Macklyn appropriated the arm of Lib's chair. "I was petrified when Bob Streeter met me at the station. Is the ankle bad?" he asked.

"Just a nuisance, because it immobilizes me."

"Imagine Fred's being here," Macklyn said. "Where did you run into him?"

"Oh, he's been recuperating here for nearly a month," Lib said. "He's staying with Digger."

"Recuperating?" Macklyn sounded surprised. "From what?"

"Pneumonia."

"He had pneumonia a month ago?"

"Yes."

An odd expression came over Macklyn's face as he passed his cigarettes to Lib. "You know who he is, don't you?"

"He writes for the newspapers. Feature articles."

"Read his stuff?"

Lib smiled. "I've been trying to keep that a secret. His articles come out in an evening paper I don't see here. I've never read a line he's written."

Macklyn's eyes twinkled. "What have you been up to, my girl?"

"Up to?"

"Fred Fowler," Macklyn said, "is a sort of one-man crime commission. He's exposed more crooks in our city government, more racketeers, bookmakers, dishonest policemen, confidence men, and business swindlers than any man alive. And I'll tell you a secret, angel. My guess is he hasn't had pneumonia recently, and if he's invented that kind of a story, it means he's here on business. Or —"

"Or what?"

Macklyn's face seemed to lose its aliveness. "He's in love with you, isn't he? I could see it the moment I stepped into the room. He's a swell guy, Lib."

Fowler brought Macklyn a drink then, and the intimate conversation ended. . . .

Digger and Van Anderson had decided on the broiler, and while the birds turned slowly on their spits under the broiler heat, the general conversation turned to the wild-dog hunt set up for the next evening. Lib had heard the plans for the wild-dog hunt for several days, but it was new to Macklyn, and he was interested in the scheme. One of the slaughtered calves was to be placed at the north end of the valley and another at the south end. They were to be set out in the late afternoon.

Four groups of hunters, numbering ten or twelve each, were to work along the ridges on either side of the valley, two groups starting at each end and working in toward the bait. The dogs, they believed, would come down out of the hills after nightfall aware that their best chance for food was on the farms after everyone was bedded down. The hunters, working in toward the calves, would make escape from either end of the valley impossi-

ble. They would wait in ambush, hoping the dogs would make for the fresh meat. Reports indicated there were from fifteen to eighteen dogs in the outlaw group and that they didn't always run together.

The hunters feared most the possibility that the dogs might have come upon deer in the hills and run them down. Their tactic was to chase a deer until it was slowed down by exhaustion; then they would hamstring the animal by biting through its leg tendons. The helpless deer was easy prey then. If the dogs had fed off deer, they might not risk coming down into the valley after the slaughtered calves.

"We've tried hunting them in the daytime," Van Anderson explained to Macklyn, who had expressed doubts as to the sinister nature of the dogs and had been told all the stories of their recent violent sorties. "You won't see hide nor hair of them by day."

"But I thought you said they attacked two men?" Macklyn reminded Anderson.

"It was twilight," Van said. "The men had been cutting wood up on the west ridge, and it was almost dark when they started home."

Digger March glanced at Fred Fowler, who had become strangely silent in the last half hour. "You've uncovered some pretty vicious characters in your time, Fred, but when you see these dogs you'll be looking at just about the most treacherous and bloodthirsty killers you've encountered. A wolf, for all he's dangerous, has a degree of nobility to him. But a dog gone wrong —"

"— is like a man gone wrong," Fred Fowler said, quietly. "The basest thing on earth because his potential for good is so great."

The guests left, and at last the time came that Lib had been waiting for. Macklyn Graves came back into the living room from seeing them off. He stood with his back to the fire, looking down at Lib thoughtfully.

"Nightcap?" she suggested.

"That'll just about do it," Macklyn said. "This country air!" He went over to the big center table and made two drinks. He gave her hers and still stood there, looking at her. "Should we drink a special toast?" he asked.

"To what?"

"You and Fred," he said, quietly.

"He hasn't asked me any important question," Lib said.

"Does he have to? You know what's on his mind, Lib. He's waiting for some sign from you that when he does ask you, the answer will be yes."

"Should I marry Fred?" Lib asked. She couldn't be certain, but she thought she saw a nerve twitch in Macklyn's cheek.

"I can't answer that question," Macklyn told her.

"You're the only friend I have I could discuss it with," Lib said.

Macklyn turned away toward the fire. "I should think I would be the last," he said.

"Why, Macklyn?"

"If there's anything I would have said about you, Lib, without reservation," Macklyn said, "it's that you wouldn't play games with any man's affection."

"I haven't played games with Fred," Lib said. "When I began to know how he felt, I had to let him keep coming here. I had to find out how I felt myself."

"I wasn't talking about Fred," Macklyn said.

"Macklyn!"

He turned on her, almost angrily. "Ever since I've known you, I've had to play the role of somebody's best friend. First it was Lucian, now Fred."

"Macklyn, I —"

"I don't like the role, and I don't intend to play it any longer," Macklyn said. "I have my own emotions, my own life. I've waited for the time to arrive when you could look at me as a man, disassociated from Lucian and from the past. Apparently I waited too long, and Fred has got there ahead of me. Fred is a swell guy. I haven't even the luxury of thinking he's a heel and being able to run him down to you."

"Macklyn, please listen to me."

"Yes?"

"I asked you here, didn't I?"

"Yes. So that I could see for myself how matters stood."

"Yes," Lib said.

"Well, I've seen," Macklyn said. "And now, if you'll excuse me, I think I'll turn in."

"Macklyn!"

He had started for the door, and he stopped and turned back. "Yes?"

"The trouble is you haven't seen," Lib said. He stood there, with a puzzled frown on his face. "Darn you, Macklyn, do I have to say it all?"

"Spell it out for me, you mean? No."

"Macklyn, you stinker," she said, "don't you understand that I'm trying to tell you that I love you?"

Macklyn was in something of a daze after that. There was long, meaningless, wonderful talk — the talk of people who have suddenly discovered each other and want to touch each other, mentally and physically, to make sure their feeling is real. It was almost daybreak when they finally said good night, with, it seemed, almost nothing talked about. Fred would have to be told. He had the right to honest treatment from Lib.

But the next day the place seemed to be swarming with people almost before they were up. The Crowder farm was to be the starting point for the hunters who would work the northeast end of the valley. Young Dicky was wild with excitement. He had no time for Macklyn or even for his hero, Fred Fowler. The hunters assembled in the late afternoon. Most of them were friends of Lib's, and almost all of them came in to see her and inquire about her ankle. Macklyn and Lib had no chance for the private talk they wanted so much.

About 4, the hunters started on

foot. Lib and Macklyn still weren't alone, because of Dicky. It would be two or three hours before Dicky finally had his supper and was trundled off to bed by Gertrude, the house maid. Dicky was one of the problems they had to discuss before anything was made public. Dicky would have to be told and somehow made to understand, and to approve of Macklyn.

About 6, Gertrude brought the ice bucket and the mixings for Martinis in from the pantry, and Macklyn was just starting to prepare them when Dicky came pounding in in a high state of alarm. Sorrowful was missing.

"He can't be very far off, Dicky. He never leaves the place," Lib said, trying to reassure the child.

Dicky's round, pink face was screwed into an absurdly tragic expression. "With so many people going off, Mum! And Sorrow *is* a hunting dog."

"I'll help you have another look for him," Macklyn said cheerfully, and he and the boy went out together.

It's a conspiracy! Lib thought dryly. She and Macklyn would never have a chance to get details settled.

Fifteen minutes later they came back, with Dicky in tears. Macklyn looked at Lib with raised eyebrows. "The pooch seems to have taken off somewhere."

Dicky fought manfully for control. "Bob said any dogs that was caught out tonight wouldn't stand a chance," he said, "Bob said they'd shoot 'em on sight, Mum."

"Well, I suppose they would if they don't recognize the dog," Lib said. "But your Uncle Van and Uncle Digger and Uncle Fred all know him by sight. And Bob's with them. Sorrowful would go right up to Bob, wouldn't he?"

"If he got right up to them," Dicky said. "But it's almost dark; they might not see him before it was too late."

"I'm sure he didn't follow them," Lib said, not sure at all. "He's probably found himself a woodchuck somewhere."

"We'd hear him barking if he had a woodchuck," Dicky said.

"I'm sure he's all right, darling. Now you go get ready for bed. Gertrude will help you."

"I'd like to look once more," Dicky said.

"I'll keep an eye out for him, Dicky," Macklyn said. "As soon as he turns up, I'll bring him up to your room to you."

"Even if I'm asleep?"

"Even if you're asleep," Macklyn promised.

"Now run along to Gertrude, Dicky," Lib said.

Dicky trudged slowly off toward the kitchen.

"Poor Dicky," Lib said. "It will be awful for him if anything happens to Sorrowful."

"Might he have gone off with the hunters?" Macklyn asked.

Lib frowned. "Bob Streeter's been training him for Dicky. If Sorrow saw Bob going off with a gun under

his arm, he *might* have gone after him."

Macklyn had just got the Martinis mixed and poured when Gertrude came in from the kitchen looking for Dicky.

"I just sent him out to you — five minutes ago," Lib said. . . .

So Dicky was missing now. It *was* a conspiracy! Macklyn would have to go hunt for him, that was all there was to it. The first search was just around the place with Gertrude helping. But Dicky was nowhere around, it seemed, and Macklyn reported back to Lib with the unhappy conclusion that the boy must have set off after the hunters. The result was that Macklyn, reluctantly armed with Lib's shotgun, had set out to find him.

Half an hour after Macklyn had left, Dicky, rubbing sleepy eyes, came walking blandly in the front door.

"Dicky!" Lib said, trying not to sound angry.

"Sorrowful's shut up in the old milkhouse, Mum. Bob must have put him there before they started out."

"Didn't you hear us calling you, Dicky?"

"I — I went into the milkhouse, Mum, and lay down on an old blanket, with Sorrow," Dicky said. "He was awful glad to see me, Mum, and I guess I must of fallen asleep."

"Your Uncle Macklyn's out in the woods looking for you."

"Gee, Mum, I'm sorry. I just *had* to look for Sorrow once more, and when I found him —"

Lib sighed. "Well, off to bed with you, young man."

The relief at Dicky's return delayed Lib's recognition of a slowly mounting anxiety for Macklyn. It was when the clock on the mantel showed her that Macklyn had been gone nearly three hours that Lib's anxiety turned sharply into fear.

Macklyn screamed and screamed again. The monster, crouching over the man's body, lifted its head to look at Macklyn, without flinching or turning away. The terror, which had frozen Macklyn where he stood, now seemed to galvanize him into unreasoning action. The man down there was alive, and the dog must be got away from him. Even if he could have loaded the gun, Macklyn knew he wouldn't have dared fire it. His aim under the calmest circumstances would not have been reliable. If he had time to load and fire at the dog, he might quite easily kill the man he was trying to save.

After all it was just a dog — a mongrel dog!

Macklyn charged down the embankment into the clearing, waving his useless gun, shouting something unintelligible, meant to sound commanding, at the dog. Surely the yellow-eyed brute would turn tail and run in the face of Macklyn's arm-waving charge and shouting voice.

It did no such thing. It stood over the body, head half raised, hackles bristling along its spine.

Macklyn stopped. He was impelled to stop by those baleful yellow eyes that seemed, at close range, to glow like fire. Then the dog moved, slowly, tentatively, a step at a time — *toward Macklyn!* Suddenly, the moon was gone and it was pitch dark.

Thought processes undoubtedly took place in Macklyn's mind then. He could have sworn, afterward, that he weighed very carefully and judicially what he should do. He had the dog's attention now, God help him. If he could manage to get away and take the dog with him, the wounded man who lay just beyond him on the ground might be saved — if other dogs didn't come to the feast. If he thought those thoughts, it took him one second to veer off to his left and run into the blackness of the woods. He had not, it seemed, had time to think one all-important thought. He couldn't go fifty feet without being overhauled by the dog.

And the dog was coming after him.

It was crazy, despairing flight. He crashed into a tree, bounced off it, and went staggering through brush that tore cruelly at his face and hands, and the snarl of the dog was loud in his ears. The ground rose in front of him, and he went staggering up the slope, fell to his knees, and the dog was on him. Toenails, like steel claws, tore at the back of his neck and he could smell a hot, fetid breath that seemed to envelop him like a poison gas.

In the brief, hopeless flight, Macklyn had clung without reason to the unloaded gun. It was in his right hand, and he drove the butt backward with all his might. He could hear the grunt of the huge dog as the weapon struck him full in the stomach. The immense weight fell away from Macklyn's back for an instant.

The woods were full of an incredible sound which Macklyn realized was his own blubbering screech for help. For a moment he was free to move, and for a moment the moon reappeared. A brief glance over his shoulder showed Macklyn the dog picking himself up slowly from where he had fallen.

What it is that makes a man act with complete stupidity through most of a crisis, with only a moment here and there of absolute clarity, is for the psychiatrists to explain. In this moment of his extremity, Macklyn had an instant of cool, clear reason. He had staggered to his feet close to a tree with low-growing branches. He reached up to the nearest limb, gripped it, and swung his feet up. At the same moment he was nearly wrenched away from below.

The dog had jumped for him, and his teeth had fastened in the loose folds of Macklyn's trench coat. The dog yanked and pulled like a fighting tarpon on the end of a deep-sea fisherman's line. The palms of Macklyn's hands were rubbed clean of skin as he clung for his life.

Then the coat gave way with a tearing of cloth, and with his last ounce of strength Macklyn pulled himself up onto the limb of the tree, just as the dog leaped for him again. Hanging on

with one arm to the trunk of the tree, Macklyn jammed his foot hard against the dog's shoulder and sent him tumbling down into the underbrush. Then Macklyn climbed three or four limbs higher to safety. He stood looking down into a small patch of moonlight.

The dog crouched there, looking up at Macklyn. Just behind the dog, in the snow, lay the gun.

Pain was a part of the moment. Macklyn looked down at his raw and bleeding hands. He was shaking from the exertion of his climb. He reached up and gingerly touched the back of his neck where the dog's claws had raked at him. His fingertips came away wet with more blood. His whole body was bruised and aching from his violent collision with the tree.

Split-second decisions were no longer necessary. From his place of safety Macklyn could consider exactly what his next move should be. He knew he had been shouting at the top of his lungs and that there had been no answering shouts. Perhaps the same trick of the wind that had made the railroad seem so close had kept his voice from carrying to the hunters who were scattered through the woods. If he had been able to hang onto the gun, there would now have been time to discover how it loaded and fire it until the shots brought some of the others. But the gun lay in the snow just behind the dog.

The dog was evidently doing his own thinking, because now he tried to do something. He crouched for a moment and then ran at the tree. His momentum carried him, scratching and clawing, a few feet up the trunk. He actually managed to get his front paws over the lowest limb and hang there, trying to get a hold with his back feet. But after a moment he fell to the ground with a heavy thud. Watching him, fascinated, Macklyn guessed that he must weigh close to a hundred pounds.

Macklyn's concern was no longer for himself. He was safe here in the tree, and sooner or later someone would come. If he couldn't get help by periodic shouting, the hunters would discover he was missing when they got back to Lib's and would come searching for him. He was safe. It was cold, but not so cold that there was any danger of freezing. When the arm and hand with which he clung to the tree trunk grew a little numb, he could shift his position and cling with the other arm while circulation was restored in the numb member. He could stand or he could sit. He could hold out here for a good many hours, if he had to.

But there was urgent need for action long before that. The man back there in the clearing was badly hurt. He needed help at once, even if Macklyn could keep the dog's interest until someone came. If the dog realized that Macklyn was lost to him, he might very well go back to the clearing to the helpless man. And where there was one dog, there might be more close at hand. They might

already have crept into the clearing now that there was no one there to drive them off.

Macklyn watched the dog as if somehow, by concentrating on him, he could read the beast's mind. After a few moments the dog turned his head toward the clearing, his nose lifted as if he were sniffing the meal that waited for him there. Macklyn tore a small branch off the tree and threw it down at the dog. Instantly, the animal's attention returned to him, and the dog came to the foot of the tree, snarling and clawing angrily at the trunk.

Macklyn drew a deep breath and shouted at the top of his lungs. "Help! Help!" Then his heart seemed to nearly jam out between his ribs. From far away there was an answering "Hello-o-o."

Macklyn shouted again, a shout that ended in a strangled cough.

The dog stood like a statue at the base of the tree, listening, as the answer came again. It seemed just a little louder, a little closer. The dog turned restlessly away. Macklyn couldn't find another branch he could break off the tree. He fumbled in the pocket of his torn coat and found the handful of shells for the gun. He threw one at the dog and made a lucky hit. For a moment or two the dog's interest returned to Macklyn.

Macklyn shouted once more, and this time the answer seemed quite close. The dog froze where he was, his head turned back toward the clearing. Then, slowly, cautiously, he started toward it. Macklyn shouted at him, but the dog paid no attention. Then, suddenly he stopped. Macklyn could hear what had stopped him. Someone was coming through the bushes, evidently running.

Macklyn gave it all he had. "Look out!" he shouted. "One of the dogs is right here. A killer! Look out!"

Almost at the same instant a figure broke through the brush about twenty yards away. In the moonlight Macklyn could see him clearly. It was Van Anderson, his red hunter's cap pushed back on his head. He had a repeating rifle gripped in his hand.

"Van! Look out! To your left. *Your left!*"

Van turned and saw the dog, which quite deliberately was moving toward the man with the gun. The rifle went to Van's shoulder, and the dog rushed him at the same instant. The first shot threw the dog down as though he'd been slugged over the head, but he scrambled up again, snarling with rage. He was on his way toward Van again, one front leg dragging. Coldly, systematically, Van pumped bullets into the dog. The great creature rose up on his hind legs like some grotesque ballet dancer, clawed and bit at the air, and then toppled over into a snow-filled gully, twitched for a moment, and lay still.

Macklyn started to laugh, crazily, as he attempted to climb down the tree. Halfway down, he lost his hold and fell. For a moment consciousness left him.

When he came to, Van Anderson

was kneeling beside him, his arm around Macklyn's shoulders, trying to force the nozzle of a brandy flask between Macklyn's lips.

"God, Macklyn, what happened to you? What are you doing out here?" Perhaps it was the reflection from the snow that made Van's sharp, ascetic face look so pale.

"No time to explain," Macklyn muttered. "Back there in the clearing there's a man, badly hurt." He struggled to his feet with Van's help. There seemed to be many voices shouting now in the surrounding woods. Van's gun had done the trick.

Every movement Macklyn made was agony, but by clinging to Van's arm he was able to stagger back toward the clearing. It had seemed to him in his flight from the dog that he had covered miles. Actually it wasn't more than fifty or sixty yards. As they struggled through the brush Macklyn told his story, disjointedly.

"Dicky — I came looking for him. His dog followed Bob Streeter. I —"

"But Bob locked the dog in the milkhouse. I saw him!" Van said.

"Then we were wrong. But Dicky set out to find him. I came after — got to clearing — then that dog came. I thought, in moonlight, it was one of the calves that you'd set out for bait."

"That's what *is* there," Van said.

"No! The dog started to tear at it. It moved — I could see clearly — a man was thrashing about with a free arm. I ran down there to distract the dog — gun wasn't loaded —"

Macklyn stumbled over the remains of an ancient stone wall and into the clearing. The black heap in the center of it lay still now, motionlessly. Macklyn broke away from Van and staggered toward it. He knelt beside it and reached for it. Then he cried out.

He was kneeling beside the butchered carcass of a black Angus calf.

(*continued on page 122*)

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CHARLES GREEN**

TITLE: ***Compliments of Caliph Bernie***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Washington Square, New York City

TIME: A day in Spring

COMMENTS: *The captivating yarn of 16-year-old Bernie Halper, Caliph of Baghdad-on-the-Hudson, and how he brought romance to humdrum lives . . . a teen-ager with a jet-propelled imagination!*

THIS IS HOW I ALMOST GOT MYSELF murdered on account of Harun-al-Rashid.

It all started innocently enough. I was alone in the apartment, wondering how I was going to spend the evening. Mom and Pop were out celebrating their seventeenth wedding anniversary. Big deal — dinner, theater, night club.

Now I promised I'd be in bed by eleven o'clock. But it was still exciting to know that I *could* be exploring Chinatown after midnight, or Times Square, without anyone at home worrying about me.

And that got me to thinking about Harun-al-Rashid — you know, the Caliph in the *Arabian Nights* who would put on a disguise and then have all kinds of fascinating adventures as he prowled the streets of Baghdad.

So I got to free-wheeling in my mind on the idea of wandering through the streets. Talking with people. Solving their problems. Enriching their humdrum lives.

Well, *that* soon led to a dead end. I mean, the Caliph in old Baghdad wasn't Bernie Halper in new New York. But then I found myself staring at the phone book. It was in my lap because I had called *The New York Times* to find out if it was still illegal to import parrots.

A local dial call can't be traced. And there were all these millions of names in the directory. Like, for instance, that one heading the column: Horace W. Frisbie.

I tried to get a mental picture of Horace W. Frisbie. Rabbity little guy. Somebody's underpaid clerk. Takes a beating on his job. Another

beating when he gets home. It's 7:30, so he's had his dinner. Now he's sitting in his crummy living room. Reading a newspaper. A sad sack sweating out another dull evening.

Now why couldn't I do something about old sad sack Frisbie? Sure, I couldn't appear as the Caliph and put him in charge of my harem. But there ought to be *something* I could do. I thought about it a while, then I reached for the phone.

Here I ought to take time out to explain that, though I'm only sixteen, I've got a real deep voice. You hear me on the phone and you'd think I was Rocky Marciano. Not that I talk like the Rock, but — you know what I mean.

So I dialed the guy's number. The man who answered said yes, he was Mr. Frisbie. I asked if he was Horace *W.* Frisbie, of Riverside Drive. He again said yes, he was. Then I said, speaking slowly in this deep voice of mine, " I simply wanted to confirm that you were in town, Mr. Frisbie. Though I'm not at liberty at present to divulge any details, I may tell you that you'll soon be the recipient of some good news. Some *very* good news, sir. Congratulations, Mr. Frisbie." And I hung up.

There! Sad sack Frisbie is staring at the phone. Thinking of the good news in store for him. An inheritance, maybe? Some rich relative he'd never even known about? Frisbie is awake. Frisbie is alive. So what if he never gets the good news? The humdrum of his life has been shattered. An exciting, dramatic evening, for a change. Compliments of Bernie Harun-al-Rashid Halper.

You're doing great, Bernie, I thought. This is terrific!

I picked at random another name which happened to be Frank Doyle, and dialed *that* number. This time a woman answered. She said, when I asked for Mr. Doyle, that her husband was out and could she take a message.

"Yes," I said, "please tell Mr. Doyle that the operation on my little girl was successful and I'll be bringing her home soon. I also would like to take this opportunity to tell *you*, Mrs. Doyle, that your husband is the finest, most decent, most generous man that ever lived. I shall never forget what he's done for a comparative stranger who so desperately needed help. God bless you both!"

I pretty near had tears in my eyes when I hung up on that one. Maybe she always believed her husband was a selfish jerk. Now she's sitting there thinking how wrong she's been. When he denies knowing anything about that phone call, she naturally assumes he doesn't want to admit that he's really a softie at heart. It revises her entire opinion of him. And a marriage headed for the rocks — saved!

Bernie, old boy, I thought, you've really latched onto something. Most fascinating thing you've ever done.

And then I pulled a boner.

It happened when the moving finger found, and having found, dialed the number of Mr. Oliver B. Hirsh. I had a little master-minding all set up

for him. But the voice that answered barked, "Yes?" instead of saying, "Hello," and it was such a rough, tough voice that I found myself answering, "They got me, pal. Suitcase with the plates is checked at Grand Central. Tell Nick and the boys —" I moaned, made a rattling sound in my throat, and jarred the phone heavily as I hung up.

Well, that was pretty stupid. I was supposed to *help* people, not annoy them. Of course Hirsh knew it was just somebody playing a dopey gag on him. Why, it was as if Harun-al-Rashid had stooped to giving some sleeping beggar the hot foot!

I was scowling at the phone — and jumped when it rang. My God, I thought, Hirsh is some Big Shot in the phone company who *does* know how to trace a dial call. I was scared to answer it, but then I realized they'd probably send a police car if I didn't.

It turned out to be Joanie. "If you're not doing anything special, Bernie," she said in her timid manner, "I'm not either. Would you like to meet me in the Park?"

I was so relieved it was only Joanie that I said, "Okay. See you there in ten minutes."

Which, of course, was another boner. I've known Joanie all my life. A nice kid, really. But — a kid. Oh, I suppose she's perfectly normal for a fifteen-year-old, but with me it must be something glandular. I look, think, and act like someone years and years older. Which makes Joanie and me awfully incompatible, and is the reason why I'd been giving her the brush-off.

Now I was stuck with her. But not for too long, I reminded myself as I went down in the elevator. Her folks would flip their lids if she wasn't home by ten o'clock. Then I could go on playing Harun-al-Rashid. Despite the boner with Hirsh, I was still plenty hot on it.

Well, as it happened, I was playing it lots sooner than that. And not over the phone, either.

I was cutting toward Washington Square through one of those slummy Little Italy streets when I spotted the three old women sitting on a stoop. Not even talking to each other. Just sitting. Pitiful, beaten-down old crones. Life passing them by. Simply sitting there like zombies till it was time for them to creak off to bed.

Harun-al-Rashid, I thought, would have done something about them. This is challenge, Bernie. How about it?

An idea came through, and I darted across the street toward their stoop. Acting as if I was all excited and out of breath, I said to one of the women, "Did the ambulance get here yet, Ma'am?"

Honestly, you could almost hear their tired old motors revving up. "*Madre mia!*" the woman said, "Who for ambulance?"

I looked past her toward the house number. "This *is* the right address. Gee, I'd better call again."

And I tore off toward the corner. It must have taken me just seconds to

reach it, but when I glanced back over my shoulder they were already up on their feet. Jaws clacking, hands waving. So what if the ambulance never showed up. I'd breathed life into three zombies. I'd made their evening.

I had a tingling feeling all over as I turned the corner and crossed to enter the Park. Sure, it was fine to think of Frisbie in a tizzy over travel folders as he planned the cruise he'd take when he got his inheritance. And of Mrs. Doyle happily tearing up the letter she had meant to leave explaining why she was walking out on her husband. But this last thing was the real thriller. Personal contact. And proof that you didn't *have* to be a Caliph with a pocketful of gold.

So keep a-lookin', Bernie, old boy, I thought. You're bound to spot something that'll need the old Harun-al-Rashid touch.

I found a vacant bench near the Circle where I usually met Joanie. And I'd no sooner sat down when I had company. The woman was first to roost, making a sighing sound as she settled down toward the middle of the bench. A skinny little woman. Steel-rimmed glasses a bit crooked on a pink, bird-like face. Dusty flowers in her hat, greasy-looking black dress, white cotton stockings — details I never would have noticed before I got on this Harun-al-Rashid kick.

Now I had eyes to see that she was a lonely old maid who scratched away in some cubbyhole of a furnished room, occasionally creeping out for a breath of air on a park bench. To chisel a free newspaper from the trash can. Like the one now on her lap. Couldn't even afford to buy a paper from the tiny pension that just kept her from starving to death. Living in the past because there was nothing in her miserable present.

And the guy who came along next, plopping down on the opposite end of the bench, was also a sad specimen. Seedy-looking, though not exactly a bum. He didn't need a shave and he seemed sober. Middle-aged. Potbelly. Stupid round face that was like a million other faces. Probably a dishwasher in some beanery. Now in the Park to get the stink of the kitchen out of his nostrils.

There they sat, looking straight ahead, paying no attention to each other. Lonely, friendless couple of sad sacks, and too timid to do anything about it.

Promote it, Bernie, I thought. Goose 'em into starting a palship.

So I sat up and said, "That's funny! Now why did he do *that?*"

It woke them up, all right. They both jerked toward me, and the woman said, "Who did — why — what? I mean, what do you mean?"

"Somebody just took our picture," I said. "Through those bushes there. And then ducked out of sight around the monument." I let that sink in for a moment, then I bore down on the point I wanted to put across. "Now why should anybody want to take *our* picture? And be so — so *secretive* about it?"

Their heads kept turtling from me

to the bushes to the monument. And I had a wonderful feeling singing through me. Only seconds ago, they're total strangers. Then Bernie Harun-al-Rashid Halper does his bit of magic. And — contact! They share a mysteriously dramatic experience. Someone *secretly* took their picture. They wouldn't be human if they didn't yattata about it. One thing leading to another, the juices of palship start to flow. She's been living on crackers and canned milk. He's a dishwasher permitted to take home leftover food. Why, it couldn't miss!

The woman now turned to the guy next to her. "What do *you* make of it?" she asked.

He yawned and said, "Oh, just some camera bug taking candid shots of people. The kid imagined the rest of it."

"Yes, of course," she nodded.

The guy pushed back his hat, folded his hands over his potbelly, and closed his eyes for a snooze. Then *she* yawned as she got up from the bench. And off she went . . .

What a letdown! I knock my brains out on a couple of creeps who are positively beyond all hope. Old Harun-al-Rashid probably would have ordered their heads lopped off to put them out of their misery. Oh, well!

I reached for the rolled-up newspaper she had left on the bench. But someone beat me to it. An old shoeshine man with red, weepy eyes and a thick thatch of gray hair practically snatched it out of my hand as he shuffled on past our bench.

I glared after the old goat. Then the man at the other end of the bench opened his eyes and said, "Sonny Boy, for a minute there you almost gave me a heart attack."

Before I had a chance to reply to that extraordinary comment, a big thug-like character, wearing a cap and leather jacket, came between us to park himself where the little woman had been sitting. He jerked a thumb at me and said, "Take off, son. You don't want to be moping on a park bench."

"No, not yet, Lieutenant," the other man said. "We might need him as a witness. He saw Bessie leave the newspaper Gomez picked up."

I was trying to absorb the pure, sheer madness of it when the lieutenant said, "I saw it, too. So did Callahan and Shultz who —" he looked over his shoulder — "are now trailing Gomez into the men's room back there. And I *don't* like it, Brod."

"You don't like what?"

"That maneuver with the newspaper. Too obvious. And unnecessary. Look. Supposedly Gomez doesn't know we suspect he's pushing heroin in the Park here. And Bessie doesn't know we've been tipped off he gets his supply from her. Right?"

"Check," said Brod. "So?"

"So why not do it the simple easy way?" the lieutenant said "Gomez squats down to shine her shoes, and Bessie slips him a dozen decks of heroin. Lots less noticeable than the phony hocus-pocus with the newspaper. Well, maybe I'm wrong."

Honestly! A Davy Crockett on a tricycle darted in to pump a few bullets in us before he sped away. Familiar Washington Square. I'm supposed to be waiting to keep a date with Joanie, so that we may do whatever dopey things you can do with a kid like Joanie. And there, next to me, is something straight smack out of *Dragnet* or *Foreign Intrigue*.

But when you did a double take on it, it made sense, all right. What better way for a dope peddler to contact his customers than to pose as a shoeshine man in the Park? And the Syndicate that supplied him with dope couldn't have picked a more innocent-looking go-between than that little old maid.

But — Gomez drinks too much *Vino* one night. Shoots his mouth off to a Skid Row companion. Who happens to be a writer looking for material. The writer contacts the police. A trap is set. They're caught. I'm the star witness. And *I* wind up in a bucket of cement at the bottom of the East River! Why, it was enough to make your hair stand on end!

"Lieutenant," Brod said, "I think you're right. The boys won't find anything in that rolled-up newspaper. Bessie deliberately conned us into tipping our hand. Now they'll shift operations elsewhere, and we're back where we started."

I began to breathe easier, when the lieutenant said, "Did anything happen here that might have alarmed Bessie? The confab between her, you, and the kid — what was that all about?"

"Yeah," said Brod, a nasty edge to his voice. He leaned forward so that he could face me. "I want straight answers, sonny. First, why did you keep staring at us?"

"I wasn't staring," I said. "It's just that I'm interested in people. I mean, I think people are fascinating, don't you?"

He said, "You wouldn't be a little bit nuts, would you?"

"Well, what's wrong with being interested in people?" I said. "Some of our greatest thinkers —"

"Never mind. You still claim you spotted someone taking our picture through the bushes there?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did he look like?"

"Medium-sized," I improvised. "Wore a brown zoot suit and one of those flat-brimmed hats. Nothing special about his face except around the mouth. I mean, one corner of it was pulled up a bit, as if it was a scar that didn't heal properly. Also I seem to remember he limped a little when he ran around the monument."

A pretty good job on such short notice, I thought, of convincing him I really saw the little man who wasn't there.

Only — it was too good!

Because Brod kind of blinked and said, "Joe Evans? Used to be one of Lombardi's hoods. Could be, eh, Lieutenant? Scar pulling up one corner of his mouth. Bum leg."

"But," the lieutenant said, "it doesn't make sense."

And Brod came back, "If the kid

identifies Evans as the joker with the camera, I may get answers that do make sense. Evans is a three-time loser who's got to keep his nose clean." His eyes returned to me as he pulled out a pencil and a notebook. "What's your name, kid?"

Well, the last thing in God's world I wanted was being asked to identify some underworld killer who'd think I was trying to frame him. So, of course, I had to give Brod a phony name. And I blurted out the first name that popped into my mind, "Oliver B. Hirsh."

He was writing it down when I realized what I had done. Why, it was the name of the last guy I'd telephoned! With that crazy they-got-me-pal message.

"Address and phone number?" Brods asked next.

By this time I was so rattled that I *really* went off the deep end. Like an absolute maniac, I gave Brod my *own* address and phone number! And those went into his little black notebook.

So there I was again — dying. Brod telephones when he's ready to pick me up to identify Joe Evans. Pop, say, answers the phone. Tells Brod no Oliver B. Hirsh lives there. Brod gives Pop my description. About sixteen years old. Looks a lot like Van Johnson. Oh, says Pop, that's my son Bernie, but I don't understand why he told you his name was Oliver B. Hirsh. I don't either, says Brod, but I'm sure as hell going to find out. Over at Headquarters. In the basement.

And that's *the least* that could happen. Because — well, take Joe Evans. Three-time loser. Desperate criminal going straight only because he knows that another conviction means a life term. And then the cops come to pick him up. Of course he'll decide Brod must be trying to frame him. He grabs a gun. They shoot it out. Brod is killed. Joe Evans is fatally injured. Dying, he swears he'd never even been near Washington Square that evening. The lieutenant looks at dead Brod, dying Evans. And then *he* goes to check on the phony Oliver B. Hirsh who's responsible for all that bloody carnage.

No, you've had it, Bernie, I decided. Take the small rap now, instead of the big one later. Tell them the truth. *Right now.*

I said, "Lieutenant?"

He turned and looked at me with fishy eyes. And there were Brod's mean little eyes. And I just couldn't go through with it. It seemed absolutely impossible even to *begin* to explain this Harun-al-Rashid business.

But I'd already stuck my neck out. So with both of them looking at me I said, "If Bessie intended to conduct some illegal transaction on a park bench, why didn't she pick a vacant bench? Plenty of them around. But she settled on this bench even though I was already sitting here."

"So?" said the lieutenant.

Now I was going to point out something as obvious as Brod's potbelly: Bessie not caring who else was on the bench proved she hadn't any heroin

to pass over. But then I decided it wouldn't be smart to make them feel like a couple of eggheads for not having thought of it themselves. So I did a last-moment switcheroo.

"Maybe there's something *special* about this particular bench," I said. "Like — well, suppose Bessie has reason to suspect detectives may be watching her when she slips the dope to Gomez. All right, so she comes earlier and somehow attaches the heroin to the bottom of a certain bench where it wouldn't be noticeable to anyone else. Then she returns to that bench. But she still plays it cagey. First, she leaves the newspaper for Gomez to pick up. Just to check if Gomez gets pounced on. Afterwards, she —"

"Hold it, Oliver," the lieutenant said.

He reached down between his legs as if to scratch his ankle. After a few moments he sat up, drew a cigar from his pocket, and got busy lighting it.

"Well, it was just a thought, Lieutenant," I said. "I mean, if I'd been right and the thing *was* there —"

"It's there, Oliver," he said.

"*What!*" said Brod.

And the lieutenant said, "A package taped to the underside of one of the seat slats. Wouldn't be somebody's discarded chewing gum."

Honest to God, it was terrifying. I mean, I was some kind of mad genius and didn't know it! They'd want my brain preserved in the Smithsonian Institution.

"Package planted earlier," the lieutenant went on in a dreamy voice. "Taped to one of the seat slats. Then a dry run with the newspaper. Simple and beautiful. And it's also a lovely thought that Bessie will now spring the trap she herself has baited. For she'll certainly be back to retrieve the stuff."

Brod cleared his throat. "I'm prepared," he said, "to love Oliver like my own flesh and blood. Even though there's still something about him that gives me the funniest feeling."

"I know what you mean," the lieutenant said. He turned to me. "Oliver, you've been a great help to us. We appreciate it. But now we'll just have to struggle on somehow all on our own. Can you think of something to do that'll keep you out of this Park for the rest of the evening?"

"Oh, yes, sir," I said.

"Then do it, Oliver. Take off."

And wouldn't you know that just then Joanie would come rushing toward me, yapping, "Hi, Bernie! Sorry I'm late, but I had to run an errand"?

"Bernie?" Brod clipped. "Why does she call you Bernie?"

Oh, brother! Well, if I was going to fall through the ice anyway, I might as well keep walking until it happened. So I told Brod, "It's the B. in Oliver B. Hirsh. My middle name. Stands for Bernard. But everybody calls me Bernie."

Brod jabbed a finger toward Joanie. "What's his name?"

And without a second's hesitation, innocent-looking little Joanie said in

her high, clear voice, "Why, it's like he told you. His name is Oliver B. Hirsh, but everybody calls him Bernie."

Brod didn't say anything else. He just sort of waved us on.

My legs felt wobbly when I led Joanie from there. Talk about narrow escapes! What if Joanie *hadn't* covered me? Oh, says Brod, so you gave me a phony name, eh? Well, you and I are going to have a nice long chat, see? Downtown. Let's find out how many more lies you told me.

All right, so it turns out Brod isn't such a bad guy. No blinding lights. No rubber hose. He listens to my story. Realizes I meant well, only things got tangled up. No hard feelings, Bernie, Brod says finally. After all, if it weren't for you, we wouldn't have been able to catch Bessie.

Does it end there? Oh, no. There's a reporter hovering in the background. Leave it to those newshawks to sniff out a good story. Next thing I know I'm a front-page hero. Signing autographs. Making guest appearances on TV shows. Enjoying my brief blaze of glory — until Mr. Big over at the Syndicate quietly picks up the phone. And the word goes out. *Get Bernie Halper.* Blow his brains out. Why, come to think of it, Joanie really saved my life!

Which reminded me. "Why did you do it, Joanie?" I asked. "You knew I was lying."

"Oh, *that*," said Joanie. "Well, if you wanted that tough-looking man to believe you're Oliver B. Hirsh, that's what I wanted too. Because that's how I feel about you, Bernie."

There was a sudden lump in my throat. None of the sophisticated glamor babes I'd been chasing around with would have said it in such a crude, inarticulate manner. But coming from Joanie, it sounded exactly right.

I looked at her, and it was as if I was seeing her for the first time. She's wonderful, I thought. The lump in my throat slid down to my chest, and it began melting, soft and warm.

"Joanie," I said, "from now on you're my girl."

"Oh, Bernie," she said, and she squeezed my hand.

Things got all choked up for a little while.

Then I said, "Don't you want me to tell you what happened back there?"

"If you feel you should — all right, Bernie," she said. "But you don't *have* to tell me."

A jewel, that Joanie. The diamond in my own backyard. I come rushing in with a briefcase. Hide it under your mattress, Joanie, I say. Don't tell anyone about it. Loyal, faithful, trusting.

And maybe that's what old Harun-al-Rashid was *really* looking for when he prowled in disguise through the streets of Baghdad. The Caliph of all Arabians searching, searching for something that Bernie Halper was able to find on his maiden effort, so to speak. I mean, it was something to think about.

H. G. Wells has been called "one of the titans of modern English literature." Whatever posterity may decide, he was certainly one of the most versatile writers who ever lived. Serious novelist, historian, scientific writer, and fantasist extraordinary, he averaged more than a book a year from 1895 until his death in 1946. Mr. Wells's serious novels included such magnificent books as ANN VERONICA, TONO-BUNGAY, *and* THE HISTORY OF MR. POLLY; *his work in history and science, such monumental achievements as* THE OUTLINE OF HISTORY *and (in collaboration with his son and Julian Huxley)* THE SCIENCE OF LIFE; *and his science-fiction, such classics as* THE TIME MACHINE, THE INVISIBLE MAN, *and* WHEN THE SLEEPER AWAKES. *All told, H. G. Wells's life was one of inspiring courage in the face of ill health, and spectacular success in the face of devastating criticism. With the publication of* KIPPS: THE STORY OF A SIMPLE SOUL, *Mr. Wells discovered that he possessed a rich store of humor. Before his death, he could write of himself, in a mock obituary: "He was one of the most prolific of the 'literary hacks' of his time."*

MR. BRISHER'S TREASURE

by H. G. WELLS

"YOU CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL WHOM you marry," said Mr. Brisher, and pulled thoughtfully with a fat-wristed hand at the lank mustache that hides his want of chin.

"That's why —" I ventured.

"Yes," said Mr. Brisher, with a solemn light in his bleary, blue-gray eyes, moving his head expressively and breathing alcohol intimately at me. "There's lots as 'ave 'ad a try at me — many as I could name in *this* town — but none 'ave done it — none."

I surveyed the flushed countenance, the equatorial expansion, the masterly carelessness of his attire, and heaved a sigh to think that by reason of the unworthiness of woman he must needs be the last of his race.

"I was a smart young chap when I was younger," said Mr. Brisher. "I 'ad my work cut out. But I was very careful — very. And I got through . . ."

He leaned over the taproom table and thought visibly on the subject of my trustworthiness. I was relieved at last by his confidence.

"I was engaged once," he said at last, with a reminiscent eye on the shuv-a'penny board.

"So near as that?"

He looked at me. "So near as that.

Fact is—" He looked about him, brought his face close to mine, lowered his voice, and fenced off an unsympathetic world with a grimy hand. "If she ain't dead or married to someone else or anything — I'm engaged still. Now." He confirmed this statement with nods and facial contortions. "*Still*," he said, ending the pantomime, and broke into a reckless smile at my surprise. "*Me!*

"Run away," he explained in further confidence, with coruscating eyebrows. "Come 'ome.

"That ain't all.

"You'd hardly believe it," he said, "but I found a treasure. Found a regular treasure."

I fancied this was irony, and did not, perhaps, greet it with proper surprise. "Yes," he said, "I found a treasure. And come 'ome. I tell you I could surprise you with things that has happened to me." And for some time he was content to repeat that he had found a treasure — and left it.

I made no vulgar clamor for a story, but I became attentive to Mr. Brisher's bodily needs, and presently I led him back to the deserted lady.

"She was a nice girl," he said — a little sadly, I thought. "*And* respectable."

He raised his eyebrows and tightened his mouth to express extreme respectability — beyond the likes of us elderly men.

"It was a long way from 'ere. Essex, in fact. Near Colchester. It was when I was up in London — in the buildin' trade. I was a smart young chap then, I can tell you. Slim. 'Ad best clo'es 's good as anybody. 'At — *silk* 'at, mind you." Mr. Brisher's hand shot above his head towards the infinite to indicate a silk hat of the highest. "Umbrella — nice umbrella with a 'orn 'andle. Savin's. Very careful I was . . ."

He was pensive for a little while, thinking, as we must all come to think sooner or later, of the vanished brightness of youth. But he refrained, as one may do in taprooms, from the obvious moral.

"I got to know 'er through a chap what was engaged to 'er sister. She was stopping in London for a bit with an aunt that 'ad a 'am-an'-beef shop. This aunt was very particular — they was all very particular people, all 'er people was — and wouldn't let 'er sister go out with this feller except 'er other sister, *my* girl that is, went with them. So 'e brought me into it, sort of to ease the crowding. We used to go walks in Battersea Park of a Sunday afternoon. Me in my topper, and 'im in 'is; and the girls — well — stylish. There wasn't many in Battersea Park 'ad the larf of us. She wasn't what you'd call pretty, but a nicer girl I never met. *I* liked 'er from the start, and, well — though I say it who shouldn't — she liked me. You know 'ow it is, I dessay?"

I pretended I did.

"And when this chap married 'er sister — 'im and me was great friends — what must 'e do but arst me down to Colchester, close by where She lived. Naturally I was introjuced to

'er people, and, well, very soon, her and me was engaged."

He repeated "engaged."

"She lived at 'ome with 'er father and mother, quite the lady, in a very nice little 'ouse with a garden — and remarkable respectable people they was. Rich, you might call 'em a'most. They owned their own 'ouse — got it out of the Building Society, and cheap because the chap who had it before was a burglar and in prison — and they 'ad a bit of free'old land, and some cottages and money 'nvested — all nice and tight: they was what you'd call snug and warm. I tell you, I was On. Furniture too. Why! they 'ad a pianner. Jane — 'er name was Jane — used to play it Sundays, and very nice she played too. There wasn't 'ardly a 'ymn toon in the book she *couldn't* play. . . .

"Many's the evenin' we've met and sung 'ymns there, me and 'er and the 'ole bloomin' rest of 'er family.

" 'Er father was quite a leadin' man in chapel. You should ha' seen him Sundays interruptin' the minister and givin' out 'ymns. He had gold spectacles, I remember, and used to look over 'em at you while he sang 'earty — he was always great on singing 'earty to the Lord — and when *he* got out o' toon 'arf the people went after 'im — always. 'E was that sort of man. And to walk be'ind 'im in 'is nice black clo'es — 'is 'at was a brimmer — made one regular proud to be engaged to such a father-in-law. And when the summer came I went down there and stopped a fortnight.

"Now, you know there was a sort of 'itch," said Mr. Brisher. "We wanted to marry, me and Jane did, and get things settled. But 'e said I 'ad to get a proper position first. Consequently, there was a 'itch. Consequently, when I went down there, I was anxious to show that I was a good and useful sort of chap. Show I could do pretty nearly everything like. See?"

I made a sympathetic noise.

"And down at the bottom of their garden was a bit of wild part like. So I says to 'im, 'Why don't you 'ave a rockery 'ere?' I says 'It 'ud look nice.' "

" 'Too much expense,' " he says.

" 'Not a penny,' says I. 'I'm a dab at rockeries. Lemme make you one.' You see, I'd 'elped my mother make a rockery in the beer garden be'ind 'is tap, so I knew 'ow to do it to rights. 'Lemme make you one,' I says. 'It's 'olidays, but I'm that sort of chap. I 'ate doing nothing,' I says. 'I'll make you one to rights.' And the long and the short of it was, he said I might.

"And that's 'ow I come on the treasure."

"What treasure?" I asked.

"Why!" said Mr. Brisher, "the treasure I'm telling you about, what's the reason why I never married."

"What! — a treasure — dug up?"

"Yes — buried wealth — treasure-trove. Come out of the ground. What I kept on saying — regular treasure."

He looked at me with unusual disrespect.

"It wasn't more than a foot deep, not the top of it," he said. "I'd 'ardly got thirsty like, before I come on the corner."

"Go on," I said. "I didn't understand."

"Why! Directly I 'it the box I knew it was treasure. A sort of instinct told me. Something seemed to shout inside of me — 'Now's your chance — lie low.' It's lucky I knew the laws of treasure-trove or I'd 'ave been shoutin' there and then. I dare say you know — ?"

"Crown bags it," I said, "all but one per cent. Go on. It's a shame. What did you do?"

"Uncovered the top of the box. There wasn't anybody in the garden or about like. Jane was 'elping 'er mother do the 'ouse. I *was* excited — I tell you. I tried the lock and then gave a whack at the hinges. Open it came. Silver coins — full! Shining. It made me tremble to see 'em. And jest then — I'm blessed if the dustman didn't come round the back of the 'ouse. It pretty nearly gave me 'eart disease to think what a fool I was to 'ave that money showing. And directly after I 'eard the chap next door — 'e was 'olidaying too — I 'eard him watering 'is beans. If only 'e'd looked over the fence!"

"What did you do?"

"Kicked the lid on again and covered it up like a shot, and went on digging about a yard away from it — like mad. And my face, so to speak, was laughing on its own account till I had it hid. I tell you I was regular scared like at my luck. I jest thought that it 'ad to be kep' close and that was all. 'Treasure,' I kep' whisperin' to myself, 'Treasure' and ''undreds of pounds, 'undreds, 'undreds of pounds.' Whispering to myself like, and digging like blazes. It seemed to me the box was regular sticking out and showing, like your legs do under the sheets in bed, and I went and put all the earth I'd got out of my 'ole for the rockery slap on top of it. I *was* in a sweat. And in the midst of it all out toddles 'er father. He didn't say anything to me, jest stood behind me and stared, but Jane tol' me afterwards when he went indoors, 'e says, 'That there jackanapes of yours, Jane' — he always called me a jackanapes some'ow — 'knows 'ow to put 'is back into it, after all.' Jane said that 'e seemed quite impressed by it, 'e did."

"How long was the box?" I asked suddenly.

"'Ow long?" said Mr. Brisher.

"Yes — in length?"

"Oh! 'bout so — by so." Mr. Brisher indicated a moderate-sized trunk.

"*Full?*" said I.

"Full up of silver coins — 'arf-crowns, I believe."

"Why," I cried, "that would mean — hundreds of pounds."

"Thousands," said Mr. Brisher, in a sort of sad calm. "I calc'lated it out."

"But how did they get there?"

"All I know is what I found. What I thought at the time was this. The chap who'd owned the 'ouse before 'er father'd been a regular slap-up burglar. What you'd call a 'igh-class criminal. Used to drive 'is trap — like Peace did." Mr. Brisher meditated on the difficulties of narration and embarked on a complicated parenthesis. "I don't know if I told you it'd been a burglar's 'ouse before it was my girl's father's, and I knew 'e'd robbed a mail train once, I did know that. It seemed to me —"

"That's very likely," I said. "But what did you do?"

"Sweated," said Mr. Brisher. "Regular run orf me. All that morning I was at it," said Mr. Brisher, "pretending to make that rockery and wondering what I should do. I'd 'ave told 'er father, p'r'aps, only I was doubtful of 'is honesty — I was afraid he might rob me of it like, and give it up to the authorities — and besides, considering I was marrying into the family, I thought it would be nicer like if it came through me. Put me on a better footing, so to speak. Well, I 'ad three days before me left of my 'olidays, so there wasn't no hurry, so I covered it up and went on digging, and tried to puzzle out 'ow I was to make sure of it. Only I couldn't.

"I thought," said Mr. Brisher, "*and* I thought. Once I got regular doubtful whether I'd seen it or not, and went down to it and 'ad it uncovered again, just as her ma came out to 'ang up a bit of washin' she'd done. Jumps again! Afterwards I was just thinking I'd 'ave another go at it, when Jane comes to tell me dinner was ready. 'You'll want it,' she said, 'seeing all the 'ole you've dug.'

"I was in a regular daze all durin' dinner, wondering whether that chap next door wasn't over the fence and filling 'is pockets. But in the afternoon I got easier in my mind — it seemed to me it must 'ave been there so long it was pretty sure to stop a bit longer — and I tried to get up a bit of a discussion to drawr out the old man and see what '*e* thought of treasure-trove."

Mr. Brisher paused, and affected amusement at the memory.

"The old man was a scorcher," he said; "a regular scorcher."

"What!" said I; "did he — ?"

"It was like this," explained Mr. Brisher, laying a friendly hand on my arm and breathing into my face to calm me. "Just to drawr 'im out, I told a story of a chap I said I knew — pretendin', you know — who'd found a sovring in an overcoat 'e'd borrowed. I said 'e stuck to it, but I said I wasn't sure whether that was right or not. And then the old man began. Lor! 'e *did* let me 'ave it!" Mr. Brisher affected an insincere amusement. "'E was, well — what you might call a rare 'and at snacks. Said that was the sort of friend 'e'd naturally expect me to 'ave. Said 'e'd naturally expect that from the friend of a out-of-work loafer who took up with daughters who didn't belong to 'im. There! I couldn't tell you '*arf* 'e said. 'E went on most outrageous. I

stood up to 'im about it, just to drawr 'im out. 'Wouldn't you stick to a 'arf-sov', not if you found it in the street?' I says. 'Certainly not,' 'e says; 'certainly I wouldn't.' 'What! Not if you found it as a sort of treasure?' 'Young man,' 'e says, 'there's 'igher 'thority than mine — "Render unto Caesar" ' — what is it? Yes. Well, he fetched up that. A rare 'and at 'itting you over the 'ead with the Bible, was the old man. And so he went on. 'E got to such snacks about me at last I couldn't stand it. I'd promised Jane not to answer 'im back, but it got a bit *too* thick. I — I give it 'im. . . ."

Mr. Brisher, by means of enigmatical facework, tried to make me think he had had the best of that argument, but I knew better.

"I went out in a 'uff at last. But not before I was pretty sure I 'ad to lift that treasure by myself. The only thing that kep' me up was thinking 'ow I'd take it out of 'im when I 'ad the cash . . ."

There was a lengthy pause.

"Now, you'd 'ardly believe it, but all them three days I never 'ad a chance at the blessed treasure, never got out not even a 'arf-crown. There was always a Something — always.

"'Stonishing thing it isn't thought of more," said Mr. Brisher. "Finding treasure's no great shakes. It's getting it. I don't suppose I slep' a wink any of those nights, thinking where I was to take it, what I was to do with it, 'ow I was to explain it. It made me regular ill. And days I was that dull, it made Jane regular 'uffy. 'You ain't the same chap you was in London,' she says, several times. I tried to lay it on 'er father and 'is snacks, but bless you, she knew better. What must she 'ave but that I'd got another girl on my mind. Said I wasn't true. Well, we had a bit of a row. But I was that set on the treasure, I didn't seem to mind a bit anything she said.

"Well, at last I got a sort of plan. I was always a bit good at planning, though carrying out isn't so much in my line. I thought it all out and settled on a plan. First, I was going to take all my pockets full of these 'ere 'arf-crowns — see? — and afterwards — as I shall tell.

"Well, I got to that state I couldn't think of getting at the treasure again in the daytime, so I waited until the night before I had to go, and then, when everything was still, up I gets and slips down to the back door, meaning to get my pockets full. What must I do in the scullery but fall over a pail? Up gets 'er father with a gun — 'e was a light sleeper, was 'er father, and very suspicious — and there was me: 'ad to explain I'd come down to the pump for a drink because my water-bottle was bad. 'E didn't let me off a snack or two over that bit, you lay a bob."

"And you mean to say —" I began.

"Wait a bit," said Mr. Brisher. "I say, I'd made my plan. That put the kibosh on one bit, but it didn't 'urt the general scheme not a bit. I went and I finished that rockery next day, as though there wasn't a snack in the

world; cemented over the stones, I did, dabbled it green, and everything. I put a dab of green just to show where the box was. They all came and looked at it, and said 'ow nice it was — even 'e was a bit softer like to see it, and all he said was, 'It's a pity you can't always work like that, then you might get something definite to do,' he says.

" 'Yes,' I says — for I couldn't 'elp it — 'I put a lot in that rockery,' I says, like that. See? 'I put a lot in that rockery' — meaning —"

"I see," said I — for Mr. Brisher is apt to over-elaborate his jokes.

"'*E* didn't," said Mr. Brisher. "Not then, anyhow.

"'Ar'ever — after all that was over, off I set for London . . . Orf I set for London . . ."

Pause.

'On'y I wasn't going to no London," said Mr. Brisher, with sudden animation, and thrusting his face into mine. "No fear! What do *you* think?

"I didn't get no further than Colchester — not a yard.

"I'd left the spade just where I could find it. I'd got everything planned and right. I 'ired a little trap in Colchester, and pretended I wanted to go to Ipswich and stop the night, and come back next day, and the chap I 'ired it from made me leave two sovrings on it right away, and off I set.

"I didn't go to no Ipswich neither.

"Midnight the 'orse and trap was 'itched by the little road that ran by the cottage where 'e lived — not sixty yards off, it wasn't — and I was at it like a good 'un. It was jest the night for such games — overcast — but a trifle too 'ot, and all round the sky there was summer lightning and presently a thunderstorm. Down it came. First big drops in a sort of fizzle, then 'ail. I kep' on. I whacked at it — I didn't dream the old man would 'ear. I didn't even trouble to go quiet with the spade, and the thunder and lightning and 'ail seemed to excite me like. I shouldn't wonder if I was singing. I got so 'ard at it I clean forgot the thunder and the 'orse and trap. I precious soon got the box showing, and started to lift it . . ."

"Heavy?" I said.

"I couldn't no more lift it than fly. I *was* sick. I'd never thought of that! I got regular wild — I tell you, I cursed. I got sort of outrageous. I didn't think of dividing it like for the minute, and even then I couldn't 'ave took money about loose in a trap. I hoisted one end sort of wild like, and over the whole show went with a tremenjous noise. Perfeck smash of silver. And then right on the heels of that, Flash! Lightning like the day! And there was the back door open and the old man coming down the garden with 'is blooming old gun. He wasn't not a 'undred yards away! I tell you, I was that upset — I didn't think what I was doing. I never stopped — not even to fill my pockets. I went over the fence like a shot, and ran like one o'clock for the trap, cussing and swearing as I went. I *was* in a state . . .

"And will you believe me, when I got to the place where I'd left the 'orse and trap, they'd gone. Orf! When I saw that I 'adn't a cuss left for it. I jest danced on the grass, and when I'd danced enough I started off to London . . . I was done."

Mr. Brisher was pensive for an interval. "I was done," he repeated, very bitterly.

"Well?" I said.

"That's all," said Mr. Brisher.

"You didn't go back?"

"No fear. I'd 'ad enough of *that* blooming treasure — any'ow, for a bit. Besides, I didn't know what was done to chaps who tried to collar a treasure-trove. I started off for London there and then . . ."

"And you never went back?"

"Never."

"But about Jane? Did you write?"

"Three times, fishing-like. And no answer. We'd parted in a bit of a 'uff on account of 'er being jealous. So that I couldn't make out for certain what it meant.

"I didn't know what to do. I didn't even know whether the old man knew it was me. I sort of kep' an eye open on papers to see when he'd give up that treasure to the Crown, as I hadn't a doubt 'e would, considering 'ow respectable he'd always been."

"And did he?"

Mr. Brisher pursed his mouth and moved his head slowly from side to side.

"Not '*im*," he said.

"Jane was a nice girl," he said, "a thorough nice girl, mind you, *if* jealous, and there's no knowing I mightn't 'ave gone back to 'er after a bit. I thought if he didn't give up the treasure I might 'ave a sort of 'old on 'im . . . Well, one day I looks as usual under Colchester — and there I saw 'is name. What for d'yer think?"

I could not guess.

Mr. Brisher's voice sank to a whisper, and once more he spoke behind his hand. His manner was suddenly suffused with a positive joy. "Issuing counterfeit coins," he said. "Counterfeit coins!"

"You don't mean to say —"

"Yes — It. Bad. Quite a long case they made of it. But they got 'im, though he dodged tremenjous. Traced 'is 'aving passed, oh! — nearly a dozen bad 'arf-crowns."

"And you didn't — ?"

"No fear. And it didn't do '*im* much good to say it was treasure-trove."

"O"

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DONALD MCNUTT DOUGLASS**

TITLE: ***You Don't Argue with the Captain***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: At sea, between Maine and Connecticut

TIME: May, last year

COMMENTS: *A fascinating story that held your Editors' interest from first word to last — and especially fascinating, you will discover, are the last 43 words of the final paragraph.*

IT'S A SMALL TOWN WITH A RATHER gay crowd. Not fast, as we know the fast set down here, but gay — pleasure-seeking, if you will. We had known Jim and Jerry Sexton for years, ever since we moved there, but I didn't know them well until after Marjorie and I broke up. She didn't want me to. But after the divorce I was unattached, and it appeared that there is nothing a gay crowd in a small town likes better than a spare man or two. There are always widows, visiting girl friends, sisters, and such, and having no home life, I was always available. Bill Hooker, being a bachelor, was the other man hostesses could always count on.

The epicenter of the crowd was the Sextons. They were childless and filthy rich, with the fixed idea that an evening without a party of some kind was utterly wasted. As a consequence, for over a year I'd seen the two of them — and Bill Hooker — perhaps on an average of four times a week. We would see one another at the Club or at someone's house, at picnics on the beach in summer and at the football games in fall, at bowling and theater parties in winter and spring.

And yet we weren't intimates. I yield to no man in my admiration for Jerry Sexton. She was a dish — far and away the prettiest girl in town, small, dark, with a straight little nose, largish mouth, enormous eyes, and the trimmest little figure that ever filled a bathing suit. And she was warm, fun to be with, with the gift of enthusiasm and *joie de vivre*, and always laughing. She would laugh at

my jokes which, I have been told, are somewhat bearded. And she used to laugh at Bill Hooker's jokes, which annoyed me — and, I think, her husband — because Bill's jokes had a furtive, leering quality that I find more obscene than the frankly ribald. Meeting at a party, she would kiss me, but that was common practice. Whenever I tried to get her alone, I was repulsed kindly but with that certain firmness that you know means business.

And certainly I had no intimacy with her husband. As far as I knew, no one did. Jim threw splendid parties and was always ready to go along on any hare-brained junket that was proposed. And he was affable and a good hand at anecdote. But one never seemed to get through to him. Talking politely, you weren't sure of what he was thinking or even if he was listening. A big, cold sort of brute. He seemed especially cold to Bill Hooker, who was one of those tall, good-looking, sleek characters, the best dancer in the Club, a professional ladies' man if I ever saw one. He even used to make passes at Marjorie.

And he made plenty of passes at Jerry. How far he got I wouldn't know. Maybe Jim did. These lady-killers are transparent enough to men, but some mighty smart girls get taken in. Jerry and Bill were seen a couple of times dining *tête-à-tête* in the city, and once Jim and I saw the same incident. They had ended a dance together and were coming over toward us. She was wearing long black gloves, and the folded paper in her palm showed. She saw it and tucked it in quickly. If I noticed it, Jim must have seen it, too. And he didn't turn a hair.

That was the background, so to speak, with regard to the Sextons, Bill Hooker, and myself when Jim called me up. I had never talked with him on the phone before — Jerry had always made the invitations and accepted them. Now Jim said that he had bought a sailboat, that it had been overhauled in Maine, and would I like to crew for him and help him bring her down. It put me back on my heels but I thought quickly about sailing that summer on Long Island, for free, with Jerry on board, and I said I'd be delighted.

I didn't know why Jim had asked me but then I thought, who would he ask? He knew I could get off when most men couldn't and he knew I was keen on sailing. And I was interested. Jim hadn't described the sailboat, but I was sure whatever craft he'd buy would be a good one. And I'd never been to Maine, and Jerry was very beautiful.

Jim gave me all the instructions. He insisted that I would be under no expense. I was simply to be at La Guardia at a certain time. Otherwise he was handling everything.

There was another surprise at the airport. I discovered a second crew member waiting — Bill Hooker, not in the least the outdoor type. I had thought Jim detested Hooker. But Jim was extraordinarily affable to us. On the plane he sat with Bill just

ahead of me and kept laughing heartily at what I presumed to be a string of Bill's off-color stories.

Bill had never been in Maine either, and Jim shepherded us about as though we were two tails to a dog. During lunch, and afterward riding out to the boatyard, he was gayer than I had ever seen him. The answer, I thought to myself, must be that he was excited about his boat and about finding helpers who could take ten days off and didn't mind going to Maine in May.

The deeper we got into it, the more I was convinced that this was so. People do live up there, of course, but they are all natives, if you know what I mean. To softies from southern Connecticut, May in Maine is a deep wet freeze. We had mackinaws, Viyella shirts, and red flannels, but nothing could keep out that bitter cold.

At the yard, we could see Jim's boat riding at anchor. They told us she was almost shipshape.

Finally all papers were signed, and the dinghy was laden to the gunwales with an anchor that had been forgotten, a mainsail just repaired, flashlights, gear, stores, and two cases of whisky and ice — as if we needed ice. The sun was going down and the pier and harbor were deserted when we shoved off and waved goodbye to the yard foreman. He turned and hurried away, probably to a nice warm house and a nice fat wife, and he didn't see our struggles against wind and tide, or know of my first taste of fear. It wasn't far to row, but when we lost the protection of a little spit of land, the wind hit us fair. I was rowing and suddenly realized that we were making no headway whatever and were shipping water with every stroke of the oars. It's a nasty feeling. I pulled with a little more strength than I was worth, and Jim pushed, but we were simply overloaded. If his boat *Simplissimus* had been moored ten feet farther out, we would have filled and someone else would have had to christen her. With our impedimenta, we would have sunk like three stones.

But we made it and, safe on board with the fire going and the bottle uncorked, the boat and life suddenly looked sweet. I, for one, never thought about Jerry.

The boat was fifty-one feet long, with narrow beam and deep draft; it had beautiful lines and was beautifully finished. One knew at a glance that she'd be fast and perhaps a little tender. She had a forecabin, a main cabin, and a separate master's cabin aft. The only unconventional features were two portholes in the master's stateroom, high up, but in the hull itself. I spoke of them at once and Jim laughed. "Naturally," he said, "you keep them buttoned up tight when you're under way. But I imagine they're a darn good feature in a calm harbor on a hot night."

As far as one could see she was a new boat, with new standing rigging, new sheets and lines. The galley was scrumptious and she had a lovely direction-finder and fathometer, but no ship-to-shore telephone. That,

Jim said, had been ordered but would be installed back in Connecticut. A boat like that is a wholly lovely thing and, cold or not, I was glad I'd come.

And I was glad the next morning, too. Dawn, after all, is more invigorating than sunset. And there is a rather exciting feeling of adventure at the start of a voyage.

There was one funny thing though — strange because it wasn't in character. Jim had new headsails, four of them, but the only mainsail on board, and the one we set, was this patched job we had ferried out the night before. He said the new one they had sent hadn't fitted properly, which is all very well but it would have been insurance. This miserable piece of canvas on that sweet boat was an absolute anachronism. I'm no purist. A patch can be a mark of distinction, proving that the sail has been to the wars, but this rag had a patch all along the foot. When they go there they're rotten, and I told Jim so. But he shrugged it off, said we'd have to make it do.

I was wrong about her being tender. She would heel under the gentlest zephyr but then she'd stiffen and, with a wind such as we had that day, she'd pile on the knots with the rail down, low but dry. I believe I got as much pleasure out of her as Jim Sexton did. I could only think of her as a beautiful animal. Bill Hooker, on the other hand, though willing enough, was obviously no sailor. He was out of his element, all thumbs, and constantly in the way.

I wondered why we had brought him.

Our landfall was the harbor of Monhegan, if you can call those two heaps of stone a harbor. The place looked utterly deserted, but an old gaffer materialized and sold us six magnificent baby lobsters.

The next day there was more weather. The Kenyon was up to ten and Bill had run out of stories. We were tearing along and I remember remonstrating with Jim as well as I could. "Why don't you reef?"

Jim looked at me with that amused look he seemed to have acquired. "Not getting the wind up, are you, old boy?"

"Hell, no," I said. "I enjoy it. But the wind *is* up, and that main is going to blow."

It wasn't twenty minutes later when she did. I could have drawn a diagram, right along the foot, at the stitching of the patch.

"You were right, Cristoforo," Jim said. "The world is round. So you take the tiller. I'll lower away." And he seemed to take a satisfaction of some kind out of the whole affair. It was damned bad management, boyish, immature. But you can't argue with the captain. And, actually, it was not serious. We had been running before the wind and would probably continue to do so. And we had, of course, the motor.

We needed that motor. The following wind kept building up and up, until none of us liked it. Poor Bill was completely miserable.

On the chart we found a cove that looked promising and we headed for it. With the mast bare, we nosed in and found it a harbor of refuge. The protecting land was low and uninhabited except by a small flock of sheep; but some thoughtful Coast Guard officer had moored a large red buoy, and we tied up happily.

The next day, and the next, it blew. We had grandstand seats for a gale. A hundred yards away we could see the angry sea, thirty feet from trough to crest, roaring down the coast. Inside our little cove, the rigging hummed and sang and slapped, but we rode well enough, and it was revealing to see the captain, who had been so careless about the mainsail, now scrupulously careful of our safety. Checking on our mooring, he found signs of chafe. He warped us up and secured us fast with the chain. He ran the motor to keep the batteries up, checked his lights and tools, and fed us royally.

On board *Simplissimus* Jim Sexton was a changed man, utterly different from the one I had known. One sensed a man with a purpose, confident, relaxed, and with great good nature. I must say the change was welcome. I had not exactly been nervous about it, but I had originally accepted the invitation with mixed emotions. Now I found myself actually liking the guy.

Bill and I scrubbed and washed up, but Jim did all the cooking and the food was so superb one couldn't believe that most of it came from tins. Just the same, sitting there with little to do was boring. I couldn't warm up to Bill. That sort of life is intimate; you get right inside the other fellow's brain. Bill, I found, had a simple one. It was simply filthy. This constant stream of anecdote, *double entendre*, and speculation about the female sheep we could see on shore was enough to make you gag.

When the wind lessened on the third day, my vote would have been to cast off and proceed. But Jim vetoed the suggestion. Ten days, he had said, and we could still make it in that. But this had been the devil of a storm, I said; wouldn't Jerry be worried about him? He stopped what he was doing and looked at me in a funny way. "Jerry," he said, "never worries about *me* when I'm on a boat."

As I say, one doesn't argue with the captain.

The next day was fine, a dash of sun and enough wind so that, with the genoa pulling, we were making a steady seven or eight knots all day, and sailed into Gloucester before sundown. We went ashore and separated by a kind of mutual consent. I was late getting back to the Yacht Club and had got myself pretty thoroughly poached, but Jim was there waiting for me with the dinghy. And, do you know, squiffed as I was, I gained the impression that Jim was seriously worried about losing me.

The following night we succeeded in getting through Cape Cod Canal before dark and anchored in Onset.

That was the end of the seventh day and I was thoroughly fed up with hearing about the tart Bill had picked up the night before. Jim was beginning to get on my nerves, too. He seemed to be growing progressively gayer — not boyish exactly, but almost childish. Laughing when there was nothing to laugh about, horseplay — that sort of thing. It was irritating because it was obviously put on.

The next day the wind was almost dead astern, we had the headsails wing and wing, the big jib rigged to port, the genoa to starboard. That heeled her over to her sweetest lines. She almost sailed herself.

It was getting dark, and we had passed Point Judith and were heading for Watch Hill breakwater, when Jim said with an unnecessary laugh, "Well, you might as well turn on the engine." I did that and she ran along, sweet and smooth as always. And then, suddenly, she stopped.

Actually, I was rather pleased. If there's one thing I know about, it's motors. It gave me a little problem to work on. We had gassed up that morning at Onset, probably with dirty fuel, so it sounded like a clogged fuel line. Bill had learned by this time to hold a compass course; he took the stick and Jim and I went below.

If there is any fault in *Simplissimus* it is in her engine mounting. She was evidently designed for a smaller motor and to get at it takes squeezing. We opened the little hatch aft the master's cabin, I crawled in, and Jim stuck his head in after me. We both had flashlights. I checked the spark and the wiring. It had to be the fuel.

I remember the smell, gas and grease and oil and paint, and the eerie light of our two flashlight beams crossing each other. I'm not always quick at the signals. When I saw it I said, "What the —?" and looked at Jim's face, not a foot away from mine. Then I knew, fast like that, that the smell of gas and grease and oil and paint was the smell of danger.

He was grinning at me, amusedly wondering what I would say.

I sort of stuttered, "The pin in the carburetor — it's gone."

"That's funny," Jim said. "It must have joggled loose."

So we spent a half hour at the fantastic masquerade of searching that motor compartment for a carburetor pin we both knew was not there, while my mind raced round and round asking, *Why?*

Carburetor pins don't joggle loose. In a looping, spinning aircraft they don't joggle loose. They can't. I suppose I could have faced up to him and said, "Look here, bud, what's the pitch?" but if I had he would have said I must be mistaken, it must have joggled loose. No, for some obscure reason, Jim just didn't want his motor functioning. And the reason was not only obscure.

It was ominous.

Jim was jocular and undisturbed. He had sailed thousands of miles without a motor. If the wind held we would just keep going, and slide into

harbor without touching a sheet. If the wind changed we could make a jury-rigged mainsail out of the staysail. We wouldn't go into any intermediate harbors — we would head straight for home. It was about six o'clock and Fisher's Island Sound was coming up ahead. Jim would cook our supper, take a six-hour watch himself and then we could take over.

Sitting there at the tiller, with Bill silent and hunched beside me, I could smell bacon and something else delicious. Jim had a trick of mixing crisp bacon into curried or newburged dishes that lifted them out of this world. That smell was the most disarming thing that could happen. I must be wrong. What Jim was up to I didn't know. Down on the motor I had sensed, rather than seen, danger. Now, through the odor of cooking, I sensed reassurance.

And I was right, the dish was wonderful. Jim must be up to some sort of joke.

Three highballs later, and I hadn't a care in the world. The boat was scudding along over the long swells as smooth as glass. Tomorrow at this hour we should be home. When we went below Jim had even washed up.

Bill and I turned in immediately and I was the first one snoring.

Jim woke us with two short blasts of the horn, and that wasn't so pleasant. It was one o'clock, still cold, with six hours of silent sitting ahead of us. Bill and I had got so we hardly spoke. Again I wondered why we had him along.

We had been sitting there maybe half an hour, not dozing, rather dopey, when something broke loose up forward and a fitting started slatting against the mast.

Bill looked at me across the binnacle lamp as though it was my responsibility, but I had the tiller and stared right back at him. He got the idea and started forward. The damned fool was a hopeless landlubber and chose the lee rather than the high side.

He was just scrambling up on deck when he yelled, "Hey!" — and went overboard.

A thing like that is so surprising that for a moment one doesn't do anything. Then I started to jerk on the twine that holds the ring buoy. When that didn't come I tried the other one, and that was fast, too. So I got out my knife, cut them loose, and threw them aft as far as I could throw. They were certainly fouled up. Both of them had emergency lights that should have flared up the second they hit the water, but neither of them did. Then I did what I suppose I should have done in the beginning — I sounded the horn and tried to bring her about, which isn't so easy when you're sailing wing and wing.

Jim came pounding up the ladder. "What the hell are you doing?" he shouted.

"Man overboard!" I shouted back.

He went for the rings, saw they were gone, and raced up forward to lower the jenny. During all this time

I'm not sure whether I heard Bill call or not. I think I did.

"How far back?" Jim demanded.

"A long way," I said. "The damned knots weren't slipknots at all. I had to cut them. And the lights didn't light."

"Humph!" said Jim. "Probably tied those knots himself and fiddled with the lights to see how they worked. Well, rest in peace, Bill."

"My God!" I said. "We've got to try."

"Don't be a fool," he answered. "Even if he got to a ring which, with all those clothes on, is probably impossible, you know we couldn't make headway in that direction."

It was then that I noticed that the left sleeve and shoulder of his shirt were sopping wet.

He saw me looking at it. In the dim light I could see his teeth flash in a smile. "There's nothing we can do, son. Accidents will happen. Better get back on course. I'll change my clothes and set the genoa again."

He was below a long time.

There are different kinds of fright. During most of life there are people about or within reach — of your voice at least — I mean, either you're alone, man to man, or you're in the company of others. Here I was in the company of one other, a friend ostensibly, a social acquaintance at least, a murderer surely. There's no place to scramble. There's no other human agency within call. The sensation is not nice. You try not to think, but you do and, then, the shakes start.

Maybe he'd bought the boat for that one purpose — those operating portholes in the hull. There were windows, of course, in the after-bulkhead of his cabin. From them, you could not see into the cockpit; but, sitting on the bunk with one arm out of the porthole, you could have seen a man climbing up on deck. One reach and a jerk . . .

Heeling as she'd been, we must have shipped a lot of water. Maybe not too much: his shoulder would have plugged the opening. I supposed he was cleaning up, now.

How long had he been waiting? And how long would he have done so?

And then I noticed that the fitting was no longer slapping about. It had sounded like the bronze snap-fitting on the main halyard. And I had to think again. What would be simpler than to tie the fitting to the mast with light twine and to break it loose with stouter line, run through his porthole? That would start it rattling, and one of us would have had to go forward.

I shook and put the thought of "one of us" out of my mind as swiftly and completely as I could. Jim knew that I would have gone forward on the high side. No, he was not after me. He'd been gunning for Bill, and he'd got him. Everything else — the split sail, the carburetor pin, the snagged ring buoys — all were just to make sure. And now he had secured the fitting when he lowered the sail.

And what was the purpose in taking me? Well, if he and Bill had been

alone, and Bill was lost, and it was known that Bill and Jerry . . . there would have been questions asked. Now it was open and shut. Bill and I were on the deck, the captain was below, after standing a six-hour watch alone. Bill fell overboard. It was airtight, cast-iron. Unless I talked.

That started a new fit of shaking. He seemed so sure I wouldn't.

Jim came up finally and set the jenny. Again we traveled wing and wing. It was just the same — same night, same stars, same wind and water — only different now, two little Indians instead of three.

He waited until dawn before he showed me how sure of me he was. All his boyish gaiety had gone. Again he was the big, cold brute.

"Now tell me?" he said. "What really happened?"

Dawn had refreshed me and I permitted myself a bit of bravado. "You know as well as I do. Bill fell overboard and, because we had no mainsail and no motor, we couldn't pick him up. The reason we had no motor was because the carburetor pin had joggled loose — or was taken."

It was a tactical error on my part. He took his time about answering. "No, you were wrong about that pin," he said. "You said it wasn't there and I took you at your word. But just now I checked again. It's been there all the time. I should have known — it couldn't joggle loose. You made a mistake. Probably the fuel line has been clogged or something. And you made a number of other mistakes, chum. You did not instantly come about. You, as an experienced sailor, know that rule. Nor did you instantly summon me."

"You can't instantly do everything at once," I protested. "I was trying to throw him a ring."

"But even that, you told me, you didn't do instantly."

"I couldn't. I had to cut them loose."

"That evidence, unfortunately, went overboard with Bill Hooker."

"Look!" I said, beginning to sweat.

"And you look," he said. "When I asked you two to crew for me, I knew you were not intimate. But I thought you were friends. It was only on this cruise that I came to realize there was bad blood between you. You weren't even civil to him since the first day out. *You* knew we had no mainsail and no motor. *You* knew we couldn't retrace our course. You *two* were *alone* in the cockpit. Bad blood breeds bad blood. You are a sailor, he was not. You outweighed him twenty pounds. Would you like to have these facts brought out in court?"

Well, that's the story. I never saw him smile again, and I hope I never will. I figure it this way: I live here in Bermuda, I like Bermuda, why shouldn't I stay?

I console myself, if that's the word, with one thought: If I had gone forward instead of Bill, and if I had gone forward on the lee side (which is faintly possible), I'll bet Jim Sexton would have pinned a murder charge on poor Bill Hooker, and he'd have made it stick, too.

Robert Graves is now famous both as a poet and a novelist . . . It was the stimulating influence of Siegfried Sassoon, with whom he served as an officer in the same regiment of Royal Welsh Fusiliers, that made Mr. Graves begin to write poetry in earnest; and by 1917, before he left active military service, Robert Graves had three volumes of poetry published. Nelson Algren has compared Graves to Skelton in wit and satire, and has appraised Graves's poetry of 1939 as "richer and more original even than his verse of 1916 . . . The leaven of sadness of his early work is replaced more and more by terror."

Then in 1934, with the appearance of I, CLAUDIUS, *Robert Graves won an international reputation as a novelist. The Claudius novels have been described as "magnificent reconstructions of Roman life."*

But let us get back to the more modern note in Robert Graves's poetry — what Nelson Algren pinpointed as "terror." Remember that when you read the chilling little tale by Mr. Graves that we now offer you . . .

We are deeply grateful to Damon Knight for having called "this wonderful little story" to our attention.

THE STEINPILZ METHOD

by ROBERT GRAVES

ELSIE AND ROLAND HEDGE — SHE a book-illustrator, he an architect with suspect lungs — had been warned against Dr. Eugen Steinpilz. "He'll bring you no luck," I told them. "My little finger says so decisively."

"You too?" asked Elsie indignantly. (This was at Brixham, South Devon, in March, 1940.) "I suppose you think that because of his foreign accent and his beard he must be a spy?"

"No," I said coldly, "that point hadn't occurred to me. But I won't contradict you." I was annoyed.

The very next day Elsie deliberately picked a friendship — I don't like the phrase, but that's what she did — with the Doctor, an Alsatian with an American passport, who described himself as a *Naturphilosoph;* and both she and Roland were soon immersed in Steinpilzerei up to the nostrils. It began when he invited them to lunch and gave them cold meat and two rival sets of vegetable dishes — potatoes (baked), carrots (creamed), bought from the local fruiterer; and potatoes (baked) and carrots (creamed), grown on compost in his own garden.

The superiority of the latter over the former in appearance, size, and especially flavor came as an eye-opener to Elsie and Roland; and so Dr. Steinpilz soon converted the childless and devoted couple to the Steinpilz method of composting. It did not, as a matter of fact, vary greatly from the methods you read about in the *Gardening Notes* of your favorite national newspaper, except that it was far more violent. Dr. Steinpilz had invented a formula for producing extremely fierce bacteria, capable (Roland claimed) of breaking down an old boot or the family Bible or a torn woolen vest into beautiful black humus almost as you watched.

The formula could not be bought, however, and might be communicated under oath of secrecy only to members of the Eugen Steinpilz Fellowship — which I refused to join. I won't pretend therefore to know the formula myself, but one night I overheard Elsie and Roland arguing as to whether the planetary influences were favorable; and they also mentioned a ram's horn in which, it seems, a complicated mixture of triturated animal and vegetable products — technically called "the Mother" — was to be cooked up. I gather also that a bull's foot and a goat's pancreas were part of the works, because Mr. Pook, the butcher, afterwards told me that he had been puzzled by Roland's request for these unusual cuts. Milkwort and pennyroyal and bee-orchid and vetch certainly figured among "the Mother's" herbal ingredients; I recognized these one day in a gardening basket Elsie had left in the post office.

The Hedges soon had their first compost heap cooking away in the garden, which was about the size of a tennis court and consisted mostly of well-kept lawn. Dr. Steinpilz, who supervised, now began to haunt the cottage like the smell of drains; I had to give up calling on them. Then, after the Fall of France, Brixham became a war-zone whence everyone but we British and our Free French or Free Belgian allies was extruded. Consequently Dr. Steinpilz had to leave; which he did with very bad grace, and was killed in a Liverpool air-raid the day before he should have sailed back to New York.

I think Elsie must have been in love with the Doctor, and certainly Roland had a hero-worship for him. They treasured a signed collection of all his esoteric books, each titled after a different semi-precious stone; and used to read them out loud to each other at meals, in turns. And to show that this was a practical philosophy, not just a random assembly of beautiful thoughts about Nature, they began composting in a deeper and even more religious way than before. The lawn had come up, of course; but they used the sods to sandwich layers of kitchen waste, which they mixed with the scrapings from an abandoned pigsty, two barrowfuls of sodden poplar leaves from the recreation ground, and a sack of rotten turnips. Once I caught the fanatic gleam in Elsie's eye as she turned the hungry

bacteria loose on the heap, and could not repress a premonitory shudder.

So far, not too bad, perhaps. But when serious bombing started and food became so scarce that housewives were fined for not making over their swill to the national pigs, Elsie and Roland grew worried. Having already abandoned their ordinary sanitary system and built an earth-closet in the garden, they now tried to convince neighbors of their duty to do the same, even at the risk of catching cold and getting spiders down the neck. Elsie also sent Roland after the slow-moving Red Devon cows as they lurched home along the lane at dusk, to rescue the precious droppings with a kitchen shovel; while she visited the local ash-dump with a packing case mounted on wheels, and collected whatever she found there of an organic nature — dead cats, old rags, withered flowers, cabbage stalks, and such household waste as even a national wartime pig would have coughed at. She also saved every drop of their bath-water for sprinkling the heaps; because it contained, she said, valuable animal salts.

The test of a good compost heap, as every illuminate knows, is whether a certain revolting-looking, if beneficial, fungus sprouts from it. Elsie's heaps were gray with this crop, and so hot inside that they could be used for haybox cookery; which must have saved her a deal of fuel. I called them "Elsie's heaps," because she now considered herself Dr. Steinpilz's earthly delegate; and loyal Roland did not dispute this claim.

A critical stage in the story came during the Blitz. It will be remembered that trainloads of Londoners, who had been evacuated to South Devon when War broke out, thereafter de-evacuated and re-evacuated and re-de-evacuated themselves, from time to time, in a most disorganized fashion. Elsie and Roland, as it happened, escaped having evacuees billeted on them, because they had no spare bedroom; but one night an old naval pensioner came knocking at their door and demanded lodging for the night. Having been burned out of Plymouth, where everything was chaos, he had found himself walking away and blundering along in a daze until he fetched up here, hungry and dead-beat. They gave him a meal and bedded him on the sofa; but when Elsie came down in the morning to fork over the heaps, she found him dead of heart failure.

Roland broke a long silence by coming, in some embarrassment, to ask my advice. Elsie, he said, had decided that it would be wrong to trouble the police about the case; because the police were so busy these days, and the poor old fellow had claimed to possess neither kith nor kin. So they'd read the burial service over him and, after removing his belt buckle, trouser buttons, metal spectacle-case, and a bunch of keys, which were irreducible, had laid him reverently in the new compost heap. Its other contents, he added, were a

cartload of waste from the cider factory and salvaged cow dung.

"If you mean 'Will I report you to the Civil Authorities?' the answer is no," I assured him. "I wasn't looking at the relevant hour, and, after all, what you tell me is only hearsay."

The War went on. Not only did the Hedges convert the whole garden into serried rows of Eugen Steinpilz memorial heaps, leaving no room for planting the potatoes or carrots to which the compost had been prospectively devoted, but they regularly scavenged offal from the fish market. Every Spring, Elsie used to pick big bunches of primroses and put them straight on the compost, without even a last wistful sniff; virgin primroses were supposed to be particularly relished by the fierce bacteria.

Here the story becomes a little painful for readers of a family journal like this; I will soften it as much as possible. One morning a policeman called on the Hedges with a summons, and I happened to see Roland peep anxiously out of the bedroom window, but quickly pull his head in again. The policeman rang and knocked and waited, then tried the back door; and presently went away. The summons was for a blackout offense, but apparently the Hedges did not know this.

Next morning the policeman called again, and when nobody answered, forced the lock of the back door. They were found dead in bed together, having taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. A note on the coverlet ran simply:

Please lay our bodies on the heap nearest the pigsty. Flowers by request. Strew some on the bodies, mixed with a little kitchen waste, and then fork the earth lightly over. *E.H., R.H.*

George Irks, the new tenant, proposed to grow potatoes and dig for victory. He hired a cart and began throwing the compost into the River Dart, "not liking the look of them toadstools." The five beautifully clean human skeletons which George unearthed in the process were still awaiting identification when the War ended.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MIGNON G. EBERHART**

TITLE: ***Dangerous Widows***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Mr. Wickwire, elderly bachelor

LOCALE: Near Stamford, Connecticut

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Which widow was a murderess? Naturally, one would shield herself with a lie, and the other would shield herself with the truth . . .*

ONE OF MY WIDOWS TELEPHONED to me at 1 o'clock, Friday, and the other telephoned to me at 3 o'clock, Friday, and both of them invited me urgently to spend the weekend at their country place.

Neither, however, was a social invitation; each widow said frankly she was in need of my advice. In fact, it was an invitation to murder.

In literal fact, too, neither woman was my widow in the accepted sense. They were Henry Briggs's widows. Both, however, were very likely to fall within my scope of duty for I am a banker, elderly enough to be entrusted with the somewhat difficult chore of advising, coaxing, cajoling, and generally acting as nursemaid to widows who seem strangely determined to invest in nonexistent uranium ore deposits, and dry oil wells.

The two Mrs. Briggs were Henry's wives; one was his first wife, Frances Briggs, divorced and never remarried; the other, Eloise Briggs, was his second and the official Mrs. Briggs. Henry Briggs was one of my old clients. And the country house each referred to was the same country house, for it had been left to them, jointly, by his will.

Consequently a rather delicate situation was in the making. I took the 5:30 train to Stamford.

While Henry Briggs had been a client of the bank's for a long time, especially during his last illness, and I had had much to do with his affairs, I had never met either of his wives.

I cannot say that I faced the prospect with any pleasure. I do not like strife or emotions, and both were far too likely to develop. As I got out of the train and looked down the long platform I wondered which one would meet me and thus possibly endeavor to get in her claims first.

Neither did. A thick-set, red-faced man, done to a turn in flagrantly country clothes, approached me and said with a hearty manner, "Mr. Wickwire?"

I nodded. He put out a large red hand. His face was jovial and friendly; he had shrewd, cold-blue eyes. "I'm Al Muller — friend of Henry's. The station wagon is this way."

I said, "Quite so," and followed him.

He put my bag in the station wagon, and wedged himself, puffing, behind the wheel. "I'm staying at the house. Thought I might be of some service to them." He negotiated a turn amid traffic.

I said, "Indeed."

His blue eyes shot me a rather narrow glance. "Yes. Frances — that's the first wife — arrived Thursday night by train. Henry was buried that afternoon, you'll remember. Eloise — that's the second wife — was here, of course."

I said, perhaps rather dryly, "And when did you arrive, Mr. Muller?"

He paused to examine a road sign rather deliberately. "Oh, I came up later Thursday night. Seemed to me I owed it to Henry. It's an odd situation, leaving the property like that. Do you know either of the Mrs. Briggs?"

Something about his manner went against my grain. I said stiffly that I hadn't had that pleasure.

He chuckled. "They're as like as two peas in a pod — extremely attractive women. You'll see. And there's a fight brewing there, mark my words. Neither is the sort to give up easily. I don't envy you, Mr. Wickwire."

"I am in no sense an arbiter. That is for the lawyers." I spoke coldly enough to penetrate even Mr. Al Muller's hide. We concluded our ride along the winding country roads in silence.

The house and grounds, when we reached them, proved to be on a rather lavish scale, with velvety lawns, swimming pool, tennis court, gardens. It represented, I knew, the whole of Henry Briggs's property; he had had a fairly large income, but had lived up to it. I had arrived at an approximate sum which I thought the property might fetch and was deducting, in my mind, such things as possible capital gains and taxes when we drew up at the white-columned entrance.

Here two women stood, waiting; both advanced to greet me as I got out of the car. And at least in one instance Muller was right; allowing for possibly fifteen years' difference in age they were very much alike. Both slender, fine-featured, blonde, and extremely attractive.

The younger, the official Mrs. Briggs spoke to me first, putting out a

jeweled hand toward mine; she introduced me to the first Mrs. Briggs, while Al Muller stood watching with a rather stupid grin on his red face and a very watchful look in those shrewd eyes. We went at once into the house.

A maid took my bag upstairs. Cocktails were set out on a tray in the spacious living room. It was an imposing room, full of what might be called objects of art and dominated by a huge portrait of Henry Briggs, done apparently when he was a rather young man, at least twenty years before his death.

Eloise, the younger Mrs. Briggs, in her proper role of hostess, saw to it that I was comfortably seated, and asked me my preference as to cocktails. In the soft light from the table lamps the likeness between the two woman diminished. They were the same general type — that was all.

The first Mrs. Briggs, Frances, was thinner, and finer-drawn than the second, with darker hair but penetrating blue eyes. She wore a simple, inexpensive white cotton dress and no jewelry beyond her wedding ring.

Eloise was almost beautiful, with a magnolia skin, soft red mouth, and a rather luxuriant figure. Her dress was simple, too, but even my bachelor eyes perceived that it was an expensive simplicity; a diamond bracelet sparkled on her wrist.

It was Eloise who, again assuming her unquestionably correct position of authority, said that, if I agreed, both she and the other Mrs. Briggs preferred to postpone our discussion of business until morning. I agreed, most sincerely. Al Muller helped himself to another drink, at which both Mrs. Briggs looked at him coldly. The maid who had taken my bag announced dinner.

Aside from the fact that Al Muller became talkative in a jovial, rallying way, it was a quiet and merely social dinner. Not a word that was said, not a gesture, suggested potential strife between the two Mrs. Briggs. They were, in short, perfect ladies.

The evening was an early one. Eloise showed me to my room. "I hope you'll not mind coming down to breakfast," she said. "The maid lives in the village and goes home at night."

I assured her that it didn't matter. "By the way, Mrs. Briggs, exactly why did you ask me to come here?"

She hesitated for a scond. Then she came close to me; her lovely mouth smiled invitingly. She put both hands appealingly on my arm. "Because I need your help."

Perfume wafted toward me; there was a deep glow in her eyes. I recoiled slightly. "I'm afraid the only help I can give you is to advise you to put the settlement of the estate in the hands of your lawyer."

Her hands, of necessity, dropped. She eyed me for a moment. Then she said, "Of course. Good night, Mr. Wickwire."

It was all very calm, all very polite. But there was something very wrong in the house. I was obliged to wait,

however, until the house was quiet before I went quietly downstairs again and out the door. I took the road to the village. It was a dark night, with scudding clouds.

The village was still lighted, and the drug store had a pay telephone booth.

There are certain shortcuts to certain kinds of information which a banker knows. Nevertheless, since it was by then rather late, it took some time to accomplish my purpose.

Fortunately, in a way, I was under the interested observation of the young man behind the soda fountain the whole time, and indeed, I bought several magazines and an ice cream soda from him. He had, however, told me that he'd have to shut up shop in another ten minutes when my New York call came through.

He turned off the lights as I left the drug store and took my way back to the Briggs's house. It seemed a rather short walk for I was thinking deeply, and it was with a sense of surprise that I turned in at the gates.

I stopped there, struck with another kind of surprise. The house was ablaze with lights. And then I heard the thud of automobiles. Indeed, I ducked out of the driveway barely in time as the first one took the curve and shot up to the entrance.

Other cars and motorcycles followed it. By the time I had run across the grass and reached the house the entire village constabulary as well as state troopers were swarming into the house, where Al Muller lay, dead of a revolver shot, on the rug below, Henry's portrait.

I pushed my way in, passing Eloise and Frances, white and frightened, in the hall.

Al Muller's thick body lay apparently as it had fallen. His too fancy country oxfords were sprawled wide apart. His brightly checked jacket was crumpled. A gun lay near his hand.

It was dawn when the police at last went away. Both Mrs. Briggs, exhausted and tense with strain, went upstairs as the last police car disappeared down the drive. I watched them go. And I wondered which one had murdered him.

Not that the police called it murder. The inquiry had been a long one and their questions had been many; they had taken our fingerprints; they had determined the ownership of the gun, which had belonged to Henry. But they had been guarded and reticent. They had not — as yet — called it murder.

They had listened to my own story, which luckily the young man in the drug store could substantiate. They had listened to the stories of the two Mrs. Briggs, which were identical. Each had been awakened, she said, by the sound of the shot; each had waited a few moments, questioning it; they had come into the hall at almost the same time and then downstairs together to find Al Muller dead.

They had telephoned for the police. They had tried to arouse me and discovered my absence. They had been

afraid that I, too, had been a victim of some robber who might still be about the grounds. When asked if either of them believed that Al Muller had been depressed by Henry's death to the point of suicide both appeared doubtful.

It was not suicide. It was murder.

But I didn't know which one had murdered him. I listened as their light footsteps, the whisper of their movements, died away above. Then I went back to the living room. Al Muller's body had been removed but the room still seemed to hold his presence, and it was not a pleasant one.

The room was in considerable disorder — chairs pushed around, the rug upon which Al Muller had died rolled up into a corner, small tables and lamps shoved aside carelessly; the portrait of Henry Briggs hung slightly askew on the wall.

I preferred not to touch the rug, or even approach it, but being a banker and a bachelor and somewhat finicky in habits of tidiness, I straightened the chairs and tables. No clues of course; I hadn't really expected there would be. I went to Henry's huge portrait with its heavy frame and straightened that, too. It seemed rather oddly out of place. Someone's shoulder must have brushed against it.

I measured, rather absently, my own shoulder height below the portrait. I am not a tall man, but the lower corner of the gilded frame was at least a foot above my own shoulder. So someone's hand had pushed it aside. I stood looking at Henry for a moment. Then I got a chair and climbed on it and looked behind the portrait.

Some time later I straightened the portrait carefully, got down from the chair, restored it to its place, and sat down in it. Something was going to happen, and it would happen soon.

I cannot say it was a pleasant wait. I hoped there was not another gun in the house. Somewhere a clock was ticking with an ominous, warning note as if to remind me of the fleeting quality of time.

It had run out swiftly for Al Muller. I am not a brave man; when I heard the faint rustle of a woman's garment on the stairway, and the very soft whisper of footsteps, I had to force myself to remain — waiting.

She must have seen the light in the room; still she thought it was empty for when she appeared as quietly as a ghost in the doorway and saw me she caught her breath and flung both hands to her throat. It was Frances, the first Mrs. Briggs.

After a moment she came toward me, her négligée gathered around her. Her fine eyes were very bright. "I didn't know you were here. I came to — to look. I had to see if there was anything the police didn't see. Mr. Wickwire — Eloise killed him."

It was, of course, in the cards. One of them would accuse the other; indeed, each might accuse the other of being the murderess — one because she must shield herself with a lie, the other because she must shield herself with the truth.

I said, "Why?"

Her hands moved toward each other. "I don't know. But I think it had something to do with money. Al Muller was simply not the kind of man to come here and stay here out of sympathy. He wanted something."

"Mrs. Briggs, why did you send for me?"

Her bright eyes didn't waver. "Because Muller was here. I didn't trust him. I was going to ask you to get rid of him. But I know Eloise killed him because I didn't. And there was no one else."

"I didn't kill him," Eloise said clearly from the doorway. "So it must have been you!" She was wearing a long floating négligée, and she had a gun in her hand.

Violence has never been, so to speak, my dish. I felt a kind of creeping chill up my backbone. But I had to get both women and myself out of the room and, of course, I'd have to get that gun.

I said, "We are all very tired. I suggest that you two ladies — er — dress while I prepare some sort of breakfast for us." I went to Eloise. "Whose gun is that?"

"Mine. Henry got it for me."

"What were you going to do with it?"

She looked at me. "I don't know," she said blankly and, I think, truthfully.

"You'd better give it to me."

She did so at once which both surprised and pleased me. I then said briskly, "Now I'll see to coffee," and went out of the room and through the dining room to the kitchen where I made a great clatter about cupboard doors and pots and pans. I made a mistake, however, when for safety's sake, I dropped the gun into the flour bin.

I gave them barely time to dress and to accomplish what one of them had to accomplish in the living room, and consequently burned the toast while I was watching the clock. But as I took it and coffee into the dining room, Frances Briggs came in, charming and fresh in blue linen. After a moment Eloise, lovely and fresh in pink, entered also.

Both seized upon coffee. Neither spoke, and I was rather uneasily aware of stored-up dynamite. A very slight jar was all that was necessary to induce an explosion, and I was not ready for that. So when I spoke I did so cautiously.

"In view of the circumstances I'd like to suggest that we postpone our business talk. But I have a request to make. I was an old friend of Henry's. If neither of you wishes to keep the portrait of him, I wonder if you would be so kind as to give it to me."

Eloise's eyes leaped to me above the rim of her coffee cup. She put the cup down, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. She said from behind it, "Of course. I didn't realize that you felt that way about Henry. I have other pictures of Henry. He — he would want you to have it." She dabbed at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Thank you," I said and turned to Frances who had risen.

She said, "I'm sorry. I'll not pretend that I was in love with Henry when he met you, Eloise. I was not heartbroken when he asked me for a divorce; I agreed to it. But once, when Henry and I were young, when that portrait was made, I loved him. I'm sorry, Mr. Wickwire, I want the portrait."

So I knew what I had to know. I said something about understanding it, made an excuse, and left the room.

I let myself out, cautiously, through the back door. A grape arbor ran along there, toward the garage, and I took shelter behind it. I reached the garage and was opening the door of the station wagon when Eloise ran into the garage.

"Mr. Wickwire, where are you going?"

"To the state police. Will you drive? I'm not accustomed to this car. Besides it might be safer."

"Safer! Do you mean she—" She gave a kind of quick gasp and then slid behind the wheel. "Take the back way down to the road," I said. "The trees and shrubbery will shield us from the house."

The sun was up, streaking across shrubbery and lawns and making a bright path of the country road. She knew the way to the state police headquarters. She went in with me, and the young Lieutenant who had directed the night's inquiry was at his desk, using the telephone, when we were shown into his office. He looked pleased and relaxed; his revolver lay on the desk.

"Oh, there you are. I was about to phone you. The fingerprints on the gun are Al Muller's. So it was probably suicide."

Fingerprints of course can be placed on guns after death, but I didn't care to argue with him about that. I gave one longing thought toward the gun in the flour bin and said, "I'm afraid I have evidence to the contrary. If you'll search the Briggs house you'll find a package of notes, given for loans advanced by Al Muller and signed by Henry Briggs. The signatures are forgeries. And in the meantime —" I cleared my throat — "kindly arrest this Mrs. Briggs at once and charge her —"

I couldn't finish because Eloise was too quick; she snatched the officer's revolver. Two shots went wild, a third crashed through the window, and then the young Lieutenant had her tight in his arms, but it was not a loverlike embrace.

He released her when other troopers rushed in. I crawled out from under the desk with such dignity as I could summon. The young Lieutenant was also very quick. "The notes," he said, panting and blushing deeply, "are probably on her. Get the matron from the village, Sergeant."

He was right. The notes, a rather bulky package, were concealed in a feminine garment which I believe is called a bra. I must say I was relieved to see them; she had had neither the time nor the chance to destroy them.

Later, back at the house, I had a conversation with the young Lieutenant and with Frances Briggs. "So Muller loaned her all that money," the Lieutenant said. "I take it that he thought he was loaning it to Henry during his illness, but she forged Henry's signatures."

I nodded. "Muller probably discovered, or knew from the beginning, that it was forgery. After Henry's death he — er —"

"Put the screws on," the Lieutenant said. "He must have demanded quite a price. So she shot him."

"Then she had to get out of the room and up the backstairs in a hurry. She got the notes out of his pocket, shoved them behind the portrait, put his fingerprints on the gun, and ran up the back way. Frances Briggs came into the hall at about that time."

"But how did you know?"

"I found the notes. I didn't know which woman had shot him or which one had forged the notes and thus must get possession of them again. I gave both women time — I was afraid too much time — but, at any rate, I then asked for Henry's portrait.

"I knew that the woman who had shot Muller would not want the portrait: she wouldn't want any association with so strong a reminder of guilt. So a rejection of the portrait would be an indication of guilt — and an indication that the notes were gone.

"Eloise leaped at the chance to get rid of the portrait. Frances did not."

I added, "I must tell you that I made some inquiries by telephone as to Eloise. She was wearing jewelry; she was dressed expensively. In short, I found that she had staggering charge accounts and had spent far more money than Henry (remember, I am in a position to know) could have given her. So where was she getting the money? Why was Al Muller there?"

But the Lieutenant said astutely, "You must have more solid — well, evidence — basis for suspicion."

I told the Lieutenant. "When anybody urgently wishes to see any banker, he — she — wants to borrow money. Frances Briggs had a different reason which was sound and sensible. But Eloise —"

"She wanted to borrow enough money on the property to pay off Muller!" the Lieutenant cried. "Did she ask you for a loan?"

"Not," I said, "precisely."

"Oh, I see. But you weren't having any — I mean to say, you were not — that is, her charm — that is —" He blushed, looked apologetic, and tried to stop grinning.

"Oh, Mr. Wickwire!" Frances Briggs leaned toward me with a lovely smile, her magnificent eyes warm. "You *are* a detective! And a very courageous man."

There are more ways than one in which an attractive widow may be dangerous. I rose rather quickly and said I had to return to town. Indeed, when another widow invited me to her house on Long Island the next weekend I sent a subordinate in my place.

THE PERPLEXING PROBLEMS OF BOHUN

AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

by MICHAEL GILBERT

IT HAPPENED A LONG TIME AGO, WHEN I was only a girl," said Great Aunt Emily. "In fact, it was the year I came out, because I remember I was staying with my sister Alice and her husband, Bill, in their house in Stanhope Gate."

"Bill?" said Bohun, casting his mind through the ranks of his great uncles. "That was the one in phosphates who had a weakness for Gaiety Girls."

"*Any* girls," said Emily. "However — *de mortuis* —"

"Alice must have been a good deal older than you, though," said Bohun. "She had quite a family by then, hadn't she?"

"Only four then. Bertha, Tom, Augusta, and Brian. It all happened on June tenth."

"You've a remarkably accurate memory," said Bohun approvingly. He was an accurate man himself.

"There's no question of accuracy. I remember it *because* it happened on June tenth. It was Bertha's birthday. She was five. Alice always had a tea party on her children's birthdays. And a big cake — she used to ice it herself — and animal biscuits for the children and sandwiches for the grown-ups."

"Grown-ups were invited, too?"

"Oh, certainly. Miss Twomey was one of them."

"She was the one who —?"

"That's right. She died — the next morning. In terrible agony. Poor woman." Emily pursed her lips. The horror of it was still with her after all those years. She added, "She was a harpist, you know. Quite famous in her way."

Bohun refrained from a facetious comment. Indeed, he looked unusually serious. "Who else was at the party?" he said. "Tell it all to me."

"I remember it," said Emily, "as if it were yesterday. There were six of us grown-ups — Alice, myself, and poor Miss Twomey, The Vicar of All Souls Lavender Hill and a splendid man, though he afterwards became an agnostic and sold sewing-machines in America — and his wife, rather a dull little woman — and Mrs. Armstrong."

"And she was *not* a dull little woman."

"Far from it," said Emily. Her voice had acquired the detached coldness which the older generation reserved for Certain Topics and Certain People.

"A merry widow?" suggested Bohun.

"Well," said Aunt Emily. "We must speak no evil of her either. She's

dead. In fact she died soon after the party I was telling you about. She slipped, on a very wet night, and fell under a horse-bus. Alice was walking with her at the time and it was a great shock to her."

Bohun preserved in his own mind a picture of his great Aunt Alice. She had been very old, and he had been very young. But he had not been deceived. An amiable-looking woman of mild disposition and gentle manners, but under it all a character and determination beside which concrete was soft and steel yielding.

"Tell me more about the birthday party," he said. "A lot more."

"Let me see, then," said Emily. "I've told you who were there — the six of us grown-ups and the four children. I think I can even remember how we sat. The Vicar on my right. His wife on his right. Mrs. Armstrong on my left. Then Miss Twomey."

"Where was Alice?"

"She hardly had time to sit down. At the moment I visualize her" — Emily screwed up her birdlike eyes — "she is cutting the cake. A lovely birthday cake. I don't think she made it herself — one didn't in those days, you know. But she'd certainly iced it, and very pretty it was. In the middle was the name *Bertha* in green icing — green was the child's favorite color. Then on the bottom edge *Five Years Old* in blue — and on the top edge the year, in red figures."

"Remarkable," said Bohun. "Remarkable."

Emily accepted this as a tribute to her memory. "But of course," she explained, "we all talked about that tea a good deal afterwards. The inquest, you know."

"Tell me about that."

"Poor Miss Twomey. Three hours later — while she was changing for dinner. The most agonizing cramps and — er — other things. Acute arsenic poisoning. She died at dawn."

"And the tea party naturally came under suspicion."

"Well, it couldn't have had anything to do with it," said Emily. "How could it? That was the whole point. Cook was furious. She had made all the sandwiches herself. And the cake. Everyone ate the sandwiches and the cake. And they ate nothing else."

"I see," said Bohun. "That did make it awkward. Had Miss Twomey had anything else to eat recently?"

"She had luncheon alone, in a Station Restaurant." Emily's tone expressed very clearly what she thought of people who ate in Station Restaurants. "It was impossible to prove anything, but it was just when Home Rule was becoming troublesome again and one of the waiters was an Irishman."

"Did Mrs. Armstrong take sugar in her tea?" asked Bohun.

"Mrs. Armstrong?" Emily brought her mind back with some difficulty to the gay widow. "No. I don't think she did. Nor milk either. Why do you ask?"

"Fascinating," said Bohun. "Fascinating. After all these years. By the

way, I don't think you told me. Was it 1896 or 1906? No. Come to think of it, it could hardly have been as late as 1906. Bertha must be well over sixty."

"As a matter of fact," said Emily, "it *was* 1896. What horrible ideas are you turning over in that head of yours?"

"I was thinking," said Bohun, "that you never know when you stand in the greatest danger. The Mafeking Celebrations? Zeppelins? Buzz bombs? Traffic? Don't let them kid you. You'll never be nearer death than you were at tea that afternoon in 1896."

"Now you must explain what you mean — at once!"

"It's very simple," said Bohun. "Dear Aunt Alice. A tigress in defense of her mate. She must have known — or suspected — more than you thought about Bill and Mrs. Armstrong."

"Yes, there was something in it, I believe. But when Mrs. Armstrong had her accident —"

"Accident my foot!" said Bohun. "Alice pushed her good and hard. It was her second attempt — after the first had misfired, don't you see, and carried off poor Miss Twomey."

"Really!" said Emily. Curiosity struggled with repugnance. "How did she manage it?"

"The only way she could pick on one individual — particularly if that individual was awkward enough not to take sugar in her tea. That would have been simple, of course, because she could have impregnated a lump and popped it into her cup when she served her. However, she didn't do too badly."

"You are being irritating and obscure," said Emily. "How?"

"The icing. It must have been. First, she'd spread the white icing over the whole cake. Then she'd get one of those nice little icing-gun gadgets and put on the words and letters. Only right at the end, when she was putting on the last letter of the year 1896, she recharged the gun, with a special dollop of red icing plus arsenic. That was the only poisonous part of the whole cake, you see — *the final letter in the date — the letter 6.*"

"Then when — oh, yes. I see."

Even after the years Emily turned pale.

"That's right," said Bohun. "You've spotted it. After she'd cut the slices she got them turned round. Mrs. Armstrong got the 9. Miss Twomey got the 6. . . . You know, it might have been any of you."

"It might, indeed," said Aunt Emily.

She recovered herself. "Anyway," she said, "Alice is dead now. And you've no proof. And it all happened a very long time ago."

Finally, firmly, she buried it — after all these years.

Another mystery story from a most unexpected source!

Remember the literary discoveries we have given you in the past? — short stories by famous poets. You will recall the tales of murder by Edna St. Vincent Millay and Walt Whitman (it takes our breath away merely to remind you!); the adventure in blackmail by Joyce Kilmer; the chronicles of crime by Mark Van Doren; the stories of pure detection by Stephen Vincent Benét; and so many others . . . Well, here is another staggering surprise — a short story from the celebrated literary figure who wrote those mighty school favorites, "Evangeline," "The Song of Hiawatha," "The Courtship of Miles Standish," "The Village Blacksmith," and "The Wreck of the Hesperus" — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow!

Longfellow had his first poem published at the tender age of thirteen. He became one of the most famous, if not the most famous, American poet of his time — at least, from the standpoint of world-wide renown. At no period in his overpraised career was he a starving poet in a cold attic; for the most part, he was that phenomenon of letters, the financially successful poet who led (in bitter contrast with, say, Edgar Allan Poe) a golden life of requited love, great friendships, and supreme ease and luxury — although none of this quite explains why Longfellow is the only American poet whose bust stands in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey . . .

Now, read Longfellow's tale of a worthy but hypochondriacal and henpecked notary public — a tale of undeniable charm and legendary quality. True, it is not a story of murder, or even of crime. But it is a mystery — one might say, a riddle — and an amusing one.

Need we tell you any more to pique your curiosity?

THE NOTARY OF PERIGUEUX

by HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

YOU MUST KNOW, GENTLEMEN, that there lived some years ago, in the city of Perigueux, an honest notary public, the descendant of a very ancient and broken-down family, and the occupant of one of those old weather-beaten tenements which remind you of times of your great-grandfather. He was a man of an unoffending, quiet disposition; the father of a family, though not the head of it, for in that family "the hen over-

crowed the cock," and the neighbors when they spoke of the notary, shrugged their shoulders and exclaimed, "Poor fellow, his spurs need sharpening." In fine, you understand me, gentlemen, he was henpecked.

Well, finding no peace at home, he sought it elsewhere, as was very natural for him to do, and at last discovered a place of rest, far beyond the cares and clamors of domestic life. This was a little Café Estaminet, a short way out of the city, whither he repaired every evening to smoke his pipe, drink sugar-water, and play his favorite game of dominoes. There he met the boon companions he most loved; heard all the floating chit-chat of the day; laughed when he was in merry mood; found consolation when he was sad; and at all times gave vent to his opinions, without fear of being snubbed short by a flat contradiction.

Now the notary's bosom friend was a dealer in claret and cognac, who lived about a league from the city, and always passed his evenings at Estaminet. He was a gross, corpulent fellow, raised from a full-blooded Gascon breed and sired by a comic actor of some reputation in his way. He was remarkable for nothing but his good-humor, his love of cards, and a strong propensity to test the quality of his own liquors by comparing them with those sold at other places.

As evil communications corrupt good manners, the bad practises of the wine-dealer won insensibly upon the worthy notary; and before he was aware of it, he found himself weaned from domino and sugar-water and addicted to piquet and spiced wine. Indeed, it not infrequently happened that, after a long session at Estaminet, the two friends grew so urbane that they would waste a full half-hour at the door in a friendly dispute as to which should conduct the other home. Though this course of life agreed well enough with the sluggish, phlegmatic temperament of the dealer in wines, it soon began to play the very deuce with the more sensitive organization of the notary, and finally put his nervous system completely out of tune. He lost his appetite, became gaunt and haggard, and could not get to sleep. Legions of blue devils haunted him by day, and by night strange faces peeped through his bed curtains, and the nightmare snorted in his ear. The worse he grew, the more he smoked and tippled; and the more he smoked and tippled, why, as a matter of course, the worse he grew. His wife alternately stormed, remonstrated, entreated; but all in vain. She made the house too hot for him, he retreated to the tavern; she broke his long-stemmed pipes upon the andirons, he substituted a short-stemmed one, which, for safe keeping, he carried in his waistcoat pocket.

Thus the unhappy notary ran gradually down at the heel. What with his bad habits and his domestic grievances, he became completely hipped. He imagined he was going to die, and suffered in quick succession all the diseases that ever beset mortal man. Every shooting pain was an alarming

symptom, every uneasy feeling after dinner a sure prognostic of some mortal disease. In vain did his friends endeavor to reason and then to laugh him out of his strange whims, for when did ever jest or reason cure a sick imagination? His only answer was, "Do let me alone; I know better than you what ails me."

Well, gentlemen, things were in this state when one afternoon in December, as he was moping in his office, wrapped in an overcoat, with a cap on his head and his feet thrust into a pair of furred slippers, a cabriolet stopped at the door and a loud knocking from without aroused him from his gloomy reverie. It was a message from his friend, the wine-dealer, who had been suddenly attacked with a violent fever, and as it grew worse and worse, had now sent in the greatest haste for the notary to draw up his last will and testament. The case was urgent and admitted neither excuse nor delay; and the notary, tying a handkerchief around his face and buttoning up to the chin, jumped into the cabriolet, and suffered himself, though not without some dismal presentiments and misgivings of heart, to be driven to the wine-dealer's house.

When he arrived, he found everything in the greatest confusion. On entering the house, he ran against the apothecary, who was coming downstairs with a face as long as your arm; and a few steps farther, he met the housekeeper — for the wine-dealer was an old bachelor — running up and down and wringing her hands, for fear the good man should die without making his will. He soon reached the chamber of his sick friend and found him tossing about in a paroxysm of fever and calling aloud for a draught of cold water. The notary shook his head; he thought this a fatal symptom, for ten years back the wine-dealer had been suffering under a species of hydrophobia, which seemed suddenly to have left him.

When the sick man saw who stood by his bedside, he stretched out his hand and exclaimed:

"Ah, my dear friend, have you come at last? You see it is all over with me. You have arrived just in time to draw up that — that passport of mine. Ah, *grand diable*, how hot it is here. Water — water — water. Will nobody give me a drink of cold water?"

As the case was an urgent one, the notary made no delay in getting his papers in readiness; and in a short time the last will and testament of the wine-dealer was drawn up in due form, the notary guiding the sick man's hand as he scrawled his signature at the bottom.

As the evening wore away, the wine-dealer grew worse and worse and at length expired. Meanwhile, the notary sat cowering over the fire, striving to keep up his courage with a glass of cognac. Already his fears were on the alert; and the idea of contagion flitted to and fro through his mind. In order to quiet these thoughts of evil import, he lighted

his clay pipe and began to prepare for returning home. At that moment the apothecary turned and said:

"Dreadful sickly time this. The disorder seems to be spreading."

"What disorder?" exclaimed the notary in surprise.

"Two died yesterday and three today," continued the apothecary, without answering the question. "Very sickly time, sir, very."

"But what disorder is it? What disease has carried off my friend here so suddenly?"

"What disease? Why, scarlet fever, of course."

"And is it contagious?"

"Certainly."

"Then I am a dead man," exclaimed the notary, putting his pipe into his waistcoat pocket and beginning to walk up and down the room in despair. "I am a dead man. Now don't deceive me, don't, will you? What — what are the symptoms?"

"A sharp burning pain in the right side," said the apothecary.

"Oh, what a fool I was to come here."

In vain did the apothecary and housekeeper strive to pacify him; he was not a man to be reasoned with. He answered that he knew his own constitution better than they did and insisted on going home without delay. Unfortunately, the vehicle he came in had returned to the city. What was to be done? Nothing in the world but to take the apothecary's horse, which stood hitched at the door, patiently waiting.

Well, gentlemen, as there was no remedy, our notary mounted this raw-boned steed and set forth upon his homeward journey. The night was cold and gusty and the wind right in his teeth. Overhead the leaden clouds were beating to and fro, and through them the newly risen moon seemed to be tossing and drifting along like a cockboat in the surf, now swallowed up in a huge billow of cloud and now lifted upon its bosom and dashed with silvery spray. The trees by the roadside groaned with a sound of evil omen, and before him lay three mortal miles, beset with a thousand imaginary perils. Obedient to the whip and spur, the steed leaped forward while the rider, filled with symptoms of disease and dire presentiments of death, urged him on as if he were fleeing before the pestilence.

In this way, by dint of whistling and shouting and beating right and left, one mile of the fatal three was safely passed. The apprehensions of the notary had so far subsided that he even suffered the poor horse to walk up hill; but these apprehensions were suddenly revived again with tenfold violence by a sharp pain in the right side, which seemed to pierce him like a needle.

"It is upon me at last," groaned the fear-stricken man. "Heaven be merciful to me, the greatest of sinners. And must I die in a ditch after all? Hee, get up, get up."

And away went horse and rider at full speed, hurry-scurry, up hill and down, panting and blowing like a

whirlwind. At every leap the pain in the rider's side seemed to increase. At first it was a little point like the prick of a needle, then it spread to the size of a half-franc piece, then covered a place as large as the palm of your hand. It gained upon him fast. The poor man groaned in agony. At length, he knew not how, more dead than alive, he reached his own door. There was a light in his wife's bedroom. The good woman came to the window, alarmed at such a knocking and howling and clattering at her door so late at night.

"Let me in, let me in quick, quick," he exclaimed.

"Who are you, that come to disturb a lone woman at this hour of the night?" cried a sharp voice from above. "Begone about your business and let quiet people sleep."

"Come down and let me in; I am your husband. Don't you know my voice? Quick, I beseech you, for I am dying here in the street."

After a few moments of delay and a few more words of parley, the door was opened and the notary stalked into his domicile, pale and haggard in aspect and as stiff and straight as a ghost. Cased from head to heel in an armor of ice, as the glare of the lamp fell on him, he looked like a knight errant mailed in steel. But in one place his armor was broken. On his right side was a circular spot as large as the crown of your hat and about as black.

"My dear wife," he exclaimed with more tenderness than he had exhibited in many years, "reach me a chair. My hours are numbered. I am a dead man."

Alarmed at these exclamations, his wife stripped off his overcoat. Something fell from beneath it and was dashed to pieces on the hearth. It was the notary's clay pipe. He placed his hand upon his side, and lo! it was bare to the skin. Coat, waistcoat, and linen were burnt through and through, and there was a blister on his side as large as your hand.

The mystery was soon explained, symptoms and all. The notary had put his pipe into his pocket without knocking out the ashes.

"Q"

Black Mask — Badge of Merit

Erle Stanley Gardner, himself "a famous alumnus of the hard-fisted school," has nominated Carroll John Daly as the first pulp-author to have written in what we now call the "hardboiled" technique. As early as 1922, Mr. Gardner has reminded us, Carroll John Daly had a story published in "Black Mask" which featured Race Williams, the probable "forerunner of all the hard-boiled detective characters." But it is now generally acknowledged that the true founding father, in spirit and style if not in first publication, was the "individual picked out to represent the whole movement" — Dashiell Hammett, rated "the ace performer" by someone who ought to know. Surely it can be said that Daly, Hammett, and Gardner were the earliest great trio, and under the guidance and tutelage of those pioneering "Black Mask" editors (George Sutton, Phil Cody, Harry North, and Captain Joseph T. Shaw) many other star-names were added to the school, including Raymond Chandler, Raoul Whitfield, and Frederick Nebel.

Now that "Black Mask" is part of EQMM, we try to give you the very best of the old action stories and of the new hardboiled stories. To give you the best, we sometimes have to leave the bailiwick of "Black Mask" itself — for many of the "Black Mask" writers, after the heyday of the pulp field, began to write for national "slick" magazines, bringing to their work the finest qualities of the old school. One of the "graduates" of the old "Black Mask" days is Frederick Nebel, and we are happy to announce that we have arranged for a group of Nebel stories to be reprinted in EQMM. The first of the group appeared originally in "Collier's" in 1939 — nearly two decades after the hardboiled 'tec type originated — and while this tale is a "slick magazine" story, it also represents what might be called the full flower of the restrained "Black Mask" method. It is taut, clipped, packed with suspense, and has that curious blend of realism and sentiment which is one of the hallmarks of the hardboiled. You won't be the slightest bit surprised to learn that the "heavy" in Mr. Nebel's story is "the plainest of men and looked rather like a solid, conservative shopkeeper"; nor will you be any more surprised to learn that this man, built "like a sack of cement," is hard and tough; he gives no quarter — and expects none.

In the remainder of the Nebel series we will tell you about the author

himself — interesting facts about his background, likes and dislikes, work habits, and favorite writers. Fred Nebel has written and published more than 5,000,000 words in his long and honorable career. He is a real "pro" — and it is an unmasked privilege to welcome him back to EQMM.

CHANCE IS SOMETIMES AN ENEMY

by FREDERICK NEBEL

KERRIGAN CLOSED THE DOOR. HE stood for a minute with his hand on the knob, his ear turned toward the door panel, his dark eyes troubled beneath bent black brows. Then he heard Julia's muffled crying. Twice during the past week he had caught her crying and each time she had laughed herself out of it, saying she was just a silly woman.

He took his hand off the knob. Turning, he went swiftly down the staircase, feeling his ears burn and sing. In the apartment below that loud-mouthed blonde and her husband were brawling again. Passing their door, Kerrigan swore under his breath. He went through the vestibule into the windy darkness outside and walked south.

He took a crosstown bus, got off at Eighth Avenue, and walked to Twenty-sixth Street. In the middle of the block he found Christophe's cheap table d'hôte restaurant — a dim blur of light in the darkness. It was almost 10 o'clock. When he entered, he thought the place was empty; but then he saw Ruell seated at a table in the rear behind a carafe of red wine. And as he approached the table Ruell said to him, "You look much the same as ever."

Kerrigan was laconic. "Don't kid me." He threw his hat and topcoat on one chair and pulled another out from the table. He saw a napkin lying on the floor beside it, and sitting down, he picked it up and tossed it on the table. The napkin was smeared with lip rouge. "I was trying to figure out where I last saw you, Ruell."

"Rome — in May of 1946. You were covering the abdication of King Victor Emmanuel for Apex."

"I remember now," Kerrigan said. "It was noon. You were getting into an automobile, in a great rush." He lit a cigarette. "That evening the Italian agents were looking for you."

"Yes. That evening I was across the frontier." It was made as a statement of fact only. "I was in Paris during August and September. It was in September, I believe, that your trouble began. I said to an acquaintance at the time, 'A pity. He had a great career ahead of him.' "

Kerrigan turned and called toward the bar, "Bring me a rye highball,

will you?" And to Ruell, "Listen, I don't like going over all that again."

"Excuse me for neglecting to offer you a drink. I was preoccupied."

"That's all right. You can pay for it."

Kerrigan sniffed, wrinkling his thick wiry brows. He glanced at the carafe of red wine, but it was not wine that he smelled. Then he knew what it was. Pernod. The licorice odor of Pernod. The tablecloth beneath his elbows was soiled. He glanced at the rouge-stained napkin.

He said good-humoredly, "This must be something new. I've never seen you dine with a woman, or even heard of it."

"Not dined," Ruell said blandly. "Madame Christophe gave me the pleasure of her company for a few minutes."

Christophe himself, a worried wisp of a man, bald, with a face full of erratic angles, brought the rye highball. At a terse glance from Ruell he snatched up the rouge-stained napkin and disappeared with it through a swing door.

"I can see," Ruell said, "that you're still touchy about that Paris affair."

Kerrigan leaned heavily on his elbows and cocked his forefinger straight upward. "Listen. Two years ago I was Apex's top European man. Do you know what I'm doing today? Clerking in a tourist agency at fifty-two-fifty a week, while my wife knocks down even less in a Madison Avenue bookstore." He took a long pull at his highball and banged the glass down on the table. "So maybe I've got a right to be touchy."

"Or a little drunk."

"No, I haven't the money for that," he said; then he put his eyes curiously on Ruell and asked, "What brought you to New York, anyhow?"

Ruell placed his hands flat on the table without a sound. They were broad hands with square fingertips. He said, "Tonight, I have a proposition." In appearance he was the plainest of men and looked rather like a solid, conservative shopkeeper. He was a heavy man — not fat, but compactly heavy, like a sack of cement. No one, so far as Kerrigan knew, had ever discovered his nationality, and the mélange of features he possessed made it difficult to guess. He spoke a number of languages fluently. He was as international as the sun and a tireless trader in the open espionage market.

Kerrigan's dark eyes chided him. "Remember, you're not speaking to Kerrigan of Apex now. I couldn't buy the time of you. Or don't you know that Jonas Packenham, the head of Apex, blacklisted me in every newspaper office in the country?"

Ruell poured more wine. "I knew that practically as soon as you did. This is what else I know."

He paused to watch Christophe as the latter walked to the front windows and stood at one peering out between the curtains. Christophe's hands were restless.

Ruell went on: "Yes, this is what else I know. While in Paris in August of 1946 you employed a Frenchwoman named Adrienne Pelletier to transcribe on the typewriter a series of political observations you had made over a period of six months spent in Berlin. She worked in your apartment, using your own typewriter. At the same time she also wrote letters for you, which you dictated, and took care of minor details. She had come to you well recommended by half a dozen newspapermen, American and British. She was at the time thirty-five and, unknown to you, in love with a German named Franz Auermann. Your writings had to do with conditions in Germany. If they were published, a number of heads would fall. We must assume that either she related the contents of your writings to Auermann or showed him the papers. At the end of August your writings were concluded and so having no further need of Adrienne Pelletier, you dismissed her. Early in September Auermann appeared before the manager of Apex's Paris bureau, Mr. Oldmorrow, and said that he had heard you were about to release a series of articles concerning high German officials. He told the manager that if you did so, he was prepared to produce a check, drawn on his American bank in the amount of five thousand dollars, as proof that he had paid you to destroy these articles. You of course denied it. The check was produced. Your signature of endorsement was on the back of it. And your bank showed that you had deposited it by post, as you were in the habit of doing with your checks."

Kerrigan's eyes were hard and lacquer-bright. "That check was originally for five dollars. While the Pelletier woman worked for me, this man came to see her one day. He said he was Frank Aronson, an American importer. He took a fancy to an etching hanging on one of my walls and asked to buy it. I didn't think much of it, so I said he could have it as a gift. But he insisted on making some payment. So I said, all right, and named a token sum. He asked if a check drawn on his New York bank would be all right. I said sure. He made it out for five dollars and the next day, when the Pelletier woman was sending several of my checks to my American bank for deposit, she reminded me to endorse it. I did.

"What they must have done was this: after I'd endorsed it, Auermann — the way he wrote his name, you couldn't quite make it out; it looked as much like Frank Aronson as Franz Auermann — Auermann raised it from five dollars to five thousand. He'd left sufficient room to add the ciphers and the word 'thousand.' Then Adrienne Pelletier sent it off with the other checks. Auermann's superiors were willing to pay five thousand to break me, and they succeeded. The Pelletier woman was my only witness, and she had vanished. And then a month later she and Auermann were found bashed to

pieces in a plane wreck in Poland. It was the check that ruined me: handwriting experts proved that the signature on the back was mine — which it was; and there was the amount credited to my account in my bank." Kerrigan took a drink. "That's evidence you can't beat, Ruell!" He chuckled drily. "That job was probably better than anything even you could have done."

Ruell said, "But I can beat it. Today, I can beat it. I can produce the means to clear your reputation."

Kerrigan shook his head. "Nope. What, just by going up to Jonas Packenham and saying, 'Look, Kerrigan is innocent?' Remember, Auermann and the Pelletier woman are dead."

"But today," Ruell insisted, "I can produce the means of rehabilitating you . . . if you will do something for me."

Kerrigan was unreasonably angry. "I'll not play your dirty game, Ruell!" He smacked the table with his palm.

"You'd rather be a little clerk who makes so much money that his wife is forced to seek employment in order to —"

"Shut up!"

Ruell brushed his thick fingers lightly together and was not offended. "You are touchy on that subject also, eh?"

"You damned well figured I would be."

Ruell nodded amicably. "Very well, then. Let us change the subject." He leaned forward on his elbows. "What are your fellings toward Nicholas Santry?"

Suddenly there was a sharp, sibilant sound. Kerrigan twisted his head and saw Christophe's right hand gripping the window curtains, holding them together. His eyelids were spread wide apart. He snapped thumb and forefinger of his left hand.

A chair scraped. It was Ruell's. Ruell was on his feet, grabbing his hat and overcoat. All at once his voice was quick, clipped: "I will phone you at your home, Kerrigan. Do not be alarmed."

He turned and drummed his heels toward the kitchen. He slapped open the swing door. It clacked a couple of times afterward, then was motionless. Kerrigan remained seated.

The front door opened and a man stepped in quietly and looked around. His eyes showed no interest in Kerrigan. He was about forty and wore a dark gray raglan topcoat and a limp brown hat cocked impudently over one ear.

Christophe bubbled, "Monsieur, I am sorry, I am on the very point of closing up."

"I'm not buying anything. I'm just looking around. For a friend. I guess he's not here. Okay." The man turned and walked out.

Christophe closed the door. Then he hurried to one of the front windows and peered between the curtains for longer than a minute. Presently he relaxed, blew out his breath, flapped his hands against his thighs.

"Please, Monsieur," he cried in a harassed voice, "I truly desire to close up. For one night, I have had sufficient!"

"Me too," said Kerrigan, rising, putting on his hat.

When he got home it was half-past eleven and Julia was propped up in bed, reading. He said, "Hello, honey," and hung his topcoat in the closet. He had walked twenty blocks and what he had been thinking about still enmeshed him. He took off his jacket, stuffed a pipe, lit it.

Julia said, "I've been worried, Kerry."

He walked across the small bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed. Deep in his eyes was a low fire, but she didn't see it because he kept gazing at the wall. She looked at him, at the long flat sweep of his cheek, the bony structure of his jaw, the nervous flickering of the crow's-feet alongisde his right eye. But she didn't say anything. She had been married to him five years and was quick to sense his moods.

Suddenly he looked at her. "H'm? Worried? About what?"

"That man Ruell." She took a deep breath, smiled. "I'm so glad you're back!"

He turned his gaze on the wall again and was silent for a while. Then he said meditatively, "Ruell knows something." The fire in his eyes grew in intensity. Abruptly he turned to her and put his hands on her arms and held them tightly.

"What, darling?" she said.

He told her what had taken place at Christophe's. It brought color rushing into her face and then all at once the color fled and she was white. She grabbed a fistful of his tie. She shook her head.

"Darling, don't get mixed up in anything!" she cried. "I don't like the sound of it. You've described Ruell to me so many times that I almost feel I know him. And I don't trust him. Kerry, you know those people — you know that nothing matters but themselves. They'd throw anyone to the wolves if —"

"Listen," he said, massaging the back of her hand with his palm, "I don't trust him. But I did some business with him when I was with Apex and he gave good value for what he received. He wouldn't have made an appointment with me tonight if he hadn't something to offer — something important."

"But what have you got to give, Kerry?"

He closed her hand between his palms. "I don't know. But he does. He asked me what my feelings were toward Santry." His lip curled. "I didn't have time to tell him!"

"Santry got your job," she sighed.

"Santry swore to Oldmorrow that he'd seen me several times in La Cloche with Franz Auermann!" he said savagely.

"Santry'd been angling six or seven years for that job. Shaughnessey got it, and then when Shaughnessey went to Moscow you got it. Santry's in his

late forties. Shaughnessey was much younger and you were much younger. And Santry is a bachelor, and a man who lives alone has more time to think and burn himself up with envy." She shook her head and then leaned it against Kerrigan's shoulder. "Still, he might have mistaken someone else for Auermann, darling. Let's forget it. We're poor but we have each other and at least when you're poor no one tries to knife you.

Kerrigan said in a low, stubborn voice, "I never sat anywhere with anyone who looked anything like Auermann. It was just Santry's golden opportunity. The rottenness of European politics and intrigue had got into his blood."

Julia lay back. "But even if he hadn't said anything, Apex would have thrown you out."

Kerrigan nodded. "Of course. But that doesn't make him any less the rat." He stood up and crossed the room, braced his arms on the windowsill, and peered out across a hopeless jumble of rooftops. "We deserve more than this, Julia. I don't know about me. But you do. Smelly alleys and brawling neighbors."

She said, "I can understand what it all means to you, darling. But I'm satisfied this way."

The telephone rang and he went into the living room and picked it up.

"Kerrigan?"

"Yes."

"Ruell speaking."

"Oh. Who was that fellow looking for you?"

Ruell said, "Can you meet me somewhere tomorrow?"

"Remember, I'm a working man."

"You have a luncheon hour?"

"Between 1 and 2."

"At ten past 1, in the main waiting room at Grand Central Terminal. Yes?"

When Kerrigan reached the Grand Central waiting room, at five past one, Ruell was already there, seated in a far corner. He did not rise. There was no change of expression on his face.

Kerrigan sat down beside him and said, "Christophe must have known who that guy was, to warn you."

"He merely suspected. While watching at the window, he saw the man stroll past several times and look at the door. When the man stopped, Christophe thought it best to warn me."

"He must be a good friend of yours."

"He does not want trouble."

"Who is the man?"

Ruell said, "I don't know. It is worth a great deal to me to find out. The night before last my hotel room was searched. In the lobby of my hotel I saw, prior to that, a man such as Christophe later described to me. It is important for me to now whether this man is an agent of the State Department or" — he put his palms together without a sound — "a man hired by Nicholas Santry."

Kerrigan's hands were clenched in his coat pockets. He said, without

looking at Ruell, "I get it. You want me to find out."

"Yes," said Ruell.

"Why are you worried about the State Department?"

"For reasons of my own."

"Or about Santry?"

"Also, for reasons of my own. By a regrettable coincidence, Santry was also a passenger on the *Ionic*, on which I crossed."

Kerrigan sat up straight. "Santry's in New York?"

Ruell nodded. "He resigned two weeks ago from Apex. I think he fears that I know why he is in America. Besides, he fears me. He is a weak man, but dangerous."

Kerrigan said, "And if I find out for you, you'll produce the means to clear me." It was not a question but a statement tinged slightly with sarcasm.

"When you have found out — not before."

"You wouldn't go so far as to tell me how you can do it?

Ruell stared straight ahead. "I trust no one. And I do not expect you to trust me. But you will recall that Apex always received of me exactly what it paid for. And Apex did not pay for it until it had received it. So here, I do not pay until I have received. So." He leaned back and closed his eyes. "Find out if Santry is having me shadowed. If it is not Santry, then it must be the State Department. You will not be required to do anything beyond that."

"Where are you stopping?"

"The address is unnecessary. The telephone number is here." He handed Kerrigan a slip of paper. "Santry is at the Hotel Cheltham."

He stood up and without a word, without a backward look, strode out of the waiting room.

For a couple of minutes Kerrigan sat staring at the slip of the paper. A healthy revulsion against all this double-dealing rose within him and broke like a wave. He stood up and crumpled the slip of paper and flung it under the bench. He plowed his hands deep into his coat pockets and tramped out.

Forty-second Street was bright and noisy and windy. Kerrigan took a long breath. He had not eaten but now he did not feel like eating. He headed west, then turned north on Madison Avenue. What he would do, he would stop at the bookstore where Julia worked. He wanted to hear her say, "Stay out of it, darling." This was when you needed a wife, a wife like Julia.

It was twenty to 2 when he entered the bookstore. A gray-haired woman approached him.

Looking around over her head, he said, "Where's Mrs. Kerrigan?"

"Mrs. Kerrigan is no longer here."

"What?" he said gravely.

"Since a week ago. We were sorry to see her go. You know how it is when the management feels it must cut down on expenses. Can I do something for you?"

"No." He flipped the pages of a book. "No, thanks."

He walked down Madison Avenue. His chest hurt. She'd been out of a job for a week and hadn't told him. She was probably tramping the streets looking for another job and when she got one — and if she got one — then she'd tell him. Meantime she'd kid him; she'd smile and laugh and say what fun they were having; while inside her hung the dread that maybe she wouldn't get another job. And over at the tourist agency there was rumor of a lay-off also.

He pulled up at Forty-fourth Street and waited for the traffic on Madison to stop. The agency was in West Forty-fourth. The traffic stopped but he did not cross. He was thinking, "These stinking, puny scruples of mine!" He turned and walked fast down Madison, swung east into Forty-second Street and was almost running by the time he reached Grand Central. Under the bench in the waiting room he recovered Ruell's slip of paper. Then he hurried back to the agency.

Julia was broiling two hamburgers filleted with bacon strips. She did not hear Kerrigan come in. He stood in the center of the living room, watching her through the kitchen doorway. She was bending in front of the stove, adjusting the gas flame, and he could tell by her shoulders that she was sobbing. He turned and moved quietly back to the hall door, opened it, then gave it a loud bang.

"Hi, Julie!" he called out. He tossed his hat and topcoat on the sofa and strode into the bathroom. He consumed an elaborate period of time washing his face and hands, combing his hair. When he came out, Julia was putting water glasses on the folding table. He saw that she was all right now.

"Smell good?" she said, nodding toward the kitchen.

"Delicious." He gave her a kiss and a slap. "I'll make a couple of cocktails."

"There's no gin, Kerry. I plain forgot." She didn't look at him. "Besides, we ought to drink less."

He said, "You talk as if we were a couple of rummies, baby."

"What I meant, I guess, is that we ought to do without it. There's only a can of beer left."

"Okay. We'll split the beer."

"No, you drink it. I don't want —"

"We split it, sweetheart."

Well, she was still putting up a good front. He didn't have the heart to break it down. He wasn't going to tell her that he had stopped at the bookstore. He wasn't going to tell her anything.

After dinner he helped her with the dishes and when they had finished he said, "Well, I think I'll go out for a while."

She watched him put on his hat and coat. He watched her.

"Ruell," she said, her lip quivering.

The hair on his neck stiffened. He didn't want to be part of any emotional scene; he didn't want her to plead with him; he didn't want to see her cry again. Not now. Not tonight.

"Don't worry," he said, and went out quickly.

He remembered the cold, prim, matter-of-fact manner in which Santry had spoken to Oldmorrow, and the way Oldmorrow had dropped his eyes. Kerrigan, already deflated because of the damning evidence of the endorsed check, had merely closed his eyes and sighed. He had thought, "You're lying, Santry. But what does it matter now?" And he had heard Santry's quiet, pedantic voice say, "I am telling you this, Mr. Oldmorrow, because I feel it is my duty to Apex." Kerrigan had laughed suddenly and raucously and Oldmorrow had snapped. "Cut it, Kerry!" And then added, "You'll have to see Packenham in New York."

Striding into the lobby of the Hotel Cheltham, he knew exactly how Santry would look. He remembered clearly the white, round face, with mouth, nose, and eyes concentrated in the very center of it; a small man's pointed features in the middle of a fat man's face. The small shell-like glasses. The plume of gray hair above each ear which should have made him look distinguished and didn't. The conical shoulders. The head held high, primly. The snakewood walking stick with the big silver knob. A man who never touched anything stronger than vermouth or a glass of wine and possessed a shuddering contempt for drunkards.

But Kerrigan told himself, "I must be nice to him. I must kid him into believing I don't hold anything against him." Into a house telephone he said, "Ring Mr. Nicholas Santry, please." And while waiting he wondered how he might be able to do this and at the same time discover if Santry were having Ruell followed.

"Hello," a man's voice growled.

"Santry?"

"No."

"Let me speak to Mr. Santry."

"He can't — not right now."

"I'm an old friend of his. Tell him Kerrigan would like to see him."

There was a momentary pause, then the voice said, "Well, look, if you're a friend of his, come up and maybe help me straighten something out."

"What room?"

"Six-ten."

Kerrigan pushed the instrument slowly down into its cradle and walked thoughtfully to the elevators. The man who opened the door of 610 wore an expression that was half puzzled and half exasperated. He threw up his hands limply, and said, "I can't do anything with him. See what you can do." His eyes, striking Kerrigan casually at first, hit him intently the second time. "Say, I've seen you somewhere before, haven't I?"

Kerrigan shrugged. "That so? What's the matter with Nick?"

"Plastered. What did you say your name was?"

"Kerrigan. I used to work with him."

"Was he always a screwball?"

"No. Pretty steady type."

"Say, I know I've seen you somewhere before!"

Kerrigan was walking slowly across the large living room toward an open door. The man suddenly jumped in front of him, saying, "Wait a minute! Just wait a minute!" He cocked a thumb. "Last night. In a restaurant in West Twenty — Now hold on, pal, there's something I don't understand here!" He jumped back and there was a gun in his hand. "Just stay where you are!"

"Don't be stupid. Put that away. I'm unarmed."

"Turn around. Put your hands up."

Kerrigan turned around and felt deft fingers race from pocket to pocket and up beneath his arm.

The man said, "Okay. Drop 'em."

Kerrigan turned, but the man was still holding the gun. Kerrigan said, "Since when has Nick been hiring gunmen?"

"Gunman your neck! My name's Farrell — I'm a private cop." Abruptly he thrust his gun into his pocket. "Your friend hired me to tail a guy and get the address of every place he stopped at. I did that for four days. There weren't many. Then he had me bust in the guy's hotel room and see if there were any papers or letters there, with his name in them. I did and there weren't. He got dissatisfied. He said maybe I wasn't following him to all the addresses. Well, maybe I did miss some, but I sure walked off a lot of shoe leather. Then last night I tailed him to that French restaurant and hung around outside. In about an hour I walked up the street to a phone booth and phoned Santry and said, 'He's been in a restaurant called Christophe's, down here in West Twenty-sixth Street, for an hour.' This seemed to mean something, because he said, 'Go in and see who's with him." When I went in, he was gone. And when I got back here, Santry was drinking. I didn't think he was a drinking guy. But there he was, guzzling away. When I told him the guy'd given me the skip, he blew up. I got sore and went home. So tonight I says to myself, 'I'm through with that guy, but I'm going to get what he owes me.' So when I get here he's reeling around and shoving bullets into a gun. I take it away from him and he comes after it and I give him a slap. So then he goes back to the bottle again. Listen — he owes me forty bucks and I want it!"

Kerrigan said, "Keep your shirt on." He strolled to the bedroom doorway and leaned in it. Santry lay on the bed, fully dressed. His hair was tangled. His face was bloated and smeared with red blotches. His breath wheezed, his lips blubbered. He was drunk and less than semi-conscious.

Crossing to the bed, Kerrigan bent over him, shook him, said, "Santry! Santry!" But there was no response. Santry's whole body was throbbing like a great heart. Kerrigan was shocked, dismayed — not because he had found a man drunker than he

had ever seen a man before, but because the man was Santry.

"See?" said Farrell. "What did I tell you?"

Kerrigan turned. He felt that he was very close to the solution of those strange events which had caused the wreckage of his own career. Though he did not gloat, his blood sang through his veins. Yet he knew he could get nothing out of Santry now or perhaps for hours to come. But he must, he also knew, keep Santry where he could find him.

He picked up the telephone and said to the operator, "Call an ambulance."

"What you doing?" Farrell asked.

"Hospital. He's in pretty bad shape."

When they had taken Santry to the hospital Kerrigan telephoned Ruell from a midtown booth and said, "Kerrigan. Where can I meet you?"

Ruell gave him an address in West Nineteenth Street. It took Kerrigan fifteen minutes to reach it, and when he entered the vestibule he looked at a brass plate containing six buttons, each with a name alongside it. He pressed the button beside the name, J. Christophe. It was now nine o'clock. The door clicked open and on the second floor he found Ruell waiting for him.

"Christophe must be a good friend," Kerrigan said as they entered a small, comfortable apartment.

Ruell shrugged and sat down in an overstuffed armchair. His eyes were wide open, blunt, searching. "Well?" he said.

Kerrigan looked at two traveling bags, side by side, with Ruell's overcoat thrown across them. He said, "Going somewhere?"

"That will depend on the kind of information you give me. Either I catch the *Centralia*, which sails in less than an hour, or I do not. Well?"

Kerrigan lit a cigarette and over the flame his eyes measured Ruell. He blew out the match. "A lot will depend also, Ruell, on the kind of information you give me. Why did Santry resign from Apex? What's he doing in America?"

Ruell frowned impatiently. "That is only incidental. It has no bearing on your case. It will not clear you."

"I'm curious."

Ruell shrugged. "He resigned for two reasons. One, because when he indicted you before Oldmorrow he lost, for some sentimental reason, the respect of his fellow correspondents. They cut him at every turn. He could not bear it. And then he found an opportunity to come to America as a foreign propaganda agent. This he suspected me of knowing. He was right; but he was wrong when he suspected that I intended to betray him. There was nothing in it for me." He leaned back and his jaw was suddenly stubborn. "Come, what have you discovered?"

Kerrigan was still measuring him. Presently he said, "It was not a State Department agent. It was a man Santry hired to tail you."

"Ah!" Ruell struck his thigh. "Good!"

"When the man reported that you visited Christophe's, Santry went to pieces. Now you talk, Ruell."

Ruell looked at his watch. "Yes. He feared I would meet a certain person at Christophe's whom he also knew. He was afraid I would use this person against him. I had no intention of doing this at first; later, circumstances forced me to do so. It was necessary for me to know whether I was being shadowed by Santry's man or a State Department agent." He stood up and put on his overcoat. He looked at his watch again. "Now I can sail on the *Centralia*, knowing that I will not be apprehended at the pier by a Government agent."

Kerrigan rose. "Listen, Ruell," he said dangerously, "don't talk around me. You said you would —"

"Yes — produce the means of clearing you with Apex. I —" A buzzer sounded and Ruell said, "Ah, that will be Madame Christophe. She attends the cash register at the restaurant until nine. She loaned me her key." He pressed a button beside the door. He thrust a blue envelope into Kerrigan's hand, then opened the door and picked up his bags.

Kerrigan got in his way. "Listen, Ruell —"

"Madame Christophe!" Ruell exclaimed. "I did not expect you so soon. I am hurrying to catch a boat —"

Suddenly Kerrigan forgot about him. Standing at the head of the staircase, staring, her face draining slowly of all color, was Adrienne Pelletier. Ruell barged past her, lugging his bags. His feet thumped down the staircase. Adrienne Pelletier's teeth closed hard. Her jaw shook. She took one step forward and then all the bones in her body seemed to collapse and she fainted.

Julia said, "Darling, you look as if you'd seen a ghost."

"I haven't, Julie," Kerrigan said, scaling his hat across the room. "I've seen Adrienne Pelletier."

"But she's dead, Kerry!"

He shook his head. "No. She's alive. She's the wife, now, of the owner of a restaurant named Christophe." He took hold of Julia's hand and led her across to the sofa. They sat down. "The woman killed in that plane wreck was not Adrienne Pelletier. The man was Auermann, all right, but it was another woman traveling on Adrienne Pelletier's passport. Auermann had stolen it. The Pelletier woman didn't report it because she was afraid she would be thrown in jail for what she and Auermann had done to me. She was living under an assumed name at the time of the wreck. Adrienne Otard. Last year she met Christophe in Paris — he was back home, on a visit. He asked her to marry him. She said she'd think it over. He returned to America. The more she thought of it, the more she wanted to go to America. But she had no money and she had no passport. She'd heard of Ruell and

went to him and asked if he could fix her a passport under the name of Adrienne Otard. But she had no money. Ruell told her that she might be able to get some by going to Santry and telling him that she intended to tell just how she and Auermann had framed me. Santry fell for it. He was afraid of losing his job. He gave her quite a bundle to keep quiet. That was a year ago."

"Oh, darling!" Julia cried, gripping his hands.

"She came to America. She married Christophe. Then Ruell came over." He wagged his head. "It's probably the first time in his life that he didn't travel on business, or to escape capture. Ruell, of all people, had fallen for the Pelletier woman. But he found her married when he got here. And all at once he was Ruell again. Hard. Tough. No quarter."

"But what about Santry?"

"I sent him to a hospital." He told her about Santry. "I phoned Jonas Packenham a little while ago. He'll see the Pelletier woman tomorrow — and Santry when Santry's sober enough."

Julia puckered her forehead. "But how do you know you'll be able to get her again?" She asked it hesitantly.

"Ruell was thorough," he said, drawing a blue envelope from his pocket. "Her passport's in here — the one Ruell fixed for her a year ago. He must have stolen it from her. At any rate, he gave it to me."

Julia shivered. "I was afraid for a minute that you were going to say you'd taken pity on her — and after all she did to you."

"She just got in deeper and deeper — took chance after chance." He stood up. "Maybe I might have taken pity on her." He was going to add, "But there's you, Julie — I won't have you living in a dump like this!" But he hid this by saying laconically, "I got tired of taking it on the chin," and wandered into the kitchen.

Julia called, "There's beer in the icebox. I went out and got six cans."

"What did you do, charge them?"

He opened two cans and when he turned she was standing in the doorway, her eyes round and grave. "Kerry, maybe I can tell you now —"

"I know. You lost your job last week. Forget it, honey. Santry's job is still open. Here, drink this — to tomorrow."

You may consider Manuel Komroff's "Death of an Outcast" just a little arty in its style, but you will find that it has genuine pathos and a slashing irony. In a curious sense the story is typical of Mr. Komroff's work, even though he has been most successful as an historical novelist — CORONET, TWO THIEVES, WATERLOO; *but then, isn't the story of an outcast dying in a cheap East Side lodging-house, surrounded by other outcasts, misfits, and failures, important historically as well as sociologically?*

DEATH OF AN OUTCAST

by MANUEL KOMROFF

OUTSIDE THE PARADISE HOTEL hangs a sign which reads: *15 and 25 cents a night.* In this East Side lodging, one flight up through a gas-lit hall varnished tobacco-juice brown, in this way-station for wrecked souls, this mere corridor between our mortal world and the land where sorrow and money are unknown, here last night an outcast died.

This morning the front room is filled with flowers. On the counter are two pails with roses, and oddly enough there is a large floral horse-shoe with a broad red ribbon on which, in gold paper letters is the word *Success.*

The flowers came promptly. They were brought in by Mozie, the house painter, within half an hour after the death of the outcast. He found the pails, filled them with water, arranged the flowers, and then he went to his cot and got out a suitcase from under-neath and threw in his things. Before he departed he went over to the corner of the dormitory and spoke to the outcast whose eyes were now closed.

"I am leaving now — I won't stay to see them take you away. But I got you some flowers. I could not see you go without flowers. The world is the same for everybody and everybody has flowers when he dies and we have a contract between us and so God will forgive me if I went out and got you the flowers. Goodbye, old pal. The boys are going to get hold of Chink Collins to come here and say a speech. But I can't stay because when the time comes to go, man must obey."

The contract made between Mozie and the dying man was made only a few minutes before the outcast breathed his last. It was made across the iron bed in a corner of the 50-bed dormitory. The words were declaimed solemnly and aloud. The voice of the dying man was deep, clear, and filled the whole room. Most of the lodgers were sitting on their beds and they

were witnesses to this oral agreement. Those who were not sitting on their beds were weary and asleep.

Earlier in the evening a collection was taken to get a dollar together and have the doctor come over. This was about 7 o'clock. Mozie contributed a dime and this little coin pried the opening between him and the outcast, which later resulted in the contract.

They gave the doctor his dollar when he came into the room, even before he examined the patient. He took only a few minutes to pronounce the one word: *Pneumonia.*

"There is no good getting him medicine," he added. "Better call an ambulance and take him to the hospital."

He shut his bag and departed briskly. The men standing about accepted the verdict in silence.

About a half hour later two well-fed jolly young interns entered. They wore smart blue caps and had warm blue overcoats over their fresh white uniforms. They looked about the dim room and remarked something about Paradise. They carried that smug air and sarcastic bitterness of the newly graduated medical student.

The one who did the superficial examining — without even unbuttoning the outcast's shirt — remarked to the other: "Bum heart. Bum lungs. Bum . . ." He glanced up and down along the brown army blanket, head to foot: "Bum all over."

At this joke the other doctor smiled, but the outcast opened his eyes and in a clear deep voice, as though he were reciting a line in a drama, he said: "It is man's privilege to pass through the gate without humiliation."

"Yes sir, yes sir," said the doctor without the slightest embarrassment. "Anything you say is O. K. with us. Just be quiet and take it easy, old boy, and everything will come out all right."

Then turning to his companion he whispered: "The filthy bum wants to high-hat us. I'll be damned if I'll take the stinking louse."

He then drew out a vial of white pills and poured some into a screw of paper. "Give him one of these every two hours." He held out the paper to anyone at all who would take it.

"You are supposed to take him to the hospital," said Mozie.

The intern smiled broadly as he quietly closed his medicine bag.

"We are the accident division and are not allowed to bring in pneumonia cases. Besides, he should not be moved in his condition. We are not allowed to carry dead ones in the ambulance."

It was then that Mozie cried out — the cry of the homeless, the call of the defeated, the fling of words against society: "You are scum, all of you!"

The doctors departed hurriedly. And through all this there were some lodgers of the Paradise Hotel — *15 and 25 cents a night* — who slept soundly. And they did not even awake during the contract which was made later with the dying man.

The outcast had been in the Paradise Hotel only two weeks. During the first week he spoke to nobody and during the second week nobody spoke to him. A big fuss had been made about a corduroy vest lost by an ex-service man called Holley and the finger of suspicion was pointed at the outcast.

"What would I want with a vest?" he protested. "I have two vests . . . So you think I would take a fellow's vest? Do I look that kind? Every man is innocent until proven guilty. But if you think I have his vest you may search me. Here! Come here closer." He reached under his iron cot, drew out his suitcase, and dumped the contents on his bed. "Here!" he repeated. "This is everything, everything! Man wants peace and when he is innocent he fears nothing. Is this his vest?" he held up a dirty brown waistcoat that was in the pile of things on the bed. "No, it is not. And the one I wear, is that his vest? No, it is not. And because of innocence does man deserve mistrust! We who are outcasts from society should live as brothers and not allow the serpent of suspicion to crawl into our lives."

On the bed among his things were a number of old photographs of well-known actors of a generation or more past. Some of these were autographed. But when the outcast, protesting his innocence, noticed that the men about were trying to glance at the pictures, he quickly gathered them up and stuffed everything back into his suitcase and closed down the lid.

That is how it happened about a week ago. He opened up his suitcase, but not his life. A few things were evident. He had been an actor. He had a name. He was well regarded by his fellow actors for they signed photographs they had given him. He had stamped the boards before great audiences and his resounding voice was still with him. He could tell much, but misfortune and age made him solitary. The missing corduroy vest brought words to his mouth. He spoke to cry out his innocence, and then was silent. But in spite of his protest the men felt that the outcast was guilty. Yet they could pin nothing on him. All this happened a week before Mozie, the house painter, called the smug interns "scum."

As soon as these laundered hospital dandies left, a silence fell upon the place. Someone got a glass of water and they gave the old man one of the pills. And as they were standing about, the old man said softly: "Life is a stream. It begins small and then it has a great rush and then it slows down when it sees the great ocean." He paused and tapped his finger on the blanket. "There is a salty air that fills man's last breath. The world of humiliation and slander I leave for those who . . ." Then he declaimed a line from *Romeo and Juliet:* "How oft when men are at the point of death have they been merry!"

He smiled and with his faculties complete and everything under control he raised his head proudly on the pillow. He was superior to all about him. He was bone, muscle, and breath an actor.

The words "humiliation and slander" cut deep. The men were sorry but did not know how to say they were sorry.

Finally, after a brief silence, one of them came to the side of the bed and took hold of the outcast's hand and spoke bluntly: "I believed what they told me and now I know it could not be true. Everyone said it and so I thought you took the vest, but I judged you wrong. Before you go I want to shake your hand."

Holley, the ex-service man, came up next and said: "Me too. It's some other guy took it, not you." He pressed the old man's hand. "I know this for a fact."

And Mozie, who called the interns "scum," said: "When we get the skunk who swiped the vest we will slam him one for you too."

Others also, in the presence of death, came forward to press the feverish hand of the outcast. A vest — such a little thing; and death — such a big thing. What have the cloth trifles of life to do with that proud dark order of eternity?

Mozie asked: "Is there something we can do?"

"No," replied the outcast.

"Nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Sure?"

"Sure."

"And the salt of the sea . . . Do you smell it?"

"Yes. And I want to be merry."

"Can you see that ocean?"

"Soon. Soon."

"Is it big?"

"Yes."

"Big waves or little?"

"Both. Big ones are far apart and little ones between."

"I knew it was like that. I once dreamed it," said Mozie.

"It is like that."

"And when you sail out, then all is nothing. It is nothing, nothing."

The dying man shook his head slowly. "No."

"Then what is it?"

"It is the new life, the great life, the life eternal."

"And will you speak and everything?"

"Yes. I will speak and my voice . . ."

"Listen. We are nobody, we are nothing. We believe in nobody and we believe in nothing. The world can do without us and we can do without the world, but only one thing would make a difference, a great difference. . . . We would like to know. And after you are on the ocean far out and away — after, then with your voice or anyhow, perhaps you will send us a message, a little message, anything, just so that we know it is a place — any place. Just so we know."

"I will," the old man replied simply.

"And we will stand here and be ready to hear from you."

"Yes."

"And you will not forget us. You promise?"

"Yes. I promise."

"And on my part — it is a contract — on my part I will do something in return. I will be good — so help me, so help me God."

He clasped the two feverish hands of the dying man. "We live for nothing," said Mozie with tears in his eyes. "We die for nothing. And afterward we believe there is nothing; just plain nothing. And that is why it does not matter. But if we could only know that there was something, then, then it would be different — oh, so different! And now you will promise to let us know. You will make a vow."

"A broken word is a broken hope. I make a vow and I swear by all hearts that are homeless and lonely, I swear by mankind and man's necessities, by everything that is holy, that I will keep my word. I will keep it . . . I swear. Salt is the air of sleep . . . I swear."

With these words the outcast breathed his last.

"It's a solemn contract," said Mozie before he went out to get the flowers. And later he packed his suitcase and departed, saying goodbye to no one but the outcast.

Even before the flowers arrived they had sent over to get the Irishman Chink Collins who lived close by, in Chinatown. It was he who presided over funerals and took care of intimate neighborhood affairs. He adjusted difficulties and arbitrated disputes. The jade and gold ring he wore was a present from two Chinese merchants.

As they mounted the stairs, Meyer the lodging-house keeper, turned the lights up a bit and ushered them into the dormitory. He also went about the beds to awake some of those who were sleeping.

"Get up," he said. "The old man kicked the bucket and Chink has come over to make a speech."

Chink lost no time but flung at once into his oration.

"We do not know this man whom we now surrender to the grave. But he is like one of us. He walked with us, he talked with us, he ate with us, and he breathed the same air that we now breathe. But now he no longer walks, nor can he reply, and as for food — hunger has been cheated — and his breath is stopped. This, my friends, is what we call death. That is how it is when we go. But they tell me that our friend was an actor from old Broadway. He once knew the great ones and he once played with stars. But today he played his last show without footlights, and this humble floor was his stage. And now he has taken his last bow and that deep red velvet curtain has come down for the last time. Was life a drama or a comedy? It makes little difference. The end is the end. And our friend now smiles from his peace and rest, for he has

gone across to join the great ones who are there to welcome him with open arms. And they will be learning their parts again and once more they will stamp the boards. And trumpets will blow before the great curtain in the sky rises. Gentlemen, we are assembled here to bid a friend good-bye and . . ."

"The police!" whispered the lodging-house keeper hoarsely. "They have arrived."

The two officers in the presence of death were unable to discharge their duty immediately. They entered the room, removed their hats, and waited for the Irishman to finish his oration. And then when the oration was done they put on their hats and asked for Mozie.

"He's gone," said Meyer the proprietor of Hotel Paradise.

"Well, we are looking for him. I suppose those are the flowers."

"Yes, he brought them just a few minutes ago."

"Sure we know. He stole them from the Greek. And that big horseshoe is supposed to be delivered to the delicatessen store opening at 8 o'clock in the morning."

"Well, if you want to take the flowers away from a dead man, go and take them," said Meyer.

"Leave it to Collins," said one of the officers.

"Is the Greek sore?" Collins inquired.

"Sure he's sore."

"Well, then, say we just borrowed them and we will deliver the horseshoe ourselves in the morning. As for the roses — well, if he wants them back . . . Hell, tell him they are all faded."

The officers of the law were satisfied with this arrangement and departed.

Chink Collins shook hands heartily with those who had given him the chance to make a fine speech, and also departed. The lights were dimmed and soon most of the men went back to sleep.

About an hour later, just at daylight, Meyer the proprietor of this Paradise Hotel awoke Holley the ex-service man and asked him to put on his clothes and come out to the front room.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing important but I want to talk to you. Yes, it is important, otherwise you can be sure that I wouldn't be asking you."

A few minutes later they were sitting in the front room beside the stove.

"Listen," said Meyer, "I want you to know something. When they were gone I went over to the bed and got the old man's suitcase out and put it in the office, just so nobody helps himself. And I felt around his body to see if he had some identification papers — they are going to ask me something. I found instead your corduroy vest."

"Where was it?"

"He is wearing it under his flannel shirt."

"Well, I'll be damned."

"Me too. I couldn't believe it.

But you can see it for yourself."

"Poor fellow. I just feel sorry as hell," said the ex-service man.

"Me too."

Then after a brief silence Meyer added, "Well, what shall we do about it? Do you want the vest?"

"Hell, no. Let him keep it. Better not say anything about it because it's best the men don't know."

"That's what I think myself. You know he never would have done it if he wasn't cold. And that must have been the cold he caught a week ago that did him in. Remember when he was making the contract? — he knew then that the vest would soon be found, for he swore by man's necessities. . . . I will button up his shirt tight and no one will see it."

"Yes, that's best, just so the men don't know. We don't want to let them down."

The light of the day was now stronger and Meyer got up to turn out his gas lamps. He paused before the large floral horseshoe and felt the quality of the bright red ribbon with the letters that read *Success.*

"You know, Holley," he said, "no one ever gave me a thing like that when I opened up here."

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Early in October last year, one of your Editors received a phone call from a Mrs. Jean Mayer of Mamaroneck, New York. Mrs. Mayer said she represented a small group of serious, would-be writers who were looking for a teacher — six authors in search of a character, one might say — and would Ellery Queen consider giving a course in creative writing? Well, it just happened that at this particular time we were turning over in our minds a new theory for the teaching of creative writing, and it occurred to us that a small class could provide the acid test for our new approach. The result was that we met Mrs. Mayer and her group, seemed to like each other, adopted the platform of "no work by the students, no teaching by Queen," and began the course. Facilities were generously provided by the Westchester Jewish Center of Mamaroneck — the use of a modern schoolroom, with comfortable seats and excellent lighting, made available one evening a week at no cost as part of the Center's nonsectarian, adult educational program (Harry Silverson, chairman).

Well, what happened? Did the new theory of teaching which your Editors had in mind prove practical? The outcome was astonishing — indeed, almost impossible for your Editors to believe. At the end of four sessions of two hours each, a class of adults which started with a roll call of 14 and rose to a 4th-week attendance of 17, wrote no less than 10 short-short stories in the field of mystery, suspense, crime, and detection. And of those 10 stories, no less than three were worthy of publication. One of the three was written by a member of the class who had had one previous story published. The other two — think of it, after a mere four weeks of instruction and guidance! — the other two stories were written by absolute beginners who had never had a single word of fiction published before.

We think you would be particularly interested in reading these two "first stories"; so we are giving both of them to you in this issue of EQMM — a sort of double debut in print.

The first is by Mrs. Emilee Berger, and you will find it a sensitive, delicately written tale with a surprising plot for a "first story." Mrs. Berger attended schools in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and was graduated from a Junior College in 1932. She was secretary to a Baptist minister for five years. She was married in 1936, her husband is now president of an office furniture company, and they have three daughters. Mrs. Berger's interest in writing goes back to her high school and college days, but it was not

until she enrolled in an adult education class that she did anything but dream that some day she would put some of her ideas on paper. Now she has discovered "that the right combination of words can be translated into money, a fact I knew but felt was far removed from any possible experience of mine."

Yes, it can happen to you too . . .

THE WATCHER

by EMILEE BERGER

MARY CHECKED HER SHOPPING list as she walked toward the bus station. She had everything — no, not quite. She had promised Jill to fix the blue dress for tomorrow and needed thread. She fumbled into the corner of her purse for the tiny scrap of blue cloth she had snipped from the dress seam. Bardon's Department Store was just ahead.

This had been "one of those days" for Mary. Her usually pleasant countenance had taken on a grim look during the last hour of shopping. It seemed incredible that there could be such huge crowds so many weeks before the holidays. She pushed her way impatiently through the entrance to Bardon's. With the unerring sense of direction her husband Ralph could never fathom, she soon found the counter over which swung the sign, *Notions*.

It took only a minute to find the spools of colored thread and the exact shade of blue she needed. Mary fished a dime from her change purse. As she moved around other customers to reach a clerk, she decided the crowd here was worse than all the others she had encountered. A bulky figure suddenly backed away from the counter and into her. Mary narrowly retrieved her spool of thread and grasped her tilting hat.

"Sorry!" The figure sped away.

Mary stepped quickly into the vacant space at the counter and held her hand, thread and dime extended, toward the clerk. The clerk saw no one. Her cosmetically correct face was impassive as she reached toward the outstretched hand of another customer. Slowly the clerk unwound a length of elastic for measuring, her pale eyes surveying something far above and beyond the stream of humanity eddying about her. She was chewing gum with maddening deliberation.

Time and again Mary held out her hand. She tried smiling at the girl entreatingly; then frowning impatiently. She fastened a steady gaze upon her that clearly said, "Look here, you must take care of me at

once!" The girl remained aloof, gliding the length of the counter, reaching here, there, but never toward Mary. She might have been the high priestess of a strange cult, granting or withholding favor with equal indifference.

Mary gripped the thread and dime tighter and pushed up her coat sleeve with her fingertips to see her watch. "Good heavens," she half moaned. "I *can't* be late." If she missed her bus, she would be another forty-five minutes. Jill had a dentist appointment right after school.

"You feel like walking out on her without even paying," an angry voice spoke in Mary's ear. She turned to nod agreement. The little woman at her elbow held a handful of darning cotton in a pudgy hand. The side glance may have been costly, for the clerk now turned her back to them, reaching toward outstretched hands on the opposite side. The little woman snorted, dropped the darning cotton with some emphasis, and left. Mary bit her lip in desperation. She must not miss the bus. Jill would be waiting at school. There was no way to let her know. Forget the thread? No, there would be no chance to stop again before the stores closed.

Her decision came abruptly and easily. She slipped the thread and the dime into her coat pocket and walked away from the counter. Her stomach felt a bit strange as she went along the aisle. She thought, "No one saw me," but hesitated momentarily, almost turning back the few steps she had come. Logic came to her aid. "I'll be coming in again in a few days. Of course, that's what I'll do! I'll just tell them I was absent-minded and give them the money." She now moved along faster. Once the decision was made, there was no point in missing the bus. She fairly sailed past the counters now, weaving swiftly through the shoppers.

It was good to come into the cool air outside the store. Mary sniffed it with appreciation and turned in the direction of the bus station. The unexpected pressure of the hand on her arm stopped her. A shiver went through her and she stood as if frozen. In that instant, however, she knew she would turn to look into the eyes of a strange man. When she spoke her voice shook only a little.

"Yes?"

"You forgot something, didn't you?" It was more a statement than a question. As if detached, Mary heard her words come tumbling out.

"It's because — I'm late, you see. Jill — my daughter — has a dentist appointment —" She stopped. The man's clear eyes were looking through her with such intensity it was impossible for her to continue. She swallowed and somehow gained composure. Why was she explaining to this stranger? She drew herself up. She was Mrs. Ralph Emerson in a hurry to catch her bus. The tall man's lean fingers rested on her arm. She looked at his hand and back to his serious face.

"You've made a mistake," she said

clearly. There was no tremor in her voice. "I have forgotten nothing. Now, if you'll excuse me — I'm afraid I shall miss my bus." She attempted to shake his hand from her arm but found she could not pull away. It was as if he exerted some power over which she had no control. His voice was low but it had the ring of authority.

"Please step into the store with me, Madam. I'm certain you will not be detained long."

Mary's composure vanished. Her eyes filled with unshed tears and she began to tremble. This was dreadful! What had she done? Her thoughts were racing. Her voice was shaking badly when she finally spoke, hardly above a whisper. "Please, I — I don't know what made me do it. The clerk was so dreadfully slow. The woman next to me — I've never — *never* taken anything before in all my life —" She turned her face away from him, forcing back the tears.

The man was urging her gently through the entrance into the store. Mary fumbled in her pocket for a handkerchief and felt the spool of thread. She quickly brought it out, gazing at it with horror. Eagerly she thrust it toward the man whose eyes had not left her face.

"Here," she said, "take this back and let me go — please! I swear I shall never —" She stopped speaking as a passing couple looked at her curiously. She must have been shouting. The hand remained on her arm and made no effort to take the thread from her. Mary stood with her eyes lowered. What would he do now? Would they ask her name, perhaps call Ralph? She shuddered. She had the sudden impulse to flee, to break away from this man and run from the place as fast as she could. The hand on her arm was light but firm in its grasp. It was no use. She had better face the thing. She lifted her head and looked directly at the man.

"Tell me what I must do," she said quietly. "Where do you have to take me?"

The man smiled. He had a wonderfully kind face, Mary thought, and again felt almost detached from the painful scene. His voice, too, was kind.

"I'm not going to take you anywhere. Just do exactly as I say and you'll always be glad you did." He paused as if to decide a best course for her to pursue. Mary looked curiously at the spool of blue thread in her hand and waited. Her mind was free of anything but a willingness to do what he asked.

"Take the thread back, tell the girl you walked off with it absentmindedly, and pay her for it."

Mary nodded, waiting.

"Go now."

Mary's mind began to function as a part of her own will once more. She gave a small, almost hysterical laugh. "You mean, that's all I have to do?"

"Except for one thing. *Never forget it.*"

For an instant Mary could not meet his gaze. Then she smiled at

him, pressed his hand, and moved away into the crowd. She walked swiftly in the direction of the counter marked *Notions*. She would just have to explain somehow to Jill and to Dr. Curtis that there had been an unavoidable delay.

A couple sauntering through the store drew quickly aside as Mary pushed by them.

The woman nudged her companion's arm.

"There she is," she said. The man followed her gaze and saw the trim figure of Mary Emerson moving rapidly down the aisle away from them.

"There *who* is?" he asked.

"That woman I told you about a few minutes ago — that nice-looking woman who was standing back there outside the store talking to herself. Honestly, the way she was carrying on as she came in, you'd have thought she was *really* talking to someone. I watched her for quite a while. There wasn't a living soul near her." She dismissed Mary with a shrug. "It just goes to show, you can't tell much about people by their looks."

The second "first story" from the Ellery Queen class is by "Martin Brooke," a pseudonym for a housewife and mother who prefers to keep her identity secret. The nom de plume, she tells us, is a combination of her husband's and her own family names.

Martin Brooke's story is about a highly neurotic woman left alone in her house. It has, you will find, mood, tension, and mounting suspense. By a curious coincidence, it was written a few weeks before a famous real-life case, and as one of your Editors remarked in class: "I suggested that you draw on real life, but I never expected you to anticipate it!"

As in the "first story" by Mrs. Berger, the characters in Martin Brooke's story are extremely well realized and projected for a beginner in the art of fiction-telling.

The author was born in Princess Anne County, Virginia, and was graduated from Virginia Intermont College in Bristol right in the middle of The Great Depression. Nevertheless, she managed to browbeat an advertising manager into letting her write sign copy for a department store (strangely enough, however, it is Mrs. Berger's story that has a department-store background). The author's husband is in retail merchandising, and they have two daughters. At the end of her letter to your Editors, Martin Brooke

said: "It still doesn't seem possible that you would have liked the very first short story I ever wrote well enough to publish it. You're a brave man."

Not so brave . . . and we repeat, for the benefit of all would-be writers: yes, it can happen to you too.

THE FOG CLOSING IN

by MARTIN BROOKE

HOW LONG SHE STOOD STARING bleakly down the driveway, Mary Turner had no idea, but it must have been quite a while after her husband, Abel, had tossed both his salesman's sample-case and two-suiter into the car and backed out with unusual speed. She felt chilled through in the damp October air by the time she pulled down the garage door and locked it carefully.

The kitchen was warm at least — warm and heavy with the odor of recently fried bacon and eggs, and half-smoked cigarettes. Abel was smoking too much lately, she thought, irrelevantly, for her mind was occupied with his recent bitterness. She still felt numb, as though her blood was congealed like the yellow smears on their breakfast plates. Never had he spoken so plainly to her before. Oh, she knew pretty well what he'd been thinking right along. But this time he'd said it.

"For Pete's sake, Mary," he'd burst out, "stop nagging me. I can't stay home with you all the time, just because you're scared of your own shadow. Get out and meet people, then you'd have more to do than sit around and brood."

"I just can't," she had defended herself. "Everything's so strange here. If you'd only ask for your old job back . . ."

"Now, Mary," he had interrupted, "you know perfectly well that this territory is much better than the one I had around Middleburg. I'd look like a fool if I told the boss I had to leave Kansas City just because my wife wanted to live with her family."

Mary remembered looking down at her plate for fear Abel would see her eyes fill up. Abel was very impatient with tears. "You just won't try to understand," she had murmured.

Abel had pushed his chair back abruptly, scraping along the linoleum, and stood up. "God knows I've tried to understand, these five years we've been married. Now look. When we moved here last summer, you wanted a house much too large for us, just so your folks could visit comfortably once in a while. You've got it. You wanted a dog to protect you during the day. I bought Clancy.

You wanted someone staying with you nights when I'm away. I hired old Mrs. Powell. Still you aren't satisfied. You're all wrapped up in some mysterious fear of something, heaven knows what, and you won't even try to adjust yourself."

He had left the kitchen then, moving soundlessly as a cat, the way so many large men do, and returned almost immediately, it had seemed, ready to go.

"Mary. Please. When we were first married your whims and fancies were sort of cute, you were so young. But it's time you grew up. A man is entitled to his own home, and, I once hoped, his own family. We'll have to reach some definite understanding when I get back Friday."

That was all he had said until he got in the car. There might have been a little smile at the corner of his lips as he leaned out to kiss her goodbye. She was never quite sure when he was laughing at her. "If there's any need," he reminded her, "you can reach me at the Statler in St. Louis."

Then she had been alone, the fog closing in.

It was time to do the dishes — but careful, now, because lately dishes had a way of slipping, and Abel mustn't say again how clumsy she was. Besides, if you wash slowly, you can listen for all the little house sounds. Each house has its own sounds, and she was just getting used to this one's . . . like the sigh in the chimney on windy days; the creak, in spite of thick carpeting, on the third from the bottom stair when she stepped on it, and sometimes even when she didn't. The most terrifying of all had been the muffled thump in the cellar pipes when the gas heat came on automatically. At first she was sure a heavy door was being thrown open violently, striking the concrete wall, or, at the very least, a giant fist pounding somewhere in the bowels of the house. Abel explained what it was, even taking her down below, almost by force, to point out the simple mechanics; so now she merely jumped, startled for the moment. Besides, the cellar door was always locked when Abel wasn't home.

Oh, yes. Be sure the doors are locked. Mary left the dishes drying in the rack and began her customary tour. The kitchen door, first. Then she remembered Clancy, out in the little fenced-in yard for his morning run. When she unchained the door, he came in quickly, his stiff coat wet under her hand. "Clancy" was an incongruous name for a half-airedale, half-police dog, but that's what the man at the pound had told Abel it was. She had hoped for something smaller, like a cocker spaniel, but was so pleased to have any dog at all, she kept quiet. Not that she felt any particular affection for Clancy — dogs have a way of looking at you that seems too knowing; but he could hear sounds and feel a presence even more quickly than she.

Clancy nosed around in his already

licked-clean dish. Mary tested the cellar door. Abel allowed Clancy to have the run of both kitchen and cellar, but, on days when Mary was alone, she kept the dog confined to the kitchen, with short excursions to the yard. So now she left him behind, regretfully, as she went through the rest of the house to be sure everything was tightly latched. If she took him with her, as she had once or twice before, Abel was sure to see signs of dog hair again and raise a fuss. For some reason, she just couldn't keep the house as clean as her mother's.

Perhaps her mother or father could make Abel understand how cruel it was to keep her here, although when she had tried to enlist their help to persuade Abel not to take this territory in the first place, they had said, "It might do you good." Of course, they hadn't really meant what they said, they were just trying to please her husband.

Mary decided to call home again. Although she was not permitted to call until after six, when the long distance rates were cheaper, it was always a good idea to have things ready. Since she was now upstairs, she went to the extension phone in their bedroom and looked at it.

Dials were confusing. Hard to remember which numbers you dialed for long distance, and even if you knew, it was so easy to put a finger in the wrong circle. The book with all the instructions was in the desk. The drawer slid out smoothly, and, as she reached for the phone book, something shiny caught her eye. The revolver Abel had given her. As though a revolver would be of any use, she thought scornfully. Closing the drawer, she opened the directory to the proper place and left it beside the pad where she had jotted down her parents' number.

All day long it rained. Once when she was watching the sheets of water thrown up by passing cars that sped too near the gutter, she saw the woman next door run out, umbrella pulled low, to a waiting cab and drive off. Mary was pleased that Abel never found out the woman had called on her one afternoon. Mrs. Sanders, as she had introduced herself, smiling, had been very pleasant, and, for a while, Mary entertained the thought of returning her visit; but in retrospect the woman's questions seemed a little sly, so Mary had decided against it.

Five o'clock came at last. She fed Clancy, made herself a sandwich, and ate in the living room while watching television. There was one nice thing about a big city, all the different TV channels.

Shortly before six, she turned off a newscaster saying something about bad driving conditions. "Maybe I should have listened," she thought on her way upstairs, "Abel may be having trouble on the road." But it was almost time to call home, which was the important thing to do. Snapping on the desk lamp, she looked at her watch. Be sure to pick up the phone at exactly six o'clock.

The long distance operator said there were no circuits open to Middleburg, could she call back when the lines were clear? Mary said yes, and went down to the kitchen to let Clancy out. It's getting dark, she thought uneasily; Mrs. Powell should be here soon. Just as Clancy gingerly stepped outside, the phone rang. She ran eagerly up to her bedroom.

"Are you the party calling Middleburg 3254?" It was the operator.

"Yes, yes."

"Sorry, the circuits are still busy. Shall I keep trying?"

"Yes, please." Mary felt deflated. Well, she might as well sit here at the desk and wait; let Clancy whine at the door, it wouldn't hurt him. The door . . . there was something about the kitchen door that began to bother her. Oh, God, it was unlocked! In her hurry, she hadn't slipped the chain in place.

She ran into the hall, the light from the lamp casting shadows before her, and shrank back, slowly, her eyes straining into the darkening gulf of the stairwell. Then, still edging back, she shut and locked her bedroom door in one swift motion. She leaned against the frail panels, spent and trembling.

How could she have done such a terribly stupid thing? Now Clancy was outside, the kitchen door unchained, and, worst of all, she was alone in a house of darkness. Then she began to breathe more easily. Mrs. Powell, she thought with a wave of relief. Mrs. Powell should be here by 6:30. It was 6:20 now. Mrs. Powell would come in through the kitchen and call, and Mary could have her turn on all the lights before venturing out. She waited, calmer, at her bedroom desk.

6:25.

6:28.

The phone rang.

"Hello, Mother?"

"This is the operator. Your Middleburg number is still busy. Shall I try again in twenty minutes?"

"Twenty minutes?" she cried. "Can't you try sooner than that?"

"Yes, madam, I'll try."

Mary had a feeling of urgency, as though her mother's voice would make everything all right, the way it used to. Surely Abel would listen to her pleas. Nothing like this could have happened if she were at home. Mother would just have to *make* Abel let her come home.

It was now 6:35 by her watch. Where was Mrs. Powell? Could the rain be delaying her? She peered out of the window, vainly trying to see the backyard.

"The old fool," she said aloud in sudden fury. "She's never been this late before!"

The sound of her own voice startled her, while outside the menacing night sent its fingers of rain tapping on the window. She yanked down the shade and inched back to the desk against the wall. It was safer at the desk where she could watch both her bedroom door and the window . . . watch and wait.

From far below — farther than the shadowy hallway, the black stairwell, and the shrouded living room — came the muffled thump of a heavy door against a wall . . . the door of a fathomless depth where unimaginable horrors lay in wait for an opportune moment to escape. The steam hissed in the radiators, but Mary leaned forward, listening only for the sounds she knew must come. There. A door opened and closed. Not the kitchen door, or Clancy would have barked at Mrs. Powell. It must be the cellar door — for shapeless things that walk by night will not be stopped by bolts and chains.

It was as though all her life was telescoped into this one moment. She had been born and had lived for the purpose of being here in this precise room at this precise moment of inevitable doom when the nameless evil that battened in the dark caves of her mind would reveal itself.

Across the shrouded living room it moves, she thought, to the black stairs. The creak of the third step . . .

"Oh, God," she thought wildly, "it's almost here! What can I do, what can I do!" There was no escape, no place to hide. What had Abel told her once? The revolver. At least it would be something to hold onto in her last horrible moment. Her hand flicked out, snatching the revolver from the desk drawer. It was cold, yet somehow she felt stronger.

Now she could actually feel the presence in the shadowy hall, nearing her room. Her knuckles whitened around cold steel.

"Mary, are you in there?" the voice called.

Her throat tightened convulsively.

"Mary, are you all right?"

It was Abel. Now, now at last she knew the name for all her fears.

She watched, knowing what she must do, as the door swayed, the lock splintered out under the force of his lunge. He stared, speechless, at her for a moment, his figure merging with the shadows in her mind.

Then she pulled the trigger.

She might have stood there forever . . . the startled cry, the crash of the heavy body having faded into deathly silence . . . but for the blatant shrills of the bell.

She looked around. Yes, the telephone was ringing. She walked slowly to the desk and lifted the receiver.

"Your call to Middleburg is ready," the operator said.

"Mother?" She cleared her throat.

"Is anything wrong, Mary?" Her mother's voice came through anxiously, the way it always did on long distance.

"Oh, no, mother," she said. "Everything is fine now. I'm coming home."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JOHN BUCHAN**

TITLE: ***Sing a Song of Sixpence***

TYPE: Suspense and Crime

LOCALE: London

COMMENTS: *Robert Louis Stevenson proved that London could be a Western Baghdad, a true City of the Caliphs. John Buchan, author of the classic,* THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS, *gives us an even newer Arabian Nights' Entertainment — again in the heart of London.*

EDWARD LEITHEN'S FACE HAD THAT sharp chiseling of the jaw and that compression of the lips which seem to follow upon high legal success. Also an overdose of German gas in '18 had given his skin an habitual pallor, so that he looked not unhealthy, but notably urban. As a matter of fact, he was one of the hardest men I have ever known, but a chance observer might have guessed from his complexion that he rarely left the pavements.

Burminster, who had come back from a month in the grass countries with a face like a deep-sea mariner's, commented on this one evening.

"How do you manage always to look the complete Cit, Ned?" he asked. "You're as much a Londoner as a Parisian is a Parisian, you know."

Leithen said that he was not ashamed of it, and he embarked on a eulogy of the metropolis. In London you met sooner or later everybody you had ever known; you could lay your hand on any knowledge you wanted; you could pull strings that controlled the innermost Sahara and the topmost Pamirs. Romance lay in wait for you at every street corner. It was the true City of the Caliphs.

"That is what they say," said Sandy Arbuthnot sadly, "but I never found it so. I yawn my head off in London. Nothing amusing ever finds me out — I have to go and search for it, and it usually costs the deuce of a lot."

"I once stumbled upon a pretty generous allowance of romance," said Leithen, "and it cost me precisely sixpence." Then he told us this story. . . .

It happened long ago, just when I was beginning to get on at the Bar. I spent busy days in court and chambers, but I was young and had a young man's appetite for society; so I used to dine out most nights and go to more balls than were good for me. It was pleasant after a heavy day to dive into a different kind of life. My rooms at the time were in Down Street, the same house as my present one, only two floors higher up.

On a certain night in February, I was dining in Bryanston Square with the Nantleys. Mollie Nantley was an old friend, and used to fit me as an unattached bachelor into her big dinners. She was a young hostess and full of ambition, and one met an odd assortment of people at her house. Mostly political, of course, but a sprinkling of art and letters, and any visiting lion that happened to be passing through. Mollie was a very innocent lion-hunter, but she had a partiality for the breed.

I don't remember much about the dinner, except that the principal guest had failed her. Mollie was loud in her lamentations. He was a South American President who had engineered a very pretty *coup d'état* the year before, and was now in England on some business concerning the finances of his country. You may remember his name — Ramon Pelem — he made rather a stir in the world for a year or two. I had read about him in the papers, and had looked forward to meeting him, for he had won his way to power by extraordinary boldness and courage, and he was quite young. There was a story that he was partly English and that his grandfather's name had been Pelham. I don't know what truth there was in that, but he knew England well, and Englishmen liked him.

Well, he had cried off on the telephone an hour before, and Mollie was grievously disappointed. Her other guests bore the loss with more fortitude, for I expect they thought he was a brand of cigar.

In those days dinners began earlier and dances later than they do today. I meant to leave soon, go back to my rooms, read briefs, and then look in at Lady Samplar's dance between 11 and 12. So at 9:30 I took my leave.

Jervis, the old butler, who had been my ally from boyhood, was standing on the threshold, and in the square there was a considerable crowd, now thinning away. I asked what the trouble was.

"There's been an arrest, Mr. Edward," he said in an awestruck voice. "It 'appened when I was serving coffee in the dining-room, but our Albert saw it all. Two foreigners, he said — proper rascals by their look — were took away by the police just outside this very door. The constables was very nippy and collared them before they could use their pistols — but they 'ad pistols on them."

"Did they propose to burgle you?" I asked.

"I cannot say, Mr. Edward. But I shall give instructions for a very careful locking up tonight."

There were no cabs about, so I decided to walk on and pick one up. When I got into Great Cumberland Place, it began to rain sharply, and I was just about to call a prowling cab, when I put my hand into my pocket. I found that I had no more than one solitary sixpence.

I could, of course, have paid when I got to my flat. But as the rain seemed to be slacking off, I preferred to walk. Mollie's dining-room had been stuffy, I had been in court all day, and I wanted some fresh air.

You know how in little things, when you have decided on a course, you are curiously reluctant to change it. Before I got to the Marble Arch, it had begun to pour in downright earnest. But I still stumped on. Only I entered the Park, for even in February there is a certain amount of cover from the trees.

I passed one or two hurrying pedestrians, but the place was almost empty. The occasional lamps made only spots of light in a dripping darkness, and it struck me that this was a curious patch of gloom and loneliness to be so near to crowded streets, for with the rain had come a fine mist. I pitied the poor devils to whom it was the only home. There was one of them on a seat which I passed. The collar of his thin, shabby overcoat was turned up, and his shameful old felt hat was turned down, so that only a few square inches of pale face were visible. His toes stuck out of his boots, and he seemed sunk in a sodden misery.

I passed him and then turned back. Casual charity is an easy dope for the conscience, and I indulge in it too often. When I approached him again, he seemed to stiffen and his hands moved in his pockets.

"A rotten night," I said. "Is sixpence any good to you?" And I held out my solitary coin.

He lifted his face, and I started. For the eyes that looked at me were not those of a waster. They were bright, penetrating, authoritative — and they were young. I was conscious that they took in more of me than mine did of him.

"Thank you very much," he said, as he took the coin, and the voice was that of a cultivated man. "But I'm afraid I need rather more than sixpence."

"How much?" I asked. This was clearly an original.

"To be accurate, five million pounds."

He was certainly mad, but I was fascinated by this wisp of humanity. I wished that he would show more of his face.

"Till your ship comes home," I said, "you want a bed, and you'd be the better for a change. Sixpence is all I have on me. But if you come to my rooms, I'll give you the price of a night's lodging, and I think I might find you some old clothes."

"Where do you live?" he asked.

"Close by — in Down Street." I gave the number.

He seemed to reflect, and then he shot a glance on either side into the

gloom behind the road. It may have been fancy, but I thought that I saw something stir in the darkness.

"What are you?" he asked.

I was getting abominably wet, and yet I submitted to a cross-examination by this waif.

"I am a lawyer," I said.

He looked at me again.

"Have you a telephone?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Right," he said. "You seem a good fellow and I'll take you at your word. I'll follow you. . . . Don't look back, please. It's important. . . . I'll be in Down Street as soon as you. . . . *Marchons.*"

It sounds preposterous, but I did exactly as I was bid. I never looked back, but I kept my ears open for the sound of following footsteps. I thought I heard them, and then they seemed to die away. I turned out of the Park at Grosvenor Gate and went down Park Lane. When I reached the house which contained my flat, I looked up and down the street, but it was empty except for a waiting cab. But just as I turned in, I caught a glimpse of someone running at the Hertford Street end. The runner came to a sudden halt, and I saw that it was not the man I had left.

To my surprise I found the waif on the landing outside my flat. I was about to tell him to stop outside, but as soon as I unlocked the door he brushed past me and entered. My man, who did not sleep on the premises, had left the light burning in the little hall.

"Lock the door," he said in a tone of authority. "Forgive me taking charge, but I assure you it is important."

Then to my amazement he peeled off his sopping overcoat and kicked off his disreputable shoes. They were odd shoes, for what looked like his toes sticking out was really part of the makeup. He stood up before me in underclothes and socks, and I noticed that his underclothing seemed to be of the finest material.

"Now for your telephone," he said.

I was getting angry at these liberties.

"Who the devil are you?" I demanded.

"I am President Pelem," he said, with all the dignity in the world. "And you?"

"I? — oh, I'm the Shah of Persia."

He laughed. "You know you invited me here," he said. "You've brought this on yourself." Then he stared at me. "Hullo, I've seen you before. You're Leithen. I saw you play at Lords'. I was twelfth man for Harrow that year. . . . Now for the telephone."

There was something about the fellow, something defiant and debonair and young, that stopped all further protest on my part. He might or might not be President Pelem, but he was certainly not a wastrel. Besides, he seemed curiously keyed up, as if the occasion were desperately important, and he infected me with the same feeling. I said no more, but led the way into my sitting-room. He

flung himself on the telephone, gave a number, was instantly connected, and began a conversation in monosyllables.

It was a queer jumble that I overheard. Bryanston Square was mentioned, and the Park, and the number of my house was given — to somebody. There was a string of foreign names — Pedro and Alejandro and Manuel and Alcaza — and short breathless inquiries. Then I heard — "a good fellow — looks as if he might be useful in a row," and I wondered if he was referring to me. Some rapid Spanish followed, and then, "Come round at once — they will be here before you. Have policemen below, but don't let them come up. We should be able to manage alone. Oh, and tell Burton to ring up here as soon as he has news." And he gave my telephone number.

I put some coals on the fire, changed into a tweed jacket, and lit a pipe. I fetched a dressing-gown from my bedroom and flung it on the sofa. "You'd better put that on," I said when he had finished.

He shook his head.

"I would rather be unencumbered," he said. "But I should dearly love a cigarette . . . and a liqueur brandy, if you have such a thing. That Park of yours is infernally chilly."

I supplied his needs, and he stretched himself in an armchair, with his stockinged feet to the fire.

"You have been very good-humored, Leithen," he said. "Valdez — that's my aide-de-camp — will be here presently, and he will probably be preceded by other guests. But I think I have time for the short explanation which is your due. You believed what I told you?"

I nodded.

"Good. Well, I came to London three weeks ago to raise a loan. That was a matter of life or death for my big stupid country. I have succeeded. This afternoon the agreement was signed. I think I mentioned the amount to you — five million sterling."

He smiled happily and blew a smoke ring into the air.

"I must tell you that I have enemies. Among my happy people there are many rascals, and I had to deal harshly with them. 'So foul a sky clears not without a storm' — that's Shakespeare, isn't it? I learned it at school. You see, I had Holy Church behind me, and therefore I had against me all the gentry who call themselves liberators. A good many are now reposing beneath the sod, but some of the worst remain. In particular, six followed me to England with instructions that I must not return.

"I don't mind telling you, Leithen, that I have had a peculiarly rotten time the last three weeks. It was most important that nothing should happen to me till the loan was settled, so I had to lead the sheltered life. It went against the grain, I assure you, for I prefer the offensive to the defensive. The English police were very amiable, and I never stirred without

a cordon — your people and my own. The Six wanted to kill me, and as it is pretty easy to kill anybody if you don't mind being killed yourself, we had to take rather elaborate precautions. As it was, I was twice nearly done in. Once my carriage broke down mysteriously, and a crowd collected, and if I hadn't had the luck to board a passing cab, I should have had a knife in my ribs. The second was at a public dinner — something not quite right about the sauce served with the oysters. One of my staff is still seriously ill."

He stretched his arms.

"Well, that first stage is over. They can't wreck the loan, whatever happens to me. Now I am free to adopt different tactics and take the offensive. I have no fear of the Six in my own country. There I can take precautions, and they will find it difficult to cross the frontier or to live for six hours thereafter if they succeed. But here you are a free people, and protection is not so easy. I do not wish to leave England just yet — I have done my work and have earned a little play. I know your land and love it, and I look forward to seeing some of my friends. Also I want to attend the Grand National. Therefore, it is necessary that my enemies should be confined for a little, while I take my holiday. So for this evening I made a plan. I took the offensive. I deliberately put myself in danger."

He turned his dancing eyes toward me, and I have rarely had such an impression of wild audacity.

"We have an excellent intelligence system," he went on, "and the Six have been assiduously shadowed. But as I have told you, no precautions avail against the fanatic, and I do not wish to be killed on my little holiday. So I resolved to draw their fire — to expose myself as ground bait, so to speak, that I might have the chance of netting them. The Six usually hunt in couples, so it was necessary to have three separate acts in the play, if all were to be gathered in. The first —"

"Was in Bryanston Square," I put in, "outside Lady Nantley's house?"

"True. How did you know?"

"I have just been dining there, and heard that you were expected. I saw the crowd in the square as I left."

"It seems to have gone off quite nicely. We took pains to let it be known where I was dining. The Six, who mistrust me, delegated only two of their number for the job. They never put all their eggs in one basket. The two gentlemen were induced to make a scene, and, since they proved to be heavily armed, were taken into custody and may get a six months' sentence. Very prettily managed, but unfortunately, it was the two that matter least — the ones we call Little Pedro and Alejandro the Scholar. Impatient, blundering children, both of them. That leaves four."

The telephone bell rang, and he made a long arm for the receiver. The news he got seemed to be good, for he turned a smiling face to me.

"I should have said two. My little

enterprise in the Park has proved a brilliant success. . . . But I must explain. I was to be the bait for my enemies, so I showed myself to the remaining four. That was really a rather clever piece of business. They lost me at the Marble Arch and they did not recognize me as the scarecrow sitting on the seat in the rain. But they knew I had gone to earth there, and they stuck to the scent like terriers. Presently they would have found me, and there would have been shooting. Some of my own people were in the shadow between the road and the railings."

"When I saw you, were your enemies near?" I asked.

"Two were on the opposite side of the road. One was standing under the lamp-post at the gate. I don't know where the fourth was at that moment. But all had passed me more than once. . . . By the way, you very nearly got yourself shot, you know."

"Why did you leave the Park if you had your trap so well laid?" I asked.

"Because it meant dealing with all four at once, and I do them the honor of being rather nervous about them. They are very quick with their guns. I wanted a chance to break up the covey, and your arrival gave it me. When I went off, two followed, as I thought they would. My car was in Park Lane, and gave me a lift; and one of them saw me in it. I puzzled them a little, but by now they must be certain. You see, my car has been waiting for some minutes outside this house."

"What about the other two?" I asked.

"Burton has just telephoned that they have been gathered in. Quite an exciting little scrap. To your police it must have seemed a bad case of highway robbery — two ruffianly looking fellows hold up a peaceful elderly gentleman returning from dinner. The odds were not quite like that, but the men I had on the job are old soldiers and can move softly. . . . I only wish I knew which two they have got. Burton was not sure. Alcaza is one, but I can't be certain about the other. I hope it is not the Irishman."

My bell rang very loud and steadily.

"In a few seconds I shall have solved that problem," he said gaily. "I am afraid I must trouble you to open the door, Leithen."

"Is it your aide-de-camp?"

"No. I instructed Valdez to knock. It is the residuum of the Six. Now, listen to me, my friend. These two have come here to kill me, and I don't mean to be killed. My first plan was to have Valdez here — and others — so that my two enemies should walk into a trap. But I changed my mind before I telephoned. They are very clever men and by this time they will be very wary. So I have thought of something else."

The bell rang again and then a third time insistently.

"Take these," and he held out a pair of cruel little bluish revolvers. "When you open the door, you will say that the President is at home and,

in token of his confidence, offers them these. '*Une espèce d'Irlandais, Messieurs. Vous commencez trop tard, et vous finissez trop tôt.*' Then bring them here. Quick. I hope Corbally is one of them."

I did exactly as I was told. I cannot say that I had any liking for the task, but I was a good deal under the spell of that calm young man, and I was resigned to my flat being made a rendezvous for desperadoes. I had locked and chained and bolted the door, so it took me a few moments to open it.

I found myself looking at emptiness.

"Who is it?" I called. "Who rang?"

I was answered from behind me. It was the quickest thing I have ever seen, for they must have slipped through in the moment when my eyes were dazzled by the change from the dim light of the hall to the glare of the landing. That gave me some notion of the men we had to deal with.

"Here," said the voice. I turned and saw two men in waterproofs and felt hats, who kept their hands in their pockets and had a fraction of an eye on the two pistols I swung by the muzzles.

"M. le Président will be glad to see you, gentlemen," I said. I held out the revolvers, which they seemed to grasp and flick into their pockets with a single movement. Then I repeated slowly the piece of rudeness in French.

One of the men laughed. "Ramon does not forget," he said. He was a young man with sandy hair and hot, blue eyes and an odd break in his long drooping nose. The other was a wiry little fellow, with a grizzled beard and what looked like a stiff leg.

I had no guess at my friend's plan, and was concerned to do precisely as I was told. I opened the door of my sitting-room and noticed that the President was stretched on my sofa, facing the door. He was smoking and was still in his underclothes. When the two men behind me saw that he was patently unarmed, they slipped into the room with quick catlike movements and took their stand with their backs against the door.

"Hullo, Corbally," said the President pleasantly. "And you, Manuel. You're looking younger than when I saw you last. Have a cigarette?" and he nodded toward my box on the table behind him. Both shook their heads.

"I'm glad you have come. You have probably seen the news of the loan in the evening papers. That should give you a holiday, as it gives me one. No further need for the hectic oversight of each other, which is so wearing and takes up so much time."

"No," said the man called Manuel, and there was something very grim about his quiet tones. "We shall take steps to prevent any need for that in the future."

"Tut, tut, Manuel. You are too fond of melodrama to be an artist. You are a priest at heart."

The man snarled. "There will be no priest at your death-bed." Then to his companion, "Let us get this farce over."

The President paid not the slightest attention, but looked steadily at the Irishman. "You used to be a sportsman, Mike. Have you come to share Manuel's taste for potting the sitting rabbit?"

"We are not sportsmen; we are executioners of justice," said Manuel.

The President laughed merrily. "Superb! The best Roman manner." He still kept his eyes on Corbally.

"Damn you, what's your game, Ramon?" the Irishman asked. His freckled face had become very red.

"Simply to propose a short armistice. I want a holiday. If you must know, I want to go to the Grand National."

"So do I."

"Well, let's call a truce. Say for two months or till I leave England — whichever period shall be the shorter. After that you can get busy again."

The one he had named Manuel broke into a spluttering torrent of Spanish, and for a little they all talked that language. I had never seen this class of ruffian before, to whom murder was as simple as shooting a partridge, and I noted curiously the lean hands, the restless, wary eyes, and the ugly lips of the type. So far as I could make out, the President seemed to be getting on well with the Irishman, but to be having trouble with Manuel.

"Have ye really and truly nothing on ye?" Corbally asked.

The President stretched his arms and revealed his slim figure in its close-fitting pants and vest.

"Nor him there?" and he nodded toward me.

"He is a lawyer; he doesn't use guns."

"Then I'm damned if I touch ye. Two months it is. What's your fancy for Liverpool?"

This was too much for Manuel. I saw in what seemed to be one movement his hand slip from his pocket, Corbally's arm swing in a circle, and a plaster bust of Julius Caesar tumbled off the top of my bookcase. Then I heard the report.

"Ye nasty little man," said Corbally as he pressed him to his bosom in a bear's hug.

"You are a traitor!" Manuel shouted. "How will we face the others? What will Alejandro say and Alcaza —?"

"I think I can explain," said the President pleasantly. "They won't know for quite a time, and then only if you tell them. You two gentlemen are all that remain for the moment of your patriotic company. The other four have been the victims of the English police — two in Bryanston Square, and two in the Park close to the Marble Arch."

"Ye don't say!" said Corbally, with admiration in his voice. "Faith, that's smart work!"

"They, too, will have a little holiday. A few months to meditate on politics, while you and I go to the Grand National."

Suddenly there was a sharp rat-tat at my door. It was like the knocking in *Macbeth* for dramatic effect. Cor-

bally had one pistol at my ear in an instant, while a second covered the President.

"It's all right," said the latter, never moving a muscle. "It's General Valdez, whom I think you know. That was another argument which I was coming to if I hadn't had the good fortune to appeal to Mr. Corbally's higher nature. I know you have sworn to kill me, but I take it that the killer wants to have a sporting chance of escape. Well, there wouldn't have been the faintest shadow of a chance here. Valdez is at the door, and the English police are below. You are brave men, I know, but even brave men dislike the cold gallows." The knocker fell again. "Let him in, Leithen," I was told, "or he will be damaging your valuable door."

A tall man in an ulster, which looked as if it covered a uniform, stood on the threshold. "President Pelem," he began . . .

"The President is here," I said. "Quite well and in great form. He is entertaining two other guests."

The General marched to my sitting-room. I was behind him and did not see his face, but I can believe that it showed surprise when he recognized the guests.

"I think you know each other," said the President graciously.

"My God!" Valdez seemed to choke at the sight. "These swine! . . . Excellency, I have —"

"You have nothing of the kind. These are friends of mine for the next two months, and Mr. Corbally and I are going to the Grand National together. Will you have the goodness to conduct them downstairs and explain to the inspector of the police below that all has gone well and that I am perfectly satisfied, and that he will hear from me in the morning. . . . One moment. What about a stirrup cup? Leithen, does your establishment run to a whiskey-and-soda?"

It did. We all had a drink, and I believe I clinked glasses with Manuel.

I looked in at Lady Samplar's dance as I had meant to. Presently I saw a resplendent figure arrive — the President, with the ribbon of the Gold Star of Bolivar across his chest. He was no more the larky undergraduate, but the responsible statesman, the father of his country. There was a considerable crowd in his vicinity when I got near him and he was making his apologies to Mollie Nantley. She saw me and insisted on introducing me. "I so much wanted you two to meet. I had hoped it would be at my dinner — but anyhow I have managed it." I think she was a little surprised when the President took my hand in both of his. "I saw Mr. Leithen play at Lords'," he said. "I was twelfth man for Harrow that year. It is delightful to make his acquaintance; I shall never forget this meeting."

They got him next year. They were bound to, for in that kind of business you can have no sure protection. But he managed to set his country on its feet before he went down. . . . No, it was neither Manuel nor Corbally. I think it was Alejandro the Scholar.

A MATTER OF JUSTICE

(*continued from page 34*)

by HUGH PENTECOST

For the second time in the space of five minutes, Macklyn slipped into unconsciousness. When he opened his eyes again, someone was calling his name, almost tenderly. It was Fred Fowler. The big newspaperman was sitting in the snow, holding Macklyn in his arms and rocking him gently back and forth. The little clearing was crowded with hunters now, and somebody was pointing an electric torch at Macklyn, which blinded him as he opened his eyes.

"We can make a stretcher for him out of some of our jackets," someone said.

"I can walk," Macklyn said, struggling up to a sitting position. "You don't understand what's happened here. It's not as simple as it looks."

Fred Fowler smiled at him, a smile of relief. "You had the hell scared out of you, boy. That's what happened here."

"Can't say I blame you, Macklyn." It was Digger March. "That brute would have scared me out of ten years' growth, if I'd met him alone."

The men gathered around. Macklyn moved, and he saw the dog. Its legs had been trussed to a pole which two men carried over their shoulders. The dog's back dragged on the earth.

"Listen," Macklyn said in a croaking voice. "I don't know what's going on here, but I tell you, when I first came to this clearing, there was a man lying where that calf is. I saw him move. I heard him cry out."

"Have a cigarette," Fowler said. He took a lighted one from his mouth and put it between Macklyn's lips.

"Did you have a flashlight with you, Macklyn?" Van Anderson asked.

"No, but the moon was bright. I tell you —"

"Where were you when you saw all this, baby?" Fowler asked.

Macklyn twisted around and pointed to the top of the low embankment where he had been sitting, smoking a cigarette, when the horror began.

"A good fifteen yards," Digger said.

"I don't care if it was fifteen miles," Macklyn said desperately. "The moon made it bright as daylight. I *thought* it was a calf at first — it was just a black heap. Then the dog came and started to tear at it, and I saw it wasn't a calf. I heard him groan, and I saw him thrash out with his arm. I screamed. That's when I attracted the dog's attention, got him interested in me."

A strange voice whispered off to the side. "Shock. Can't blame him. That dog was a real killer."

"It's not shock, and I wasn't seeing things!" Macklyn cried. "There was a man here. I don't know what's happened to him. I don't know who brought the calf here and took him away —"

"The calf was brought here about half-past three this afternoon," Digger said. "It's been here ever since, Macklyn. I tell you, old man, it's just that the whole experience got your imagination working overtime."

"Take it easy, baby," Fowler said, as Macklyn struggled to his feet and faced the semicircle of hunters.

"So I'm crazy," he said. "But I wasn't crazy when I sat on that rock up there, resting. I was lost, but I wasn't crazy. I saw the dog, and he scared the hell out of me. My gun wasn't loaded, and I wasn't sure I knew how to load it. I sat there, still as a mouse, hoping the dog would get interested in — in — the — the calf and not me! He did, and I thought I could get my gun loaded and fire at him. Then I heard that groan — not from the dog but from — whatever it was there. The dog pounced on him, and I saw his arm thrash out, trying to protect himself. Do you think, if I hadn't been *sure*, I'd have run down into this clearing with an empty gun and no way to protect myself? I — I was trying to defend that guy who was too badly hurt to defend himself!"

"It was a trick of the moonlight," Van said. "The dog's action made the carcass move somehow."

"It was a hand! I saw the *fingers* on it!"

For the first time Macklyn became aware of Bob Streeter, Lib's hired man. "Just so Mr. Graves'll rest easier," he said, "we can count heads here. Is anyone missing?"

A quick count was taken, and all eleven hunters who had set out to work the northeast side of the valley were present.

" 'Course someone could have worked over from the other side, though it was understood no one would, so's to avoid accident."

"I don't care if every hunter in all four groups is accounted for," Macklyn protested. "So it was a tramp or a stranger or God knows who. But don't you see what's happened here? The calf was right here at 3:30, you say. Well, someone took the calf away and put a man there. And in the time that damn' dog and I were playing hide-and-seek, someone took the man away and brought back the calf!"

There was a moment of dead silence.

"We'd better get him back to the house," Van Anderson said. Fred Fowler reached out gently for Macklyn's arm.

Macklyn wrenched away from him. He ran, unsteadily, toward one edge of the clearing. "Here! You can see where the bodies of the calf *and the man* were dragged in and out." There were clear markings of the draggings in the snow.

"We couldn't get within about a hundred yards of here on that old logging road in the jeep," Digger

March explained to anyone who cared to listen. "We hauled the calf in from there and walked back to the jeep the way we came."

"At 3:30 this afternoon!" Macklyn's voice sounded strangely triumphant. He was about fifteen yards away from the group, near the edge of the clearing, bending down. "How do you account for this, then?"

Only Fowler went to join him, placating, gentle. "What is it, baby?"

"On this stone!" Macklyn said. "Fresh blood! It's still wet, Fred. Look at it! I insist you look at it! Would there still be wet blood on this stone from a carcass dragged over it *nine hours ago?*"

The fire had been built up in Lib's living room, and Macklyn had been forced to take the chair that had been Lib's. She sat on the pillow, her crutches on the floor beside her. The room was full of people, and again Grace Cuyler and her husband had taken over. Hot coffee and drinks were being served. Crowded around Macklyn's chair were Fred Fowler and Van and Digger. Dr. Jelliffe had been called in to check Macklyn over.

Macklyn was furious. They had treated him like a child or a harmless idiot, out there in the woods. They had looked at the wet blood on the stone, and they had mumbled about it, and then, as if he needed humoring, they had gone through the motions of searching the woods for a radius of about a hundred yards. Then they had insisted on bringing Macklyn home.

Dr. Jeliffe had dressed Macklyn's torn hands and bandaged them, and he had, laughing as he did it, examined Macklyn's head for injury. "You fell a couple of times," he said. "You might have a concussion, Mr. Graves."

"I didn't fall on my head," Macklyn said angrily, "and I'm not crazy, whatever these idiots may try to tell you." Only the feel of Lib's hand on his arm kept him from blowing his top entirely. He looked at her and remembered there had been an understanding between them long, long ago. It seemed like forever since he had arrived from New York the night before.

"Lib, darling," he said, quietly, "they're trying to brush me off, but I know what I saw!"

No one wanted to listen. Everybody was talking about the hunt. It seemed that the main pack of dogs had been drawn to the bait at the other end of the valley. The men stationed there had shot thirteen of them, and the one Van had gotten — known as "Macklyn's dog" — made fourteen. There could be only three or four left, and they were probably the least dangerous.

Macklyn sat silent, sipping a bourbon Fred had brought. Then he excused himself and struggled out of his chair.

"Where you going, baby?" Fred said.

"Do we have to make a production out of my going to the bathroom?" Macklyn said sharply.

"Don't be sore, baby," Fred said.

But Macklyn had no intention of going to the bathroom. Instead he went to the telephone at the rear of the entrance hall. He asked for the state troopers' barracks in Canaan.

"My name is Macklyn Graves," he told the officer who answered the telephone. "I'm staying at the Crowder farm north of Sharon. I want to report a murder . . . No, I won't go anywhere."

He limped back to the chair in the living room. Van Anderson was standing by Lib. "I've been telling Lib you're a damn' brave guy, Macklyn. You *thought* there was a man there. You risked your life to save him."

Fred brought Macklyn a second drink. "Get to work, baby," he said. "We're getting you drunk, didn't you know? Doctor's orders."

Larry Cuyler was at the piano playing old-time jazz. People stood around the piano singing. It was all very gay.

It was so gay that the two state troopers, who were admitted by one of the guests, were quite puzzled. They asked for Macklyn, and the instant they were seen, the music stopped and people crowded around. Who sent for you?" Digger asked.

"A Mr. Macklyn Graves."

"Oh, brother!" someone said, at the far end of the room.

Digger brought the troopers over to where Macklyn sat, "You phoned for the state police, Macklyn?"

"Yes," Macklyn said.

"I'm Sergeant Jackson," one of the troopers said. "You reported a murder over the phone."

"That's right, Sergeant."

"Look, Sergeant," Digger said. From his tone of voice it was clear he represented a special kind of authority. "Mr. Graves is suffering from shock. He —"

"I want to report a murder," Macklyn said grimly.

"Who is the victim?" Jackson asked.

"I don't know."

"Where is the body?"

"I don't know."

Jackson held his pencil poised over his black notebook. The roomful of people were silent.

"I'd like to tell you what happened, if it can be done without interruption," Macklyn said.

"Is there some place —" Jackson said, looking around.

"The study across the hall," Lib said.

Macklyn went there with the two troopers. Jackson sat at the desk and Macklyn sat in a red-leather chair, facing him. The other trooper stood by the door.

"When I get through telling you," Macklyn said, "you may agree with the others that I am crazy. But I'd be doing less than my duty as a citizen if I didn't tell you."

"Go ahead, Mr. Graves."

So Macklyn told the story from beginning to end. "We found fresh blood where the calf and the man had been dragged into the clearing," he said as he finished. "I say it came from the body of the man who was alive or had only just died when he was taken

out of the clearing and replaced by the calf."

Jackson's voice had an odd sound to it. "The others don't agree?"

"The others," Macklyn said, "say it may have been the dog's blood. That he might have been wounded before they actually got him. They say" — and Macklyn spoke with emphasis — "that it might have been *my* blood — that it dripped off my neck or hands right then, while I was searching."

"I see," Jackson said. He closed the notebook. "We'll search the location, Mr. Graves. And we'll check the surrounding communities for news of someone missing. If there was a murder, someone is missing somewhere."

"Unless it was a tramp, someone like that," the trooper by the door said.

Macklyn turned his head. "If it was a tramp, why the elaborate effort to remove the carcass of the calf and replace it with the man, and then remove the man and replace him with the calf?"

"*If* that happened," the trooper said.

"It happened," Macklyn said grimly.

Jackson drummed his pencil on the edge of the desk. "Why do *you* think someone did that, Mr. Graves?" he asked.

Macklyn was suddenly almost too tired to talk and more. "I think the murderer intended it should seem the man he killed had been run down and destroyed by the dogs. I think there is evidence the man was murdered. Suppose he was strangled. The dogs would tear out his throat first thing, from what I hear. That would destroy the evidence of strangulation. Not autopsy evidence, perhaps, but no one would have thought of an autopsy. Right?"

"Go on," Jackson aid.

"But I saw the body before the dog could destroy the evidence. I kept the dog from destroying it. So the murderer had to remove the body again. He brought back the carcass of the calf, and it's worked out perfectly for him. Everybody's satisfied I was frightened into a piece of gaudy imagination. I wasn't. And when you find the body you'll find evidence that the man was murdered. I'll bet everything I own on that."

"You've no idea who the man was?"

"Not the slightest. I never saw his face. The chances are, being a stranger here, I wouldn't know him."

Jackson stood up. "We'll check," he said. "Do you expect to be around for a while, Mr. Graves?"

"Till this is settled," he said.

"I guess that's all for now," Jackson announced.

The troopers went straight across the entrance hall and out the front door without talking to anyone else. Macklyn watched them go, and he was angry all over again. Why hadn't they questioned some of the other hunters? Had Digger March convinced them that this was all just a pipe dream?

Fred Fowler came out of the living room to where Macklyn stood, carrying his own glass and Macklyn's. "You've done what you could, baby," he said. "Drink up."

Macklyn took the glass from him, raised it, and drained it. He shuddered slightly and then looked up at Fowler. "Tell me, you fat slob, in what New York night club did you enjoy that case of pneumonia you're supposed to be up here recuperating from?"

Fowler looked back at him without blinking. "A literary-type guy like you ought to know better than to end a sentence with a preposition," he said.

Exhaustion works in peculiar ways. Tensions had held Macklyn together until after the troopers left. The combination of their going and the whiskey Fred had brought seemed to end his control. The room began to spin almost at once, and ten minutes later he realized he was being helped to bed by Fred and Van Anderson.

He thought once that he heard the sound of laughter and of cars driving away, and then, in the next conscious moment he had, the sun was streaming through the windows of his bedroom and young Dicky was standing by his bed shaking him gently. His eyes were bright with excitement.

"The state troopers are here to see you, Uncle Macklyn."

"Oh." The night's adventure came back to him, even more sharply when he tried to move. He felt bruised from head to foot.

"Mum says Gertrude will bring you a tray and you can see the troopers here," Dicky said.

"No need," Macklyn said. "I'll be down in ten minutes."

With his bruised and stiffened fingers, dressing was difficult, but he managed everything except the tying of a bow tie.

Downstairs, the two troopers were having coffee at the dining-room table with Lib and the seemingly ever-present Fred Fowler. "Hi, baby," Fred said. "How do you feel?"

"In one piece," Macklyn said. "Lib, you'll have to tie my tie for me." He bent down in front of her and looked into her dark blue eyes, and the day was new and good.

"Well, Sergeant?" he said to Jackson.

"We just wanted to report, Mr. Graves," Jackson said. "We started a search of the location at daybreak. There's no sign of a body, nor any sign of anyone's having been dragged around anywhere. Of course, that old road was pretty well tramped."

"Oh, you don't have to tell me the rest," Macklyn said. "Nobody's missing. Right?"

"That's the way it is, sir," Jackson said. He fiddled with his coffee cup. "We thought perhaps, after you'd had a night's rest, and the shock of the experience was over —"

"I saw what I saw," Macklyn said.

Jackson sighed deeply. "We haven't got anything to go on, Mr. Graves, except your word."

"Which has always been good," Macklyn said.

"Don't misunderstand me, sir," Jackson said. "We don't doubt for an instant that you're telling the truth as you saw it. Only, all things considered, it's possible it really didn't happen the way you think it did."

"You're dropping the case?"

"We've sent out a request to all state police and sheriffs' offices in the area, both Connecticut and New York, for immediate information on any missing persons reported."

"And you've given up the search for the body?"

"If they moved it around as handy as you say they did," the other trooper blurted out, "they probably moved it out of the woods by now." He sounded again like he was talking to a loony.

"You intend to do anything more about it, sir?" Jackson asked.

"I intend to clear it up, Sergeant, with or without your help," Macklyn said.

The troopers looked at each other, then thanked Lib for the coffee, and went out.

Macklyn sat down at the table. "I could eat a horse," he said. "I didn't have any dinner last night."

Gertrude was sent for, and she brought fruit juice and coffee.

Fred Fowler leaned back in his chair, the ash from his cigarette dribbling down over his vast expanse of stomach. "You're a revelation, baby," he said. "I've always thought of you as the one who sat at home, listening to your classical records, studying your stage designs. And now I find you determined to play bloodhound."

"Listen, Fred, I'm sick of everybody treating me as if I were nuts. There was murder done out there last night. If no one believes me, then I have no choice but to follow through."

Fred puffed on his cigarette. "Does it occur to you, baby, that you may be setting yourself up as a clay pigeon?"

"It does," Macklyn said.

"What does that mean?" Lib asked.

"If there was a murder," Fred said, "Macklyn's the only hitch in the murderer's getting away with it."

Lib's eyes widened. "Macklyn!"

"So what do I do?" Macklyn said impatiently, "Give up because it's dangerous, and let a killer go free?"

Fred took another cigarette from his pocket and lighted it from the stub of the one he had been smoking. "You've got yourself a good boy, Lib," he said. Then he laughed. "You don't have to look so surprised. I saw I had to throw in the towel the minute Macklyn got here last night. Make her happy, Macklyn, or I'll wring your neck for you. And one way to make her happy is not to run foolish risks."

"Here we go again," Macklyn said.

Gertrude came in with a heaping plate of bacon, eggs, and toast, and Fred was silent till she had gone back to the kitchen.

"You asked me a question last night which I didn't answer. You're right, I've never had pneumonia."

"Fred!" Lib said.

"Oh, it's nothing sinister," the fat man said. "I needed a holiday. Whenever I go any place without a good reason, people pull in their sidewalks and lock their doors. They think I'm investigating them or their neighbors. So when Digger invited me to come here, we spread the story that I'd been sick and was here to recuperate. That was so the good people of your valley wouldn't think I was here to look under someone's bed."

Lib laughed. "You double-talker!"

Fred looked at her. "I'd have been gone long ago, but I fell in love, Mrs. Crowder, and I had hopes."

"Fred, dear, I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about. I asked you nothing, and you promised me nothing." Fowler pushed back his chair noisily and rose. "Take care of your woman, baby," he said to Macklyn, "and stop playing cops and robbers."

Then he turned and left them.

It would have been easy for Macklyn to follow Fowler's advice. He had done his duty as a citizen, technically. He had notified the authorities of what he'd seen, and the authorities had chosen to believe it was only his imagination. His conscience should have let Macklyn drop it there.

"But I can't," he said to Lib, after Fred had left them. "If we go on living here, as I suppose you'll want to, something may happen tomorrow or next week or next month that'll put two and two together, and we'll be back in it again."

Lib's eyes had a twinkle in them. "You talk about our living here, Macklyn, and you haven't even asked me to marry you."

"Lib!"

"Darling."

"Last night — Lord, it was night *before* last night, wasn't it — I thought —"

"It is typically male," Lib said, "to take everything for granted."

"A respectable widow with a small son! You're not suggesting —"

"It doesn't happen every day," Lib said. "A girl has a right to a formal proposal of marriage."

"The classic style is out," Macklyn said. "I couldn't bend my knees far enough to kneel."

"Poor darling," Lib said.

Looking at her, the comedy went out of it for Macklyn. He felt suddenly choked with what he felt for her. "Words have been my business for so long they have a way of becoming meaningless, Lib," he said, very quietly.

"Say the words anyway, darling."

"I love you, Lib," he said.

"And I love you, Macklyn."

"I've always loved you."

"I've been in love before, Macklyn," Lib said. "I loved Lucian."

"Of course."

"But because I've been in love before, Macklyn, I think I know now how to love more than I could then."

He went quickly around the table to her and took her hands in his. "Will you marry me, Lib?"

She laughed a little. "I always im-

agined I'd take this standing, but this blasted ankle —"

He lifted her up out of her chair and held her close to him. "Darling," he whispered. "Darling, darling, darling."

He finally went back to his place — and to the cold bacon and eggs.

Over his second cup of coffee and a cigarette, he was back at the problem that worried at him. "What about Van Anderson?" he asked.

"What about him?"

"He was there before anyone, Lib. He shot the dog. It was some time before any of the other hunters appeared."

"Macklyn, how can you speculate about anyone, darling? You can't guess at a motive when you don't know who was killed. Van is a hot-tempered, reckless guy who might kill someone under the right set of circumstances. But so might you, darling — under the right set of circumstances. Until you know who's dead, you can't try to guess why it happened. And as the trooper said —"

"Yes?"

"The body of the man who was killed may be far away from here by now. There's been time."

Macklyn stood up. "I don't think so," he said. "It couldn't have been safely moved last night. Anyone's absence would have been noticed. The troopers have been on the job since then. I don't think anyone's going to try it by daylight now." He turned to Lib. "Did your shotgun get returned in the excitement last night?"

"Van brought it back."

"Show me how it works. I'm going for a walk," Macklyn said.

Bob Streeter and Dicky were on the front lawn when Macklyn appeared with Lib's shotgun, loaded this time, under his arm. The boy and the farmers were working on Sorrowful, who was being taught to walk at heel. Macklyn stopped to watch.

"How you feeling today, Mr. Graves?" Streeter asked.

"As well as can be expected, to use a medical term." Macklyn said. "I wish I'd known you'd locked that pup in the milkhouse last night. It would have saved me quite a workout."

"I was afraid he'd follow me," Streeter said. "Because I've been helping to train him, he hasn't made up his mind yet between me and Dicky."

"Where will I find the beginning of that logging road, Bob?"

"You going back out there?"

"Just want to look around in the daylight," Macklyn said.

"You go down here to the first break in the stone wall," Streeter began. Macklyn watched his fine, almost aristocratic face, so typical of many of these country people, the ones who knew each stone, each rise of ground, each clump of bushes. ". . . and when you come to a tree that's all wrapped round with bittersweet, you'll see the beginning of the road just off to the left of where you are."

"Do you think I was seeing things last night, Bob?"

Streeter looked away over the countryside. "I'm a countryman, Mr. Graves. I started hunting in these woods over thirty years ago." He chuckled. "I've hunted in 'em often at night, which ain't legal. But if a fellow needs a piece of venison to eat . . ." He let his breath out in a long sigh. "I've seen things in the woods I never mentioned to no one. They wouldn't of believed me. And after a while I didn't believe 'em myself. You'll see how it is, Mr. Graves. A month from now — six months from now — you'll begin to wonder if you really saw what you think you saw." He looked straight at Macklyn. "It's easier that way, Mr. Graves."

A faint chill ran along Macklyn's spine. "I hope you're right," he said. "But I'm off to have a look when there aren't so many shadows."

Go to the first break in the stone wall, up a rise of ground, bear right along the edge of a piece of boggy land, through a wire fence — and there was the dead apple tree, with the bittersweet wound round it like the coils of a snake. The bright orange berries rustled in a brisk, cool breeze. Off to the left Macklyn saw the old logging road . . .

It was strange, but in the darkness the night before, he had been so concerned with his search for Dicky that the woods had not disturbed him. Now, as he walked slowly along the logging road, he had an inclination to turn back. The wind blew in little gusts, shaking some of the brown leaves that still clung to the trees. The sun seemed to be shut out, and the light was bleak.

Macklyn could see the tracks of the snow tires of the jeep that had brought in the calf's carcass, and the many footprints of the hunters who had come and gone. He was no woodsman or tracker. He could scarcely have told which were fresh and which were old. Finally he stopped. Bearing off to the left, through trampled brush, were the marks where the carcass had been dragged into the clearing.

Almost reluctantly, the shotgun crooked under his arm, Macklyn followed the trail into the clearing. The carcass was still there, but there was less of it. Something had been there to feed on it. He looked slowly around to the spot where he had been sitting when last night's adventure had begun. It struck his fancy that the clearing was like an amphitheater, and that he'd had the perfect box seat.

He stood there trying to think. It was hard to arrive at anything like an accurate estimate of the time that had been involved in his duel with the dog. He had rushed down into the clearing and had stood for a moment facing the dog; then the dog had started his advance and he had blundered off to the left, crashed into the tree, started up again, and the dog had jumped on his back. He had fallen again, stunned the dog with the gun butt, and then climbed the tree. There had been what seemed an endless wait for help. But trying to be clear-headed about it, he realized the

whole sequence might not have taken more than twenty minutes, half an hour at the most. In that time the murderer had removed the body and brought back the carcass of the calf. The body *had* to be somewhere close by! There hadn't been time to take it any distance.

It was just then that Macklyn heard the sharp crack of a rifle and the whine of a bullet. To his astonishment he was suddenly bareheaded. He bent down to pick up his hat and saw that a bullet hole had been made neatly through the crown.

"Hey!" Macklyn shouted.

The gun cracked again, and Macklyn felt a faint, searing pain in his left shoulder. Open-mouthed, he stared at the hole in the sleeve of his coat. Then he dived for safety.

Twice more he heard the gun crack. Then, running bent over, he charged back along the trail toward the road.

As he approached it, suddenly he saw a figure standing there, gun poised. It was Digger March.

"You crazy son of a —" Macklyn shouted. "What are you doing?

"If you can't hunt any more carefully than that, I ought to blow a hole in you," Digger said angrily.

"What are you talking about?"

"You put a bullet right through my hat," Digger said. "You missed blowing my brains out by about an inch."

"Look at this!" Macklyn said, waving his own hat. "Anyhow, this is a shotgun I'm carrying."

Digger March moistened his lips. "Me too," he said.

Both men turned and looked back into the woods. There was no sound except the rustling of dead leaves.

After a minute, Macklyn spoke. "Are you satisfied now?" he asked Digger.

"Satisfied?"

"That there's a killer in these woods."

Digger stared at Macklyn for a moment, and then he threw back his head and laughed. "My dear Macklyn, you've surely got that on the brain. That was some crazy kid. They've heard about the bag of dogs last night, and now the woods are full of 'em. He probably didn't even see us."

"You think that shooting was accidental?" Macklyn asked, rubbing the spot on his upper arm where the bullet had grazed him.

"Of course," Digger said. "And let's get out of here before we get some more of it."

They walked in silence back along the logging road. Finally Digger glanced sideways at Macklyn. "You out here hunting for evidence, Macklyn?" he asked.

"Yes," Macklyn said. "What were you out here for, Digger?"

Digger smiled sheepishly. "I didn't even see a live dog last night, let alone get a shot at one. There are supposed to be three or four left. I thought maybe they might still be attracted by what was left of the calf. I should have known there'd be dozens of other people with the same idea. That's what happened, you know.

They heard movement in the clearing — you — and just blazed away without waiting to see what it was."

"You seem positive of that."

"Of course I'm positive."

They came out into the open near the apple tree embraced by the bittersweet vine. A jeep which had not been there before was now parked a few steps away, near the edge of the woods. Digger laughed. "More than one guy had the same idea," he said. "That's Van's jeep."

Macklyn drew a deep breath. "I cut across here for the Crowder place," he explained.

"Be seeing you," Digger said. "I go that way. My car's over there on the highway. Be seeing you."

Macklyn moved slowly over the rise of the hill and waited there until he was sure Digger was out of sight. Then he retraced his steps, walked over to Van Anderson's jeep, got in, and settled down to wait for its owner.

It was more than half an hour before Van Anderson came striding out of the woods, gun tucked under his arm. Presently he saw Macklyn sitting in the jeep, and he came on at a slightly slower pace. Macklyn saw that the gun was a repeating rifle, such as Van had used to kill the dog last night.

"Hi," Van said. "You waiting for me or just resting?"

"Waiting for you."

Van laid his gun down on an Army blanket in the back of the jeep, after emptying the chamber. Then he climbed in behind the wheel. "Something special on your mind?" he asked.

Macklyn noticed how tightly the skin was drawn over Van's thin, ascetic face. His brown eyes were deep-set and seemed always to contain the threat of a brewing storm. Macklyn took off his hat, rested it on his knee, and turned it slowly around with his fingers. Van saw the hole in the crown and whistled.

"I got it a little less than an hour ago up there in the clearing."

"Those crazy kids! The woods are full of them," Van said.

"I didn't see a soul except Digger March — and now you," Macklyn said.

"Macklyn! You don't think —"

"Why is everybody so anxious for me to drop this murder business, Van?"

"Murder business? My dear fellow, you're not still clinging to the idea you saw a man there?"

"I'm still clinging to it. It's true."

Van reached down and turned the starter key on the jeep. He had to raise his voice to be heard over the motor. "If it gives you pleasure —"

Quietly Macklyn reached down and turned off the key. "You were the only hunter anywhere near the clearing when I needed help last night," he said.

Van stared at him. "What?"

"You were hunting alone. You *could* have moved the body before you came to save me. No one else appeared for quite a while."

Van's lips drew together in a thin, hard line. "Don't touch that key again or I'll break your arm," he said. "And don't say what you just said to me or anyone else again, or I'll take you apart piece by piece."

"You haven't answered my question," Macklyn said stubbornly.

Van shook his head slowly. His anger seemed to have suddenly evaporated under the absurdity of Macklyn's question. "You'd rather be right than be President, wouldn't you, Macklyn? You could get to be quite a nuisance with these irresponsible accusations of yours. Now suppose we talk about the weather while I drive you home."

Van let Macklyn out at the entrance to the Crowder place. Macklyn was walking across the yard toward the house when he saw Bob Streeter sitting on a stool in front of the barn, cleaning a rifle. He went over to him. The farmer looked up.

"First chance I've had to clean this since last night," he said.

"Bob, you know the woods around that clearing pretty well."

"Ought to. Lived here all my life."

"Are there any caves, anything like that?"

"Not what you'd call caves," Bob said, running the cloth through the barrel of his gun. "Might have called them that when we were kids. Just sort of openings between rocks."

"Places big enough to hide a body?"

Bob rubbed the calloused tips of his fingers over his jaw. "Might be."

"How about going out there with me after lunch? It would save me a lot of time if you could take me to the places where anything could be hidden."

Bob closed one eye and squinted with the other through the gun barrel. He seemed satisfied. "I guess I could," he said. "Have to be back around four for my chores. Start around two, we could pretty well cover places."

"That'll be fine," Macklyn said.

The farmer's pale-blue eyes lifted. "What happened to your hat?"

"The woods are full of kids hunting for wild dogs," Macklyn said.

Bob grunted. "I should have warned you. That there was close."

Sunday dinner wasn't quite so happy as it might have been. Lib was beginning to be worried. Macklyn hadn't meant to tell her about his narrow escape, but he had carelessly left his hat on the bench in the front hall, and young Dicky found it straight off and brought it in with excited questions.

When Lib and Macklyn were alone she said, "You don't think it was an accident, do you?"

Macklyn smiled at her. "You're going to be tough to live with," he said, "what with all that intuition."

"Macklyn, give it up. You've done everything you could."

"I'm going back this afternoon."

"No!"

"With Bob." He leaned across the table and covered her hand with his. "I'm getting to think like a private eye," he said, grinning. "I think I'm being scared off, darling, but I don't think anybody is going to kill me. That would indicate I was right, and there'd be a murder investigation on in earnest."

"I don't want you dead just so that the police will get interested," Lib said unhappily. "It *must* have been an accident. Digger was shot at too."

Macklyn frowned. "Digger *says* he was shot at. He says someone put a bullet right through his hat, the way they did through mine. But I've been thinking, Lib. I never saw the hat."

"He probably ran when it happened and just left the hat."

"Probably," Macklyn said.

At 2 o'clock sharp Macklyn met Bob Streeter in front of the house. Sorrowful, the beagle, was excitedly running in circles, but Bob had other ideas. He spoke to Dicky, who was watching from the porch with Lib.

"I'm going to put Sorrow in the milkhouse, Dicky," Bob said, "and don't you let him out till we get back. He's liable to get hurt up in the woods with all those crazy kids hunting for dogs."

So Sorrowful was taken off to the milkhouse and left there, protesting with loud wails. Then Macklyn and Bob set out across country to the logging road and into the woods.

"Used to help haul timber out of here when I was a kid," Bob said cheerfully. "My father was a teamster. Used to have a six-horse hitch to pull the big stuff out. Drag it right along the snow. I used to ride astride one of the lead horses, hanging onto the harness . . ." Macklyn had never heard Bob so loquacious. ". . . sittin' there on a log, filling my pipe, with my gun laying right alongside, when I heard a rustling in the bushes. I slipped my pipe into my pocket and reached out real quiet for my gun. Then out of the bushes came Mister Partridge, a-strutting across the road. Well, I upped with my gun, and brother! Did the feathers fly!"

"Isn't that the turnoff for the clearing?" Macklyn interrupted.

"Thought you wanted to circle round the possible hiding places, Mr. Graves. There's another turnoff just above this to higher ground."

"But oughtn't we to stop and listen for some of these hunters?"

Bob chuckled. "When you're hunting, Mr. Graves, you move as quiet as you can. When you're not hunting you make yourself heard so's no one will mistake you for something else. Why do you think I been shooting off my mouth so much for? There may be wild dogs in these woods, but there ain't any that talk that I know of."

There was no doubt about Bob's knowing the woods. In the space of half an hour he showed Macklyn at least a dozen places where a body could have been hidden, but hadn't. They climbed up and down banks, over rocks, peered into crevices.

"Course I'm showing you places it could be hidden, Mr. Graves, but we

already know in advance it ain't, because the snow ain't been marked up hardly any, even by hunters."

Macklyn looked slowly around with a strange feeling of excitement. "Bob, where's the clearing from here?"

"Just over that rise there," Bob said, gesturing with his pipe.

"I'd like to look," Macklyn said.

"No use," Bob said. "It's a straight drop down. No place to hide anything."

"All the same I'd like to look."

He climbed up the rise of ground and looked down the other side. A swampy bog stretched out in front of him. There was no sign of the clearing. Macklyn turned back. Bob leaned against a spruce tree, pulling on his pipe.

Macklyn went straight up to him. "Bob, I'm not an unreasonable man," he said quietly. "I haven't got it in for anyone. I don't know who was killed, and I don't know who killed him. It's simply a matter of common justice that something should be done about it."

"I agree," Bob said. "It's a matter of justice. We got to live by the law, or we got nothing left. You're right."

"Then why have you deliberately led me *away* from the clearing — *away* from places where a body could be hidden?"

"Why, the clearing's right over that rise," Bob said.

"It isn't, and you know it isn't."

"Well, I'll be darned," Bob said. "Must have got off the track."

"You know every inch of this ground, Bob. You've taken me directly to a dozen hiding places where you knew I wouldn't find anything. Why?"

The pale-blue eyes avoided Macklyn's. "I guess I just got lost."

"We might as well head back for home," Macklyn said, after a moment.

"Anything you want, Mr. Graves."

Macklyn couldn't sleep. It had been a bad evening, after Lib had heard his story of Bob Streeter's deliberate attempt to lead him off the trail. She had depended on Bob more than Macklyn realized.

"He was the tenant farmer here for the people that owned the place before Lucian bought it," she had told him. "Lucian thought highly of him, and he's a wonderful worker — actually makes money for me and for himself off the place. After Lucian died I turned to him, almost as I might have to a member of the family. He's been wonderful with Dicky. I've never felt a moment's fear at living here alone. I've always had the feeling I could depend on him."

"Nonetheless," Macklyn had said, "he didn't want me to find what I was looking for."

"It's incredible."

"The whole business is incredible," Macklyn had said. "I have the uneasy feeling that Bob isn't alone in trying to steer me away from this. Why? *Why?*"

There was no answer, not even a far-fetched one, that Macklyn could

make sense out of. They had gone to bed fairly early, all of them still hung-over with fatigue from the previous night's excitement. Macklyn had thought he could sleep, but he couldn't. He lay in bed, tossing and turning, lighting an occasional cigarette. It was just before midnight that he heard someone moving in the yard outside his window. He jumped up and looked out into the moonlit night.

Bob Streeter, gun crooked under his arm, was walking briskly across the yard toward the gap in the stone wall — toward the logging road.

Macklyn felt himself begin to tremble from head to foot. Somehow he knew this was it. Bob was going to the hiding place he had so carefully avoided during the afternoon. Macklyn's first impulse was to call out to him, but he checked himself, realizing that if Bob knew he'd been seen, they'd be involved once more in evasions. Macklyn knew his one chance to solve this puzzle was to follow Bob. But he knew that by the time he'd got dressed, Bob would be gone.

Then Macklyn thought of Sorrowful. He got dressed as quickly as he could and tiptoed down the hall to the door of Dicky's room and opened the door softly. Dicky was sound asleep, curled into a round ball under his eider down quilt. Macklyn heard a thumping noise on the floor, and the light from the hall showed Sorrowful, lying on the scatter rug beside the bed, wagging his tail in greeting. Macklyn whispered to him, and Sorrowful came cheerfully out into the hall. Macklyn closed the door, praying that Lib had heard nothing.

Sorrowful's leash hung in the coat closet in the hall, and Macklyn attached it to the beagle's collar. Then they slipped out together into the night.

The dog jogged briskly along at Macklyn's side. Bob had trained him well. It wasn't until they had reached the field, where the apple tree stood, that Macklyn led the dog over to the fresh tracks Bob had left in the snow.

"Go ahead, Sorrow. Find Bob," he said. "Find him."

Instantly Sorrowful lowered his sensitive nose to the trail, tugging on the leash as he forged ahead. The dog went straight to the logging road and along the path that was quite familiar to Macklyn by now. But about a hundred yards from the turnoff to the bloody clearing, the little hound broke away to the right. Macklyn was instantly aware of a new trail, a trail made by the snow tires of a car.

Sorrow was moving fast now, his tail wagging vigorously. Then up ahead, through the trees, Macklyn saw a parked jeep. It wasn't Van Anderson's; that had been a dark green. This was a light color.

Then Sorrowful barked joyfully. Instantly, from around the other side of the jeep, Bob Streeter appeared, his gun poised. Sorrowful's delight was boundless. He pulled Macklyn forward.

Bob didn't speak or move until the

puppy reached him and clawed happily at his trouser leg. Macklyn was the distance of the leash away. "So you followed me, Mr. Graves," Bob said.

"Yes."

The farmer reached down and scratched Sorrowful's head. "A good dog. He's going to be a fine dog, if he's kept in training."

"He's fond of you," Macklyn said. "He came to you, straight as an arrow."

Bob Streeter lifted his head, and the gun barrel rose too so that it was aimed straight at Macklyn's chest. "You'd better take him home, Mr. Graves."

"I'm sorry, Bob, I've come this far and I'm not turning back. If you're threatening me with that gun, you're going to have to use it."

The farmer stood there staring at him, uncertain.

Then another voice spoke from the far side of the jeep, and Macklyn felt as though his heart would dissolve in his chest. "You're a hard guy to discourage, baby," Fred Fowler said. "Bring him around here, Bob."

Bob Streeter motioned with the gun. Macklyn walked close to him, and to his astonishment he saw in the moonlight that the farmer was crying.

Fred Fowler was not dressed for the woods. He had on his city clothes, overcoat and hat. The inevitable cigarette dangled from his lips, and he tried to smile at Macklyn, but it was a shaky attempt. At Fowler's feet something bulky lay under an Army blanket. Without asking, Macklyn knew that it was the body.

"Brace yourself and take a look," Fred said.

Macklyn hesitated, and then he bent down and pulled back the blanket. The throat of the corpse had been mangled by the dog, but the man was clearly recognizable, even in the half-light of the moon.

"*Lucian!*" Macklyn whispered.

It was Lucian Crowder who had died two years ago in a plane accident over Long Island Sound — Lucian Crowder, who had *not* died two years ago in a plane accident over Long Island Sound.

Fred Fowler's voice was a tired monotone. "You know how I felt when I saw him — alive," he said.

Macklyn had turned away. He felt as if he had been slugged in the stomach.

Fred's voice went on: "He appeared out of the night at Digger March's three days ago, smiling, self-confident. He wanted Digger to go to Lib and break the news that good old, charming old Lucian was not dead after all. He wanted us to tell her that good old, charming old Lucian had been suffering from amnesia for two years, but now he was all right and ready to return to the loving bosom of his family."

"Amnesia," Macklyn whispered.

"Amnesia, my foot!" Fred said harshly. "Good old, charming old Lucian had just walked out on Lib and you and his life. Because why?

Because he was bored with it. Because he didn't like monogamy. Because after he had enjoyed the only lady of loose morals in this community and most of them in New York, he wanted to find fresher fields. Good old, charming old Lucian's finances had seemed remarkably low when he died, but the truth was he'd been more frugal than we knew. He'd set aside a considerable sum of money for this moment. So he took off — Mexico, he said. The plane wreck was a fake, staged like the showman he was. To hell with his wife and his child, to hell with his business associates."

"He told you this?" Macklyn asked, incredulous.

"He told us," Fred said. "How he'd prepared his finances for the disappearance. How he'd crash-landed his plane near a deserted strip of Connecticut beach. How he'd left it to be pounded to pieces against a submerged reef when the tide rose. He told us everything — all about the lush, degenerate life he'd led after that, all with a kind of relish. And he made it clear why he had come back."

"Why?"

"For money," Fred said grimly. "He knew that Digger was in love with Lib. He knew that I was in love with Lib. He suspected that you were in love with Lib. One of us, he said, ought to think it worthwhile to pay him to disappear again — to keep him from making his past a public scandal that would crucify Lib and mess Dicky up by revealing a story the boy could never forget or live down. It was a neat little frame-up, baby. We could tell him to go to hell, and he would reappear. He could tell his amnesia story, and unless we chose to rake up the filth, Lib would have to take him back. If we fought him with the truth, Lib would have to face that, and Dicky would too. It would, he said, be so much nicer for Lib if he just continued to be dead — at a price, of course."

Fred drew a deep breath. "I don't think I ever hated a man so much. I hit him. I hit him with everything I had, and when he came staggering back, I hit him again. He went over backward, and his head hit the big table in the center of the library. I reached over to yank him up to his feet again, with Digger trying to pull me off him. But he was dead, Macklyn. The corner of that table smashed in his skull. I hadn't meant to kill him, baby. But he was dead, and I know I was glad Lib and Dicky were safe.

"But after Digger and I had talked a bit, we realized they weren't safe. We would call in the doctor, Lucian would be declared dead, and then the whole filthy story would have to come out. I might get away with self-defense, but the story would come out. While we were still talking about it, Van Anderson came in. Another black page in the saga of good old Lucian was revealed. It needn't be told, beyond saying there is a connection between Van's wife's retirement from the world and good old, charming old Lucian.

"So we made a decision. You must be the judge, Macklyn, whether or not it was wrong. We decided no one need ever know that Lucian had come back to life. We decided to dispose of the body and keep the secret." Fred's mirthless laugh sounded again. "Have you ever tried to dispose of a body, Macklyn? We needed help, and we went to the one person we could think of who, in his way, loved Lib and Dicky as much as we did — Bob Streeter. More of the saga of Lucian! Bob had always known Lucian's true stripe. He knew about Van's wife and the other local lady, who shall be nameless. He'd even thought at one time of taking the law into his own hands. He was willing to help and he had an idea — the dogs."

Macklyn's fists were so tightly clenched his hands were cramped. It seemed he couldn't bear the harsh sound of Fred's voice any longer.

"Bob convinced us," Fred said, "that the dogs would destroy Lucian's body beyond recognition. No one would be looking for Lucian, because Lucian was supposed to have died two years ago. Even if the body was ever found, it would be an unsolved mystery. And so we became conspirators, and we got the body out here the night of the hunt, and we left it in the clearing after the hunters had scattered. Van stayed behind to create a diversion in case stragglers turned up too soon. And one did — much too soon. You, Macklyn! You who might very well have joined our conspiracy if you'd known the truth. As a result of the accident of your coming into the woods, you have pressed us and pressed us until we have lost. The dogs would no longer serve the purpose. They were dead. The woods were no longer a safe hiding place because of your insistent prying. We had to wait until tonight to remove the body, and now, finally, you have beaten us."

The woods were still except for the sound of Sorrowful's snuffling.

"Now, Macklyn, you must decide," Fred said. "You must decide whether murder has been done in a legal sense. You must decide whether our conspiracy to save Dicky and Lib from learning the truth about Lucian is worth preserving — can be preserved. Nothing can bring Lucian back. The only thing that can be accomplished is public exposure of a degenerate and vicious past. I think I could beat the rap. It's for you to decide if I must give myself up as a murderer. And whether Bob and Digger and Van must give themselves up as accomplices after the fact."

Macklyn couldn't speak.

Fred's mouth twisted in a wry smile. "You may wonder why the police didn't find the body this morning. They didn't know the woods here, Macklyn, and they asked for help from a man who did. Bob directed their search, as he directed yours this afternoon. When you came out here this morning, Bob followed you. He was the one who shot at you. It happens that he's the best marksman in the county. If he had wanted

to kill you, you can rest assured you would be dead. He wanted to frighten you away. Digger helped with the illusion by pretending he'd been shot at too. Anything to get you away — because we were preparing good old, charming old Lucian for his removal tonight."

Macklyn's stomach was a cold knot, and his mind was a confusion of thoughts.

"The mad, exasperating thing about this, baby, is that you *didn't* hear and see what you thought you heard and saw. Lucian had been dead for two days when we put his body in the clearing. He didn't cry out. The sound you heard must have come from the dog. And he didn't thrash out with his arm to protect himself, as you insisted. The dog moved him, and his arm, stiff in rigor mortis, flailed out in some way. Your imagination *was* working overtime, Macklyn. God, if only we could have convinced you!"

Still Macklyn couldn't speak.

"And the fresh blood." Fred laughed, and it was a despairing sound. "It *was* your own blood, Macklyn."

Macklyn put one hand over his eyes.

"Remember one thing, baby," Fred said, and he suddenly sounded enormously tired. "If you decide that my blow was responsible, in the eyes of the law, for Lucian's death and that I am a murderer, I will take what's coming to me. But remember, Digger and Van and Bob were not protecting me. They wouldn't have covered up for me for an instant. It was always Lib they were thinking about — Lib and Dicky. Lucian deserved to die and he was dead, and nothing they could do would bring him back. They thought only of what the whole truth would mean to Lib and Dicky. It's for you to decide what shall become of us, Macklyn. You, and you alone."

"God help me!" Macklyn said. And it was a prayer.

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edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

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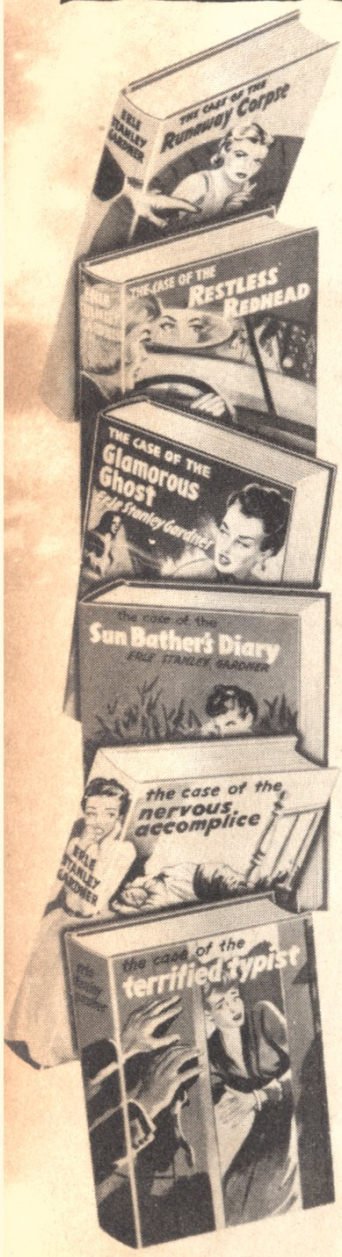

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