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A NEW STORY BY CORNELL WOOLRICH

The late Carl Brandt, beloved literary agent, once described a murder story as follows: imagine a rock thrown into a fishpond; the reader doesn't want to know what happened to the rock—the reader wants to know what happened to the fish!

Cornell Woolrich's newest story illustrates that description perfectly: witness the effects of murder on different strata of society, the impact of shock, fear, violence on the everyday lives of people—young, middle-aged, and old—rich and poor—good and evil—the design of the "human comedy," the pattern of the "human tragedy"...

BLONDE BEAUTY SLAIN

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

THE DELIVERY TRUCK DROVE UP and parked alongside the newsstand at exactly 9:29 P.M. This was very good time, since its contents were what was loosely called the "Nine O'Clock Edition." This in itself was wholly inaccurate since the edition itself bore tomorrow's dateline. To simplify, it was the next day's paper going on sale the day before. Tomorrow's paper in turn would *really* be the day after's, with a new headline and make-up. But no one was the slightest bit confused—least of all, the reading public.

The newsstand was out at the curb, but it faced inward, toward the subway entrance. This was highly advantageous and Mrs. Maloney, the lessee, had to pay considerable for the concession. However, she made considerable, so the arrangement was to no one's disadvantage. Mrs. Maloney was a woman of remarkable hardihood and, considering her occupation, surprising years. She habitually wore a coat-sweater in the colder seasons, and drank hot coffee from a container, but never stayed away from her stand. She must by all appearances have already been at the very top of her sixties. She had, however, a nephew—himself far from a youth—who spelled her at mealtimes and performed the harder details for her, such as lifting the papers from the ground to counter. She was, incidentally, called simply "Mom" by all and sundry. Very few actually knew her name.

The driver called out, "Hello, Mom," jumped down, ran around to the open back of his truck,

and hoisted a towering bale of 9 o'clocks, bound around with hairy hempen cord. He staggered a few bow-legged steps, then dropped the newspapers on the sidewalk with a detonating and dust-producing thud.

He said, "Any returns?"

Mom said, "Twanny-four."

He scowled—he didn't like returns—but picked them up from her counter and went back to his truck with them. He had to—that was the arrangement.

This completed their dealings until tomorrow night. The truck speeded off to feed the next stand along its delivery route.

Mom's aforementioned nephew ran out with a short sharp-edged implement and flicked the hempen binding apart. Then he hoisted the massive bale—but by segments, not all at one time—to the counter. Mom in turn disposed a portion of them underneath the counter to wait their turn, placed the rest on top of the counter for immediate sale. The topmost paper invariably —and tonight was no exception— had to be discarded as unsalable. Either the rope had cut it into tatters at the edges, or the pitch to the pavement had smudged obliterating dust into it.

Mom glanced, but with only perfunctory interest, at the undamaged one right below as she threw away the top copy. The covering leaf which folded and went around to the back, was a peculiar pale-green color. The fill, however, was white. On the pale-green outer page, in lettering the size of the top line of an optician's chart, blazed the words: *BLONDE BEAUTY SLAIN.* In the space left was a photograph. The two, however, had nothing to do with one another; for in minuscule print, almost invisible compared to its titanic reference, was the footnote: *story on page 2.* This was called a teaser or hook, the idea being first to catch the reader on the outside and then draw him into the inside. Its psychology was, to say the least, illogical—for it could have been assumed that the reader had already purchased the paper by that time anyway.

Mom sat back, propped her elbows up, and waited. From that point on it was up to the customers.

A man came along, peeled the top newspaper off the pile, threw a dime onto the one below. Quick as a flash, Mom threw down a nickel, and the dime was gone.

The man—

The man put his key in the door and went in, and he was finally home. It always surprised him that so small a flat could produce so much noise. Not that he minded it; he would have missed it—it wouldn't have been home without it. He wouldn't have wanted to come in here and find it deathly quiet; it would have frightened him.

She had just spanked Terry and he was howling in the corner. The little girl, who made much less direct noise, but far more indirect, than her brother, was squatting on the floor in front of the blaring television. Even the meat balls were contributing to the din, hissing and sputtering away.

The little girl ran to him and kissed him. Then the little boy. Then he went to *her* and kissed her. She was harassed, he could tell. He didn't blame her.

"What kind of day did you have?" he said. It was the wrong thing to have said—he could tell right away.

"What kind of a day did I have?" she declaimed. "You can well ask that! You can well *ask!*"

She interrupted the recital that he knew was about to come by turning her head sharply. "Milly, turn off that thing! You've had enough now! It's giving me a headache."

Then back to him again. "I had my usual glamorous day. What else? You didn't expect it to be any different, did you? I know I don't—not any more."

He turned away from her, sought out his usual chair, and sank into it, weary, the paper he had just bought unopened on his lap. This had to be got through, he knew. More and more frequently lately, this had to be got through.

"It's housework, housework, all day long!" she went on gratingly. She was coming and going, putting plates on the table now. "Doing the dishes, making the beds, cleaning, cleaning! And when it comes to washing clothes, I *never* get through. I no sooner turn around, and they've gotten themselves all dirty again."

"Kid are kids," he said leniently. "You were that way when you were a kid. I was too. You can't keep them locked up in a glass case. It isn't right."

"That's easy for *you* to say, you don't have to wash their things." The meat balls had finally appeared. They all gathered around the table, which was in the one main room. She resumed: "Then when I do get to go out, in the afternoons, where do I go? The A. and P. or Safeway, Safeway or the A. and P. That's my outing. That's my recreation. I have to push a cart through the street both ways, coming and going. I'm so *sick* of standing on check-out lines and having arguments with people in back of me, people in front of me. I'm so sick of looking cans of corned beef in the face. Today they short-changed me a dollar, a whole dollar."

"Don't they give out those little paper tapes with the items listed on them?"

"It wasn't on there. It was in the change he handed back to me. I had a terrible time about it. They had to empty out the whole cash register. Then coming back, a taxi

made a right turn into Amsterdam Avenue and tipped over my shopping cart, and I had to pick up everything all over the street."

"Were you crossing against the light?" he said uneasily. "Don't ever—"

"No, but they changed too quick for me."

"My day wasn't good either," he said. But he said it uncomplainingly, as if to show her what to do with a day that wasn't so good.

"Yes, but with a man it's different," she caught him up immediately. "You get out of the house at least, the first thing in the morning, and don't come back to it again until the evening. You don't have the kids in your hair the whole livelong day—"

She had stopped eating now, overcome by her frustration.

"Eat," he urged gently. "Don't let it get you."

"I can't *help* it. I should never have—"

He seemed to know what she'd been about to say. "Should never have married me?" He finished it for her ruefully.

"No, not you. I should never have married at all. I should have been like my sister. I should have listened to her—"

Here comes her sister again, he thought, but forbearingly.

"She has a maid, she has a gorgeous apartment, she dresses like a queen—"

"I know, I know," he said patiently. "You told me many times."

She put the kids in the bedroom. When she came back he laid down the paper and looked at her, with a sort of understanding pity, a sort of pitying understanding. "Let the dishes go," he said. "For once. Come on, I'll take you to the movies. Get your hat. It'll take your mind off things."

"The kids?" Her smile was bleak. "You forget."

"They're old enough now, they'll be all right. It's only for a couple of hours. Mrs. Silvano next door can look in on them now and then."

"The movies," she said. Suddenly she laughed. It wasn't a good sound. "Oh, you're too good to me. You're spoiling me!"

"Don't," he said.

The days and weeks of pent-up discontent, the years of it, seemed to brim over all at once. She sat down heavily at the cleared table, began to pound it at spaced intervals with her clenched fist, to underscore the torrent of words that suddenly poured from her.

"She gets night clubs, I get the movies. She gets lobster Newburg, I get meat balls. She gets champagne, I get Seven Up. She has charge accounts in all the swellest stores in town, I go to Woolworth's. She was up here a couple weeks ago—you should have seen how she was dressed. A mink. A diamond on her finger as big as—pearls around her neck."

"You told me, you told me," he

mumbled wearily. "How often."

"She felt sorry for me. I could tell it, she didn't have to say so. When she left, I found a hundred dollars hiding under the coffee pot. She didn't want to hurt my pride." And then in tragic summation: "Oh, why did I throw away my life this way!"

"Here," he said. "Here." He handed the paper to her.

"What's this for, something to keep me quiet?" She stared at him as if she couldn't make up her mind for a moment whether he was making fun of her or was serious. "Now it's the paper I get for my evening's recreation. A big five-cent tabloid to keep me amused."

"Open it," he said quietly. "Read the second page."

Her face was suddenly one big scar of shock, and just as white as such a scar is. A great gust of breath was drawn from her.

"Beatrice Barrett," she gasped, almost voiceless. "That's Bessie, that's the name she used in her career."

For a long time there was silence in the room. He just sat there holding his head, like the failures in life who've tried to do their best but are failures just the same. Then after a while she moved over toward him, softly, quietly. Almost like a kiss.

She sank to her knees beside him.

"What're you doing?" he asked her. But not abruptly, in that same quiet way he always had with her.

"Thanking God." And he saw that her eyes were moist.

When she'd finished weeping, she raised her head and smiled at him.

"Does that offer to go to the movies still hold?"

He smiled back, nodding his head.

"Just one more thing," she said, like a little girl coaxing.

"Anything."

"No, not anything. Just one more thing. Just a bag of popcorn. That'll make my evening."

And as they went out together, arm in arm, like the sweethearts they'd been ten years before, they passed the fallen newspaper.

She looked up at him, not down at it.

"I'll settle for this," she said. "The two kids, and a guy like you; and if I have to spend all the rest of my life cleaning and shopping for groceries and fixing meals and washing clothes, I won't complain—not any more."

The delivery truck drove up and parked at exactly 9:29 P.M.

The driver said, "Any returns?"

Mom said, "Twanny-four."

The headline said *BLONDE BEAUTY SLAIN.*

Mom sat back, propped her elbows up, and waited.

A woman came along walking quickly. She had red hair, and mistrustful hazel eyes that darted wary little glances to the left and right.

Many people look both ways in crossing through traffic, but she was already on the sidewalk, had finished crossing. She stepped up to the stand, snapped open her handbag, and fumbled in it for change. But while she fumbled she still found time to look to the right, look to the left. She came up with a quarter, put it down, and took the uppermost paper from the pile.

Long before she had finished folding it and wedging it under her arm, Mom had two dimes waiting for her on the next one under.

The woman scooped them up, and one dime escaped her, fell to the sidewalk with a little *tink*.

She glanced down just once, but didn't bend over and look for it. She snapped her handbag shut on the rest of the change.

"I see it," Mom said, trying to be helpful. "There it is, over there."

"Never mind, let it go," the woman answered in a muffled voice, and walked away at the same quick gait with which she had approached, looking to the right, looking to the left.

Mom gazed after her and shrugged. If it had been a penny, maybe; but a dime? Then she darted out to pick up the coin.

The woman—

The woman, still wary-eyed, went chip-chopping up a violet-black side street studded with glaring white disks like outsize polka dots. They came at wide-spaced intervals though—the ground-pools of brightness from the street lights. She went around the outside of each, instead of cutting straight through as ordinary walkers would have. The whole block was one long row of brownstone, compartmented into furnished rooms. She either missed the one she wanted, or else knew it only too well when she saw it. She strolled past it, four or five houses past it, then turned unhesitatingly and came back. The way she turned unhesitatingly, you knew she'd seen it the first time.

She hurried up the stoop and darted in, looking to the right, looking to the left. She keyed the inner door, then ran up the inside stairs which were linoleum-matted. She stopped in front of the door she wanted, and the way she knocked you could tell it was a signal. Two taps, then one, then two again. Very quietly, almost impossible to hear—unless it was being waited for.

A bolt slid back, a chain went off, and the door opened. A man was standing there. He didn't look at her—he looked past her to where she'd just come from. She didn't look at him either—she too looked back to where she'd just come from. They didn't say hello.

She squeezed past him, and he rebolted and rechained the door.

He was unkempt. He hadn't

shaved, and his hair was on end from being ground into a pillow. His shirt was off; he just had trousers and undershirt on him. He would have been handsome—apparently he once had been—if he hadn't been so incredibly vicious-looking. Everything about him bespoke viciousness — the eyes, the mouth, down to a vicious scar like a Band-Aid, diagonally across one cheek. Some women like their men vicious.

He followed her into the depths of the room, to get as far away from the door as possible, before either said a word.

There was a bottle of whiskey on a table and two glasses, one empty, one with about an inch of tan in it. Riffed about on the floor, as though it had been feverishly searched through, was an ancestor of the tabloid she had just brought in—a much earlier edition, almost a full day earlier, and with a different headline.

"Get it?" he said. His lips scarcely moved when he spoke. They say that men learn that in jail.

"It's in," she said. Her own voice was shaky. And now that she was indoors under light, it could be seen how white she was, almost gloweringly white with fright. "This time it hit. It hit finally. I knew it wouldn't stay out much longer."

He took it from her, looked. "Hoddaya know that's it? Je stop and look at it on the street?"

"No, I didn't dare stop. I didn't have to. It hit me in the eye right as I picked it off the stand." She was beginning to shake noticeably now.

He seemed to see her do it, even though his eyes were riveted on the paper. "Cut that out," he said.

"I can't help it, Al," she said. "I can't help it."

"Take a drink."

"This is one time I'm too scared even for that," she quaked. "I'm afraid what it might do to me."

He put both glasses and the bottle on the floor, to gain enough room on the table top for his reading. He spread the paper open on it. There was a chair there, but he read standing up, just bending forward, with his hands flat on the table.

She put the back of her hand to her forehead several times, as if distracted. She came up next to him finally, tried to read from over his shoulder.

"Quit shaking the table," he said.

She took her hand off it. "I'm getting better," she said. She tried to light a cigarette, but it shook too much in her mouth, and the match flame couldn't pin it down.

"I never saw you like this," he said.

"I never was this way before, like I am now."

"Beatrice Barrett," he said, from the paper.

"Was that her name?" she asked him.

"I never knew her name," he said. "We only met about an hour before."

Her own feminine eye now selected a detail. "Twenty-eight," she said. Her throat gave a hiccup of derision. "Wanna bet? Sure, I'm twenty-eight too."

"Shut up," he said, but without animosity. He wanted to concentrate on what he was reading.

"Anything about—?"

He seemed to know what, rather whom, she meant.

"Not yet. They wouldn't put it in even if there was. They jump first."

"Oh, God," she whimpered.

"You're going to fix us good," he said. "I can't take you down to the street, that way."

"I'll try," she said. "I'll try."

"Is it the first time it ever happened to anyone?" he wanted to know disparagingly.

"For me it is," she said.

He swore scaldingly. Not at her, but at the contents of the newspaper. He pasted his open hand down on it with vicious impact. "Damn them! They can't wait till they break out with it."

"You didn't figure they were going to hold it back, did you?"

He didn't answer.

"What do we do?"

He turned on her then—almost spun around he turned so swiftly. "We get the hell out of here but fast, while we can still make it!" he said intensely.

As if it were a signal, the two of them broke into a flurry of fast, frenzied action. He flung himself down into a chair, began shoveling his feet into his shoes, which he had discarded while she was out. She hauled a small valise out from under the bed and flung things into it.

She moaned, at one point, "Just when I thought we could sit tight for a day or two."

"You don't sit tight when you've got a rap like this coming at you."

"Where do we go?"

"Where doesn't matter. Just go and keep on going."

"We'll never make it."

"Sometimes when you don't think that, is just when you do."

He pulled a hat down low over his face, shading it.

"You carry the bag," he said. "I may need both arms free."

She whitened even more.

"Don't leave anything behind, now," he cautioned. "That's just what they're looking for."

He went up close to the door and pressed his head sideward to it. He held still. Then the bolt slipped, the chain dropped.

He opened it and went out first, making a furtive gesture at her, with his hand held down low, to follow.

She looked around to make sure nothing had been forgotten—nothing that might betray them.

She saw the paper, left wide open at that particular story, lying con-

spicuously on the table under the light. She took it by both outer edges at once and closed it.

Then she stopped a minute, her arms wide, the paper between.

He went "Sssst" warningly through the open door, to hurry her up.

She turned and ran out after him, as if she had just been reminded that he was waiting for her. But she left the valise standing in the room.

He was at the end of the stairs, waiting to go down. He gave her a black look.

"Wait minute, Al!" she whispered urgently, running all the way over to him so that she could keep her voice low. "Wait a minute. Not the same one."

"Whaddaya mean not the same one?"

"East, not West." She was hissing like a tea kettle with her strenuous sibilancy. "The same street — but *East,* not West."

"That's a misprint," he whispered back to her. "Can't take a chance— papers are full of 'em."

"No, it isn't. Come back in, I'll show you."

He followed her back. They reclosed the door, then bent over the paper again, her finger guiding him.

"There it is. East. And there it is down there again."

"It's a misprint," he said. "It's got to be. They came out with it in a hurry."

Then suddenly he stopped and fixed his eyes.

"No," he agreed slowly. "You're right. It isn't the same one. 'The victim's apartment was located upstairs over a fashionable restaurant, Luigi and Manfredo's.' And—" He turned and looked at her. They stared at each other eye to eye. "And—where I was—there was a dry cleaning establishment down below."

She finished putting back the bolt and chain. "Pour me one too," she said, luxuriating. "All the way to the top."

When it was halfway down to the bottom again, she held it up and gazed at the light through it, musingly.

"You know, that's something that could never happen in a story. Two blondes, both the same night, both the same street. Only, one east, one west. Could happen only in real life."

The truck drove up at 9:29 P.M. The batch hit the ground.

"Twanny-four returns," Mom said to the driver.

Her nephew ran out from in back and sheared the twine binding. He hoisted the free bale in sections to the top of the counter. Mom stowed some of them below the shelf, left the rest on view for immediate sale. She adjusted the wick of the oil lantern, which had begun to flicker a little. She propped up her elbows. The rest

was up to the buying public.

A boy and a girl came along, thin as clothespins—

The place was empty and unlighted until the boy and the girl came into it together. She looked around after he'd turned on the light.

"Hey, how'd you find this place?"

Her voice was shrill, splitting. Not naturally so, purposely so, as if she were calling to him across the width of a street.

"Dusty told me about it. He came here with Marge the other night."

"Ho, what I know about Marge!" she chortled brassily. Every remark was pitched in a raucous key. She couldn't seem to keep her voice moderate. Or even try to.

They were both approximately the same age, perhaps a year or two in his favor—that evanescent slot just in between the end of adolescence and the onset of maturity. Childhood's final sunset.

They were dressed alike too. He wore a coat-shirt of vivid scarlet, hers was electric blue. His trousers were legging-tight, hers were too. Her hair was long, his was too. The only difference was that hers was bound into a mane and lifted away from the back of the head; his mane clung to the back of his neck and went down inside his collar. And they were both thin as inverted exclamation-points.

"What's wrong with Marge?" he answered her last remark. "Think she's a square?"

"I know she isn't," his companion agreed with ready gang-loyalty.

He began to dump cans of beer out of a brown-paper bag they'd brought in with them.

"*You're* the square," he told her.

"I'm here, enn!?" she squalled protestingly. "So what more do you want?"

He chopped at the top of one of the beer cans with an opener, and it overbalanced, rolled off the table, and clouted to the floor. He used a filthy expletive, but she was neither surprised nor offended.

From a second paper bag he pawed out a number of soft, rounded buns, split through the middle and spread with hamburger.

"What'd you do, buy out the whole store?" she shrieked in an appalling cat-call.

"We're gunna be here for a while, ain't we?"

Her lack of comment indicated complete acquiescence.

"Wuddle your old lady say?" he jeered. The jeer was meant for the old lady, not for her.

A dripping beer can in one hand, crumbling hamburger in the other, he flung himself full-length on the white-enamel bedstead, crossed his heels and elevated them to the foot-rail.

"Ah, she's a pain in the neck," the girl screeched impatiently.

"They all are. Mine was too,

until I got too big for her. Now she don't make a peep. She better not, boy."

She was still intent on her own maternal difficulties, not his previous ones. "She already thinks I've done this."

"How diya know?" he shot at her.

"She's all the time warning me about it." She performed a savage parody, clasping her hands before her face, rolling her eyes up to the ceiling, and dragging down the corners of her mouth dolorously. 'Oh, I only hope I'm not too late,' she keeps moaning, 'I only hope I'm not too late.'"

"Y' better go around wearing a sign after tonight. 'You're too late.' So she don't have to worry about you any more."

They both went into thunderclaps of laughter, as shattering as the dropping of ashcan lids on a cement pavement.

When the guffaws had stilled finally, he up-ended the beer can so that the last remaining drops would fall through the puncture into his open mouth, then cast it away from him with a clatter.

By now she was seated on the edge of the bed, with her back to him, head bent to the newspaper he had brought in.

"Whattiya gunna do, sit there all night reading the paper?" He pawed clumsily at her shoulder from behind, so that momentarily she half toppled over, then immediately righted herself again like a rubber plaything. She slashed her arm backwards at him, to ward him off. It was more a reflex than an intended blow. "Come on, babe," he whispered.

"Lemme finish reading about this blonde first."

"Why? Whadda you care? She's dead, ain't she? So what's to read?"

Absorbed, she didn't answer.

"Ah, she was just a high-class tramp," he said airily.

"But she wasn't until she started," she pointed out. "She wasn't before. Everyone, even one of them, s'got to start sometime."

She read a little further.

"I wonder what she was like. Then, I mean. At the start."

"Like you are now," he shrugged.

She got up from the bed abruptly, went over to the tarnished mirror, peered into it, still holding the paper.

"Whattiya looking at?" he said idly, without watching her, blowing smoke toward the ceiling.

"Me, like I am now," the girl said, bending forward even closer. Then she moved her head aside and down, and stared with equal intentness at the photo in the paper.

"Matter, you don't know what you look like?" he mocked, but still without watching her.

"I know what I look like now," she replied thoughtfully, "but I wonder what I'll look like—" She didn't finish it and her eyes went back to the paper once more.

She came away at last, still staring at the picture in the paper.

All of a sudden the paper rippled to the floor, its pages molting.

"I'm going home, Frankie." She didn't squall it. For the first time all evening—maybe all year and the year before—she spoke quietly.

"You—*what?*" He sat bolt upright on the bed.

"I don't want to do this," she said, almost inaudibly. "I'm—I'm afraid."

"Whatsa matter with you anyway," he yelled. "I lived on the same street with you all my life."

Her thoughts now seemed to be elsewhere.

"They always do. They always do. The first one of them all. And then after a while, they don't live on the same street with you. And then after a while, they find you dead. Like her."

Then, without saying anything more, she flung the door open and ran out.

He leaped from the bed and started after her. His foot stepped squarely on the face of the woman in the discarded paper as he flew through the open door after her.

The room was high up in the building. He leaned over the stair-rail and looked down. Her feet were pattering below him, around and around.

"Hey, Ginny, come on back!" he shouted down the stairwell. "Come on back, will ya!"

But the way she ran, the terrified way she ran, he knew she wouldn't return. And he knew something else too. She wasn't running like that because she was afraid of being pursued—she was running like that because she was afraid of the future.

The delivery truck drove up alongside the stand at exactly 9:29 P.M.

"Twanny-four returns," Mom said.

The headline said, *BLONDE BEAUTY SLAIN.*

Mom sat back, propped her elbows, and waited.

The expensive black limousine had had to wait there for a traffic light. The man in the back leaned forward and said something to his chauffeur. The young colored driver, spruce in his uniform, immediately got out, crossed over on foot, and came up to the stand.

"Times?" he said.

"Not up yet," said Mom.

"How about the *Herald-Trib,* then?"

"Not up yet either," Mom said. "They don't come up until eleven thirty."

He looked a little disconcerted. He even glanced over to where he'd left the car, as if weighing the possibility of going back for further instructions.

But the light had changed meanwhile and the impeding limousine was being honked at by several blocked cars in back of it. "All

right, I'll take a tab," he said quickly.

He snatched one up, turned away, and hustled back to his driver's seat. He closed the door after him, started the car off then handed the paper over the seat to the man in the back.

The latter put the light on. When he saw the name of the paper he looked up questioningly. "What's this, Bruce?"

"That's the best I could do, Mr. Elliott," the young chauffeur explained. "The *Times* isn't out yet."

His employer tucked it away in his coat-pocket sight unseen. "Oh, well," he drawled good-naturedly. "I'll just have to do without reading tonight."

Bruce chuckled a little.

Mr. Elliott lit a cigar and watched the sights go by.

In the morning he found his wife June at the table ahead of him, as he always did. He liked to. Not that she had anything to do with preparing breakfast—that was the cook's job; but, he always said to himself, she brightened up the table just by being there. With her yellow-jersey jumper and her little-girl hair hanging loose all about her head, she could have passed for a teenager.

He kissed her good morning, then once more for good measure.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she said, indicating what was outside the picture window.

"Each morning gets better than the one before. People who live in the city are such fools."

His *Times* was there now, waiting for him. It came in every morning, of course. It was just that he had wanted to kill time by having something to read on the drive home last night. He furled it over, all the way back at the financial section. Those pages were the only ones he ever read carefully. However, before he'd quite finished, they had a problem on their hands. Oh, not a very large one, but one concerning Dickie, and any problem concerning Dickie always received full consideration. They were that kind of parents.

Amy brought him in with her. Amy was his governess (Bryn Mawr, post-graduate course in child care and training), and Bruce's wife.

"This is one I'm afraid I'll have to pass on to you," she said, when good mornings had been said, "considering its source. I'm no expert."

Dickie didn't wait for any further preamble. "Daddy, do canaries really go ffft? Tommy Holden has one at his house and I never heard it do anything but chirp."

"Where'd you get that from?" Elliott looked completely blank for a moment. June stifled a burst of laughter.

"The paper says a canary went ffft at someone."

"This," said Amy sternly, pro-

ducing the newspaper. "I always encourage him to read for himself as much as possible, and help him with the hard words. I saw he was having trouble, and it was only after I'd read the line to him that I realized what I was reading it *from.*"

Elliott smote himself on the forehead in dismay, then held a hand to one cheek. "Oh, Lord, a gossip column, no less," he said in an undertone, giving his wife a plaintive look. "What do I do with that?"

"It's your job, dear," said June pertly.

"Buck passer," he said out of the corner of his mouth.

"Let's hear how he gets out of this one," June whispered to Amy. "This is going to be good."

He glanced upward for a moment, for inspiration.

"Cats really are the only ones that go ffft," he began.

"You didn't get the ffft quite right, dear," said June. She was in one of her mischievous moods. She had her elbows on the table and her chin propped in her cupped hands, trying to throw him off by staring at him earnestly.

"Please," he said ruefully. "This is tough enough without being heckled."

He went back to the task in hand. "Now, real canaries don't go ffft—"

"You got that ffft better," said June.

He ignored her. "Ladies who sing are sometimes called canaries, because they sing so pretty," he went on laboredly. "And if they get mad at somebody, sometimes they do go ffft."

Dickie turned aggrievedly to his mother. "I didn't understand a word Daddy told me," he complained.

June turned her head sharply one way, Amy the other. In fact, the only two people in the room who weren't convulsed with laughter were the two males, king-size and pint-size.

June patted the little boy's head. "And you weren't the only one, dear," she whispered consolingly—a whisper she somehow managed to direct so that it reached Elliott's ears.

"Let's see you try it if you're so good at it," he whispered her way.

"I know someone who's going to hear from me about bringing that rag into the house in the first place," vowed Amy darkly. "That's one thing I can't compete with, a tabloid. I don't know the right slang."

"Bruce?" said Elliott. "Now don't blame poor Bruce. He had nothing to do with it. I asked him to hop out a minute and get me the *Times,* and it hadn't arrived at the stand yet, so he brought this back with him instead."

"I notice he didn't bring back *Reader's Digest* or *Atlantic Monthly,*" was Amy's tart comment as she

led Dickie out of the room.

June went to the door to see her husband off, as she did every day. Dickie joined the leave-taking, rushing at his father head-first and whiplashing his little arms about him at mid-thigh, which was as high as he could reach.

"See you tonight, Daddy, hunh?" he chirped. "See you tonight!"

June winked at Elliott over the little boy's head.

She gave him one of her rare compliments when Dickie had been led away a second time, and he was kissing her goodbye—rare, but from the heart. "You're a good father, Doug," she said softly. "The best. Sense of humor and everything."

"Don't I get any rating as a husband also?" he wanted to know.

She closed her eyes dreamily, to show him that he did.

He became oddly serious for a moment, almost pensive. "That's all I have," he told her thoughtfully. "You and him. My family. That's all I care about—*really* care about. I wouldn't let anything—or anyone—stand in their way. I wouldn't let anything — or anyone — threaten their happiness." His eyes had a faraway look just then, as if he remembered he'd said that once before—some place, sometime, to someone.

Then he kissed her once more, and hurried down the long sun-dappled walk to where Bruce was waiting for him in the car.

"It's a shame to go in on a day like this," he said, taking a panoramic look at the Westchester landscape before getting in and closing the door.

"I can't tell you how I sympathize with you, sir," Bruce said, with just a touch of dryness. It was a genial sort of dryness, though, meaning, You don't have to go in if you don't want to, and you know it, but you'd still like me to feel sorry for you.

"As for you, young fellow," Elliott warned him jocularly, "you're in hot water with Amy. She thinks you were responsible for that tabloid."

"Greater love hath no man," quoted Bruce softly, "than he take a rap for his employer."

"Who's taking any rap for who?" Elliott brought him up short. "I squared that. I told her it was my fault."

"I may as well be skinned for a wolf as for a sheep," Bruce remarked as they sped along. "Amy's standards of reading are so high I can't even get up to them with my chin on the crossbar. Anything less than Proust is trash."

"What sort of reading do you go in for, Bruce?" Elliott asked. "I've been meaning to ask you that."

"Mostly mysteries. I drive a car, and I like things to move fast. They've got to be well-written, though."

"They can be. I read them myself, quite frequently. If a mystery isn't well-written, it's not because it's a

mystery, it's because the writer is a sloppy worker."

They spent the rest of the drive into town discussing books in general, both mystery and non-mystery, and life itself, the greatest book of them all. Elliott found that he enjoyed it immensely. His driver was a college graduate, which he had always known of course, but in addition he was keenly intelligent, nimble-minded, and ambitious, which didn't always necessarily follow. He was bound to get some place as soon as the door opened a little wider. This driving job was just temporary.

Elliott liked to know his fellow-men better, because he liked his fellow-men.

"Thank you, sir," said Bruce when they'd reached the office.

"For what?" asked Elliott.

"At least you didn't say I'm a credit to my race."

"What race?" said Elliott blankly. "I don't know what you mean." And he actually didn't.

"Pick you up at the same time, sir," said Bruce, and drove off

Elliott went upstairs to what he liked occasionally to refer to as "the grind." If it was a "grind" (and it had to have some name, apparently), it was the most velvety, well lubricated, chromium-plated, air-conditioned grind conceivable. He didn't even have to open his own letters. That was done for him. The one out of five that got through to him he could be sure would be worth his personal attention.

A little dictating—into a machine. A little phoning—here, there, around. From him, and more often, to him. Perhaps involving thousands and thousands of dollars—but you never would have guessed. Money was never even mentioned. The calls seemed to be mostly about golf, and the last country club dance, and the next country club dance, and how's Evelyn, and June's fine. And then an appointment for lunch would be set up, and after the lunch had come and gone, he'd be twenty thousand richer, or forty, or sixty, or more. Not at anyone's expense. Certainly not at the client's. The client went right along with him — twenty, forty, sixty. Not at the market's, either. Because for everyone who sold, there was someone who bought. Just "the old grind." Mystique.

By that time it would be 11:00 or 11:30, and he'd have Rico and Dotty up—Rico to trim his hair, Dotty to trim his nails. Not every day of course, about once in a week. Twice, if he and June had some big engagement on. It wouldn't have occurred to him to go *to* a barber—the barber came to him. It was done just right—everything just right. Not too much talk—that would have been clownish; but not too little either—that would have been stiff and ungracious. Then they'd both leave, thanking

him, and if he'd given them a little something more than the customary tip, which he did every now and then, he'd repeat his instructions, so they'd be sure to get them right.

"Now remember, buy at twenty, as I told you. Put the order in right away, so you'll catch it on the fly first thing the market opens in the morning. *But don't hold on.* Put in a 'sell' order at twenty-five and you'll make a nice little profit. And, mind you this is just for you two. If you say a word to anyone, spread it around, it's the last time I'll ever—"

"I won't even tell my own husband," Dotty would vow.

"Good," he'd say solemnly. "Because husbands have big mouths. I happen to be one myself, and I know."

And by then it would be about time for whatever lunch date he had.

Today it was with Don Warren. Don Warren and Doug Elliott had been friends long before they became client and broker. In fact, they had been college classmates together. Don was waiting for him at their usual table, in their usual restaurant.

After he'd shaken hands with him and sat down, Elliott began to worry one fingernail with the corner of his mouth, moistening it and blowing his breath on it. "Dotty's a very good manicurist, but this split goes down just below the cuticle. Even she couldn't do anything with it. Except smooth it out a little."

"How'd you come to do it?"

Elliott looked up at him disarmingly. "Strangling blondes," he said with winning frankness.

Warren uttered the polite chuckle that friendship called for—but no more—then gave him a rueful look. "You've always had the weirdest sense of humor," he complained.

Elliott strugged meekly. "I wasn't trying to be funny," he mumured, then opened up the large menu-folder with the concentration of a man whose efforts to be sprightly have not been an unqualified success, and who therefore turns resignedly to something else . . .

E S G : Extra Sensory Gumshoes

When we think of criminological characters in fiction, most of us associate the name of Erle Stanley Gardner with Perry Mason, the wizard of the courtroom; some of us remember that Mr. Gardner also created "The D.A."–Douglas Selby; a few of us keep recalling Lester Leith; but how many of us realize that Mr. Gardner possibly invented more detectives and criminals than any other modern writer? True, most of Mr. Gardner's series characters date back to his prolific pulp days; but their number, while not legion, is still staggering.

Surely you remember Ed Jenkins, the Phantom Crook–he was one of Gardner's most successful characters and he appeared in print for more than twenty years. And how about Ken Corning, the clever lawyer who antedated Perry Mason? And Senor Arnaz de Lobo, the professional soldier of fortune–and the suave and sinister Patent Leather Kid–and the curious firm of Small, Weston & Burke–and the desert detective, "Whispering Sands"–and Speed Dash, the human fly (Gardner's very first series character)–and Major Brane (shades of Charles Dickens's medical monikers, like Sawyer, Slasher, and that unforgettable classic, Dr. Nockemorf!)–and Black Barr, the grim, two-gun avenger–and Larkin, the juggler whose only weapon was a billiard cue–and Hard Rock Hogan–and Skarle–and how many others? Erle Stanley Gardner himself probably doesn't remember them all.

Well, we are indebted to Charles G. Higgins of the Department of Geological Sciences, University of California, for reminding us of still another Gardner character–Sidney Zoom and his police-dog helper, Rip. Mr. Higgins was also kind enough to supply us with the text of one of the Zoom stories.

"The Case of the Scattered Rubies" belongs to an era of the detective story in which a criminal investigator could bear the onomatopoeic name of Zoom (suggestive of, say, a sharp, sudden thrust upward mingled with a sense of doom)–an era in which the male private detective would invariably be a tall, lean, hawkeyed night prowler–an era in which the sardonic sleuth could be the possessor of a special badge and commission from the police department and live (believe it or not) on a palatial yacht! Ah, nostalgia! Ah, those good old times! Ah, those early days of S. S. Van Dine, of Erle Stanley Gardner–and, yes, of Ellery Queen ...

THE CASE OF THE SCATTERED RUBIES

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

RAIN SHEETED INTERMITTENTLY out of the midnight skies. Between showers, fitful stars showed through drifting cloud rifts. Street lights, reflected from the wet pavements in shimmering ribbons, were haloed in moisture.

The feet of Sidney Zoom, pacing the wet pavements, splashed heedlessly through small surface puddles. Attired in raincoat and rubber hat, the gaunt form prowled through the rainy night, his police dog padding along at his side.

Sidney Zoom loved the night. He was particularly fond of rainy nights. Midnight streets held for him the lure of adventure. He prowled ceaselessly at night, searching for those oddities of human conduct which would arouse his interest.

The police dog growled throatily.

Sidney Zoom paused, stared down at his four-footed companion.

"What is it, Rip?"

The dog's yellow eyes were staring straight ahead. His ears were pricked up. After a moment he flung his head in a questing half circle as his nose tested the air. He then growled again, and the hair along the top of his back ruffled into bristling life.

"Go find, Rip."

Like an arrow, the dog sped forward into the night, his claws rattling on the wet pavement. He ran low to the ground, swift and sure. He leaned far in as he rounded a corner, then the night swallowed him.

Sidney Zoom walked as far as the corner where the dog had vanished, then stood waiting. He heard footsteps, the rustle of a rubber raincoat, and a dark figure bulked upon him.

A flashlight stabbed its way through the darkness.

"What are you doin' here?" grumbled a deep voice.

The hawklike eyes of Sidney Zoom stared menacingly.

"Who are you?—and put out that damned flash!"

The beam of the flashlight shot up and down the long, lean, whipcorded strength of the man, and the grumbling voice rumbled again.

"I'm the officer on the beat. It's no time for a man to be standin' out on a street corner, all glistenin' with rain, and lookin' into the night as though he was listenin' for something. So give an account of yourself, unless you want to spend a night in a cell."

Sidney Zoom turned his eyes away from the glare of the light,

fished a leather wallet from an inside pocket, and let the officer see a certain card.

That card bore the signature of the Chief of Police.

The officer whistled.

"Sidney Zoom, eh?" he said in surprise. "I've heard of you and of your police dog. Where's the dog?"

Sidney Zoom's head was cocked slightly to one side, listening.

"If you'll quit talking for a moment I think we can hear him."

The officer stood stock-still, listening. Faintly through the night could be heard the barking of a dog.

"It's around the other corner," said Zoom.

The officer grunted. "What's he barkin' at?"

Sidney Zoom's long legs started to pace along the wet pavement. A sudden shower came rattling down on the hard surface of their shiny raincoats.

"The best way to find out," said Sidney Zoom, "is to go and see."

The officer was put to it to keep up with the long legs.

"I've heard of some of your detective work," he said.

He gave the impression of one who wished to engage in conversation, but the pace was such that he needed all his wind. Sidney Zoom said nothing.

"And of your dog," puffed the officer.

Sidney Zoom paused, motioned to the officer to halt, raised his head and whistled. Instantly there came an answering bark.

Zoom's ears caught the direction of that bark, and he lengthened his stride. The officer ceased all efforts to keep step and came blowing along, taking a step and a half to Zoom's one.

A street light showed a huddled shadow. The dog barked again, and Sidney Zoom pointed.

"Something on the sidewalk," he said.

The officer started to talk, but thought better of it.

Zoom's stride became a running walk. His lean form seemed fairly vibrant with excitement.

"Someone lying down," he said.

The dog barked once more—a shrill, yapping bark, as though he tried to convey some meaning. And Sidney Zoom interpreted the meaning of that bark.

"Dead," he said.

The officer grunted his incredulity.

But Zoom had been right. The man was dead. He lay sprawled on the pavement, on his face, his hands stretched out and clenched, as though he had clutched at something.

There was a dark hole in the back of the man's head, and a welling stream of red had oozed down until it mingled with the water on the sidewalk, staining it red. The hat was some ten feet away, lying flat on the sidewalk.

The man had on a coat, trousers,

heavy shoes. But there were pajamas underneath. The bottoms of the pajamas showed beneath the legs of the trousers, and the collar of the pajama coat showed through a place where the coat lapel had been twisted backward.

The officer ran his hands to the wet wrists of the corpse.

"Dead," he said.

"That," remarked Sidney Zoom, dryly, "is what the dog told me. He'd have come running to me, urging haste, if the man were still living."

The officer looked up with glittering eyes.

"You kidding me?" he asked.

Sidney Zoom shrugged his shoulders. Experience had taught him the futility of seeking to explain canine intelligence, highly developed, to anyone who had had no experience with it.

The officer turned the figure over. Zoom's hand thrust out, caught the officer's arm.

"Wait," he said, "you're destroying the most valuable clue we have!"

The officer's eyes were wide.

"I'm just turnin' him over."

He had paused, the corpse precariously balanced on one shoulder and hip, the head sagging downward.

Zoom nodded.

"Precisely," he said. "But you'll notice that the shoulders of the coat, on the upper part around the neck, are quite wet. That shows that he's been out in the rain for some time.

"But the back of the coat is almost dry. That means he was walking, facing the rain, that he hasn't been lying very long on his stomach here. Otherwise the back of the coat would have been quite wet. But if you turn him over before we check on these things, and the back of the coat touches the wet pavement, we'll have no way of determining the comparative degree to which the garments are soaked."

The officer grunted.

"You're right about the shoulders," he said, feeling them with an awkward hand. "And the front of his coat is sopping wet. It looks as though he'd been walkin' toward the wind, all right."

Zoom ran his fingers over the garments. His eyes held that hawk-like glitter of concentration which marked his rising interest.

"Now the wind," said Zoom, "was blowing in the same direction the head is pointing. Which means that he was either turned around, after the shot, or that he had changed the direction of his walk. You'll notice that he has no socks on, that the shoes are incompletely laced, and the strings hastily tied around the ankles.

"Apparently the man had retired for the night, when something aroused him, sent him hurriedly out into the rain with just the barely essential clothes on.

"He was shot in the back of the head. Probably the shot coincided with a clap of thunder, since no one seems to have heard it, and it's a district where there are apartment houses. He probably has been dead less than quarter of an hour . . . Let's have the flash on his face, officer."

The beam of light played obediently on the cold face. It disclosed the features of a man somewhat past the middle fifties. His face was covered with gray stubble. His hair was thin at the temples. The high forehead was creased with scowl-wrinkles. The mouth was a firm, thin line, almost lipless. Deep calipers showed that the corners of the mouth were habitually twisted downward.

"A man," said Sidney Zoom, "who seldom smiled."

The officer's hand went to the coat pocket. "Lots of papers in this pocket. You notify headquarters, I'll stay here and watch."

Zoom's eyes focused on the wet pavement, some three feet beyond the corpse.

"Officer, raise your flashlight a bit higher—there!"

"What is it?"

The rays of the flashlight were caught, reflected back by something that glowed an angry red.

Zoom walked over to it, stooped, and picked it up.

"A red bead, or a synthetic ruby, pierced for stringing on a necklace," he said, "and I think there's another one a little farther on. Let's see."

The officer obediently elevated the flash. Once more there was a dull gleam of angry red in the darkness.

"From the direction he was travelin'," said the officer.

Zoom picked up the second bead, stalked back to the corpse.

"Look in his hands," he suggested.

The officer pried open the left hand. It was empty. He pulled back the fingers of the right hand. Half a dozen red beads glittered in the reflection of the flashlight, their color suggestive of drops of congealed blood.

Sidney Zoom scowled thoughtfully.

"Is that a bit of white thread there?" he asked.

The policeman bent forward.

"It is that. What do you make of it?"

Zoom stared in unwinking thought at the small cluster of red gems. "They may be genuine rubies, but I doubt it. They look like synthetic rubies. Notice that they graduate slightly in size. Evidently they were strung on a necklace. There's a chance, just a chance, that the necklace was worn by the person who fired that fatal shot, that the man clutched at this person, caught the necklace in his hand and ripped out a section of it. Then, when that person fled from the shooting, more of the

rubies dropped . . . but I doubt it."

The officer lurched to his feet, letting the body slump back upon the wet pavement.

"It's gettin' too much for me," he said. "I don't want to leave the body, even if I do know you're all right. You go in that apartment house, get a telephone, and notify headquarters."

Zoom nodded. "Stay there, Rip," he said. "I'll be right back."

The dog slowly waved his tail in a swing of dignified acquiescence. Zoom crossed the street to an apartment house.

The outer door was locked, and the lobby was dark. Zoom's forefinger pressed against the button below the apartment marked *Manager* until he received a response. When a fat woman with sleep-swollen eyes came protestingly to the door, Zoom explained the situation, was led to a telephone, called headquarters, and reported the finding of the body.

Then he returned to the officer. The dog was crouched down on the wet pavement, his head resting on his paws. He thumped his tail on the pavement by way of greeting, otherwise remaining immobile. The officer was going through the papers in the dead man's pocket.

"Seems to be a Harry Paine," he observed here. Looks like he tried to carry all his correspondence in his pocket. The address is here, too. It's 5685 West Adams Street. And here's some legal papers :— looks like he'd been in a lawsuit of some kind. . . . The papers have been carried around for some time. You can see where the pencil marks have rubbed off on 'em and polished up until they're slick."

Zoom nodded. He was studying the face of the dead man.

"Ain't you interested in these papers?" asked the officer.

Zoom's expression was one of dreamy abstraction.

"I'm more interested in the character of the man," he observed. "He looks to me like an old crank, and man who never smiled, who had no compassion, no kindness. Look at those hands! See the gnarled grasping fingers . . . Do you believe in palmistry, officer?"

The policeman grunted scornfully.

"Baloney," he said.

Zoom said nothing for a few seconds.

"It's strange," he then remarked, "how character impresses itself upon every portion of a person's body. Hands, feet, ears, shape of the nose, the mouth, the expression of the eyes . . . everything is shaped by that intangible something we call a soul."

The officer, squatted on the wet pavement by the side of the corpse, lurched to his feet.

"You're talking' stuff that don't make sense," he growled. "This here is a murder case, and the law

has got to catch the person that did the murder. What's the character of the dead man got to do with the thing?"

Sidney Zoom's reply consisted of one word. "Everything."

He reached for the papers which had been in the pocket of the corpse.

"Murders," the officer observed, "are everyday affairs. Handle 'em as routine and you get somewhere. Identify the dead guy, see who wanted him bumped off, round up the evidence and maybe give a little third degree at headquarters, and you're ready for the next case."

Sidney Zoom said nothing. In the distance could be heard the wailing of sirens.

"There are powder marks on the back of the head," said Zoom, after the siren had wailed for the second time. "Let me see your flashlight."

The officer handed it to him. Zoom circled the gutter with its rays, steadied his hand abruptly, then pointed.

"There it is."

"There what is?"

"The empty shell. See it, there in the gutter? He was shot with an automatic. The ejector flipped the shell out into the street, the running water from that last burst of rain washed it down into the gutter."

The officer bent and picked up the shell.

"You're right. A forty-five."

The siren wailed again. Lights glittered from the wet street, and the first of the police cars swung into the cross street, then hissed through the water to the curb.

Another car followed close behind. Then there sounded the clanging gong of an ambulance. Thereafter, events moved swiftly.

Detective Sergeant Gromley was in charge of the homicide detail, and he heard the officer's report, checked the facts from Sidney Zoom, and started the men gathering up the various clues.

They started tracing the trail of the blood-red beads, found that they led to an apartment house about fifty yards away. They were spaced at almost even intervals, and they glistened in the rays of the searching spotlights.

The district was largely given over to apartment houses, and the wailing sirens had brought watchers to the windows. The cloud rifts drifted into wider spaces and tranquil stars shone down up the concrete canyon of the sleeping street.

Officers started checking to find out if anyone had heard the shot, if anyone had noted the time, if here had been any sound of running feet.

Sergeant Gromley scanned the apartment house where the trail of red beads ended and uttered an exclamation of triumph as he pointed to the row of mail boxes in the vestibule, each faced with

a printed name cut from a visiting card.

"Notice Apartment 342," he said. "The name's been torn out of there within the last half hour or so. See, there's a wet smear on the cardboard backing, and . . . it's a little smear of blood! See it?"

He turned toward the lobby where a man in a bathrobe was peering curiously.

"Where's the manager?" asked Gromley.

"I own the place. My wife and I run it."

"Who's the tenant in Apartment 342?"

The man scowled, ran his fingers through his tousled hair.

"I ain't sure. I think it's a woman. Paine or some such name. That's it, Paine, Eva Paine. Ain't her name on the mail box?"

"Come on," Gromley said to his broad-shouldered assistants who had knotted around him. "Let's go."

They crowded into the elevator. Sidney Zoom took the stairs, Rip at his heels.

"Here, you," grunted the man in the bathrobe, "you can't bring a dog in here!"

But Sidney Zoom paid no attention. His long legs were working like pistons as he went up the stairs two at a time.

But the officers were getting out of the elevator as Zoom reached the upper corridor. The stairs emerged at the end opposite from the elevator shaft, and the apartment they wanted was close to the elevator.

One of the men pounded upon the door.

It was opened almost immediately by a girl in a kimono. She stared at them in wide-eyed silence.

Sergeant Gromley pushed unceremoniously past her.

"We want to ask you some questions," he said.

The others crowded into the room, which was used as a sitting room during the daytime, a bedroom at night. The wall-bed had been let down, apparently slept in, but the sheets were folded neatly at the corners. The girl must be a quiet sleeper, or else had not been in bed long.

She was dressed in a kimono of bright red which enhanced the gleam of her eyes, the red of her lips, the glitter of the lights on her hair, which was glossy black.

"You're Eva Paine?" asked Sergeant Gromley.

"Yes. Of course. Why?"

"Know a Harry Paine?"

"Y-y-yes, of course."

"Why do you say 'of course'?"

"He's my father-in-law."

"You married his son?"

"Yes."

"What's the son's name?"

"Edward."

"Where is he?"

"Dead."

"When did you see Mr. Harry Paine last?"

She hesitated at that, made a little motion of nervousness.

"Why, I can't tell. Yesterday afternoon, I think. Yes, it was yesterday afternoon."

"Aren't very certain, are you?"

She lowered her eyes.

"I'm a little confused. What is the idea of all of you men, who seem to be detectives, coming here and asking me questions? I've done nothing."

Sergeant Gromley shook his head, belligerently, aggressively.

"No one accused you of it—yet."

"What do you want?"

"Information."

"About what?"

"About who might have had a motive for murdering Harry Paine."

The girl came to her full height. Her face paled. Her eyes widened until the whites showed on all sides of the irises. Her forehead wrinkled with horror.

"Murdered?" she asked.

Her voice was weak, quavering.

"Murdered!" snapped Sergeant Gromley.

"I—I don't know anything about it."

"Was there bad blood between you?"

She hesitated, then became almost regal in her bearing.

"Yes," she said, "and I'm glad he's dead—if he is dead. He was a brute — a stingy, narrow-minded, bigoted, selfish brute."

Sergeant Gromley nodded casually. The character of the dead man was of no consequence to him. It did not matter to him how much the man might have deserved to die. It was only the fact that the law requires vengeance which mattered to him.

"Who murdered him?"

"I—I don't know."

"Have you a necklace of rubies, or imitation rubies, or red glass beads? Think carefully. Your answer may mean a lot to you—and don't lie."

"What have red beads got to do with it?"

"Perhaps nothing, perhaps a lot. Have you such a necklace?"

Her lips clamped tightly.

"No!"

"Do you know anyone who has such a necklace?"

"No!"

Sergeant Gromley remained undisturbed. There was a lot of ground to cover yet, and the veteran investigator had no fear of lies. The only thing that caused him consternation was a suspect would would not talk. Given one who would answer questions, he was always certain of ultimate triumph.

"Where have you been since 9 o'clock?"

"In bed."

Sergeant Gromley raised his eyebrows.

"In bed?"

"Yes."

"Since 9 o'clock?"

"Yes."

The answer was surly this time, defiant, as though she had been trapped into some answer she had not anticipated and intended to stick by her guns.

"What time did you retire?"

"At the time I told you — 9 o'clock."

The sergeant's smile was sarcastic. He looked over the graceful lines of her figure, the striking beauty of the face.

"Rather early for a young and attractive widow to retire on a Saturday night, isn't it?"

She flushed. "That is none of your business. You asked me a question, and I answered!"

Sergeant Gromley's smile was irritating. His manner was that of a cat that has a mouse safely hooked in its claws and is willing to torture the creature for a time.

"Rather a coincidence that I chose the hour of 9 o'clock and that you answered so promptly. I am just wondering, Miss Paine, if you hadn't resolved to give that bedtime story as an alibi. When I asked you where you've been since 9 o'clock—rather than where you've been during the last hour—you said 'in bed' because you had expected the question to be different. Then, having said it the first time, you decided to stick to your story."

She was cool, defiant, but her shoulders were commencing to rise and fall with rapid breathing.

"Your reasoning is too complicated for my childlike brain. Just confine yourself to necessary questions, please."

Gromley continued to press the point. "It is rather a peculiar coincidence that I should have been the one who predicted the exact time of your retirement, isn't it?"

She shrugged. "That, also, is a matter I cannot answer."

She swept her eyes momentarily from the sergeant to the ring of curious faces which were watching her. And as Sidney Zoom caught her eyes, shiny with excitement, his long forefinger lifted casually to his lips and pressed firmly against them.

Her eyes had left his face before the significance of the gesture impressed her. Then they darted back with a look of swift questioning in them. But Zoom, taking no chances that his signal might be seen and interpreted by one of the officers, was rubbing his cheek with slow deliberation.

The girl returned her eyes to the sergeant, but now there a look of puzzled uncertainty in them.

"Do you know what the weather is like?" asked Sergeant Gromley.

"It's showering."

He smiled again.

"Really, Miss Paine, you are remarkable. It was quite clear at 9 o'clock. The showers started about 9:45 and continued steadily until just before midnight."

She bit her lip.

"And you were asleep?" pursued the sergeant.

Triumph gleamed in her eyes as she swooped down upon the opening he had left her with that eagerness which an amateur always shows in rushing into the trap left by a canny professional.

"I didn't say I was asleep."

"Oh, then, you weren't asleep?"

"No, not all the time."

"And that's the way you knew it was raining?"

"Yes. The rain beat against the window. I heard it, got up and looked out. There was some lightning and thunder too."

"And that's the only way you knew it was raining?"

"Yes."

"And you weren't out of this room after 9 o'clock tonight?"

"Would I be likely to leave it, dressed this way?"

"Answer the question. Were you out of this room after 9 o'clock?"

Instinctively, her eyes sought those of Sidney Zoom.

This time there could be no mistaking the impressive significance of the gesture he made—the forceful pressing of a rigid forefinger against his closed lips.

"Answer the question," barked Sergeant Gromley.

"No," she said. "I didn't leave this room."

But her eyes were hesitant, helpless, and they looked pleadingly at Sidney Zoom.

The sergeant swooped, pushed aside a filmy bit of silk, reached a long arm under the edge of the bed, and brought out a pair of shoes.

"These your shoes?"

She knew then that she was trapped, for the shoes were soaked with rain. The knowledge showed in the sudden panic of her eyes, the pallor of her lips.

She looked at Sidney Zoom, and suddenly stiffened.

"I have answered quite enough of your questions, sir. I will not make any more statements until I have seen a lawyer."

Gromley simulated surprise.

"Why . . . Why, Miss Paine, what could you possibly want to see a lawyer about? Has any one made any accusations against you?"

"N-no . . ."

"Then why should you want a lawyer? Do you expect accusations will be made?"

She drew in a rapid lungful of breath preparatory to speaking, then raised her eyes once more to Zoom's face.

"I have nothing more to say," she said.

The sergeant snapped out a rapid barrage. "Is it your custom to put powder on your cheeks, lipstick on your lips, have your hair freshly done up at one o'clock in the morning? Or were you expecting a call from the police, and just wanted to look your best?"

It was plainly a relief to her that she did not need to answer the question. She simply shook her head, but the panic of her eyes

was even more evident now.

Sergeant Gromley turned to the men.

"Frisk the place, boys."

He spoke quietly, but the effect of his order was instantaneous. The men scattered like a bevy of quail. Drawers were pulled open, skilled fingers explored the contents. They even went to the bed, felt in the mattress, probed in the pillowcase.

Sergeant Gromley kept his eyes on the panicky eyes of the young woman.

"It might be much better for you, later on, if you told the truth now," he said, gently, trying to make the fatherly tone of his advice break through the wall of reserve that had sealed her lips.

He was almost successful. The touch of sympathy in his voice brought moisture to her eyes. Her lips parted, then clamped tightly closed again. She blinked back the tears.

"I have nothing more to say."

One of the officers turned from the dresser.

"Look what's here," he said.

He held up a fragment of necklace made of fine red beads.

"Where was it?"

"Hidden. Fastened to the back of the mirror with chewing gum. You can see where the string was broken, then it was tied up at the ends, and stuck to the back of the mirror."

Sergeant Gromley grunted. "Let's see the gum."

The officer handed him a wad of chewing gum. The outside was barely dry, had not yet commenced to harden.

Sergeant Gromley riveted his eyes on the young woman once more.

"Yours?" he asked.

She glanced swiftly at Sidney Zoom, then shook her head.

Sergeant Gromley was sitting with his back to Sidney Zoom. He spoke now, quietly, evenly, without raising his voice.

"Zoom, I've heard of you, heard of some of the help you've given the department. It's customary to exclude all civilians from questionings such as these. I let you remain because of your record. Unfortunately, you seem to have taken advantage of my generosity."

Sidney Zoom's voice was sharp.

"Meaning," he asked, "exactly what?"

Sergeant Gromley kept his back turned.

"Do you think," he asked, "that I am an utter fool?"

Zoom snapped, "Do you want me to leave the room?"

"Yes," said Gromley, without turning his head.

Sidney Zoom reached the door in a few strides.

"Come, Rip."

Their feet sounded in the corridor, the man's pounding along, the dog's pattering softly, a rattling of claws sounding on the uncarpeted strip of floor at the sides of the hallway. There was a sardonic

smile on the features of Sidney Zoom as he gained the ground floor of the apartment house. Here he walked to the outer lobby and surveyed the row of brass letter boxes, each fitted with a lock.

Zoom paused to take from his pocket a pair of gloves. They were thin, flexible gloves, yet they insured against any casual fingerprints being left behind.

"Fools!" he muttered to himself under his breath.

Then he took from a pocket a bunch of keys. They were not many in number, but each had been fashioned with cunning care by a man who had made the study of locks the hobby of a lifetime.

The third key which he tried clicked back the bolt of the mail box which went with Apartment 342.

Sidney Zoom reached a gloved hand inside the aperture, removed a wadded scarf of silk. Within the scarf were several hard objects which rattled crisply against each other.

They might have been pebbles, or bits of glassware, but Sidney Zoom wasted no time in looking to see what they were. He simply dropped the entire bundle, scarf and all, into one of the pockets of his coat, and then went out into the night.

He stopped at the nearest telephone and called the best criminal attorney in the city.

"This is Zoom speaking. The police are trying to pin a murder charge on a young woman, a Mrs. Eva Paine, who lives in apartment 342 at the Matonia Apartments. They're there now. I'm retaining you to handle the case under the blanket arrangement I have with you. Get out there at once. Tell her to keep quiet and see that she does. That's all."

And Zoom clicked the receiver back on its hook.

He knew that the attorney would be there in a matter of minutes. Zoom kept him supplied with various cases which attracted the interest of the strange individual whose hobby was the prowling of midnight streets and the matching of wits with both criminals and detectives.

Then Sidney Zoom summoned a cab and was driven to the palatial yacht on which he lived. Only when he was safely ensconced in his stateroom did he open the package which he had taken from the mail box.

It was filled with jewels, strung, for the most part, into necklaces.

It was 10 o'clock in the morning. The musty air of police headquarters was filled with that stale odor which comes to rooms which are in use twenty-four hours a day.

Captain Bill Mahoney, a small man in the early fifties, but equipped with a large mind, raised dark, speculative eyes and regarded Sidney Zoom thoughfully.

"Sergeant Gromley," he said,

"wants to place a charge against you for aiding and abetting a felon."

"The felon being whom?" asked Sidney Zoom.

"The Paine girl."

Zoom tapped a cigarette impatiently upon the table, rasped a match along the sole of his shoe, lit the cigarette, snapped out the match with a single swift motion of his arm.

"Sergeant Gromley," he said, "is a dangerous man. He is dangerous to innocent and guilty alike."

Captain Mahoney's voice remained quiet. "He's the best questioner in the department."

"Perhaps."

"And he tells me you interfered with him in the Paine case."

"He's right. I did."

"That's serious, Zoom. We've orders to allow you to cooperate because you've always had a passion for justice, and you've helped us clear up some difficult cases. But you're going to lose your privileges."

Captain Mahoney was never more quiet than when enraged. Zoom had known him for years in a close friendship which was founded upon mutual respect. Yet Captain Mahoney would have been among the first to have admitted that, despite their long friendship, he knew virtually nothing of that strange, sardonic creature who made a hobby of patrolling the midnight streets and interesting himself in odd crimes.

Sidney Zoom regarded the smoldering tip of his cigarette.

"I'm afraid, Zoom, I shall have to ask you to surrender your courtesy star and your commission as a special deputy. I'm sorry, but you knew the rules, and you infringed upon them."

Sidney Zoom took the articles from his pocket, passed them over, heaved a sigh.

"I'd anticipated that, and I'm glad. I can do more by fighting the police than by cooperating with them."

He jackknifed his huge form to its full height, strode toward the door. His hand was on the knob when Captain Mahoney's quiet voice stabbed the tense atmosphere of the room.

"That," he said, "disposes of my duty as an officer. Now, Zoom, would you mind telling me—as a friend—why you took advantage of the confidence this department reposed in you?"

"Because," replied Zoom, "Gromley was about to outwit an innocent woman and pin a murder upon her."

"He's done it anyway."

"No. He hasn't."

Captain Mahoney fished a cigar from his pocket, slowly bit off the end. His dark, luminous eyes regarded Zoom with curious speculation.

"Do you know who murdered Harry Paine?" he asked.

"No. But I know who didn't."

Captain Mahoney lit his cigar.

"I wish I'd been there last night."

"I wish you had, Captain."

Mahoney's eyes gleamed above the first puff of blue smoke which came from his cigar.

"Because if I had been, I'd have sensed that your interference was for the primary purpose of getting yourself kicked out. I'd have figured that you wanted to leave that room without exciting attention, and you took that way of doing it."

Sidney Zoom whirled, strode back to his chair, sat down, and laughed.

"Bill," he said, "it's a good thing you weren't there. You're too clever for me."

Captain Mahoney had not moved. He twisted the cigar slowly, thoughtfully, then flashed his black eyes at Sidney Zoom's hawklike face.

"And I have an idea you wanted to be relieved of your courtesy commission on the force because you're figuring on a fast one, and don't want any sense of ethics to stand in your way."

Zoom said nothing. For a few moments they smoked in silence.

"Bill," said Sidney Zoom, at length, "you're human. Do you want to solve that Paine murder?"

Captain Mahoney spoke cautiously. "Gromley says it's a perfect case, but that you and your lawyer have interfered with his proof and now he may not be able to turn over enough evidence to get a conviction."

Zoom leaned forward.

"If you'll put your cards on the table, Bill, I'll try and clear up the case for you."

"If I put my cards on the table," asked the police captain, "will you put yours on the table?"

Zoom's answer was explosively prompt.

"No!"

"Why not?"

Zoom laughed lightly.

"Because I'm going to play with a marked deck."

"You think the woman *isn't* guilty?"

"I'm certain of it."

"It would hurt the police a lot if we should go ahead and try to pin a murder rap on her and then have it turn out to be a mistake," said Bill Mahoney, slowly.

Sidney Zoom knew that he had won.

"Get your hat, Bill," he said.

Captain Mahoney reached for his hat.

"Where to?"

"To Harry Paine's place, out on West Adams. I'll drive slowly, and you can tell me what the police have found out while we're driving."

"Sargeant Gromley would have a fit if he knew what I was doing," sighed the captain.

But Mahoney had seen Sidney Zoom perform seeming wonders on many previous occasions, and be-

yond the sighed regret he showed no other signs of hestitancy.

As they purred along in Zoom's high-powered car, his police dog crouched in the rumble seat, Captain Mahoney gave Zoom a brief summary of the facts the police had discovered.

"It's a family fight. Guess old Paine was a man who had at least one killing coming to him. He had a son, Edward. Edward fell in love with Eva, the girl. Paine kicked the boy out. The boy started in doing some gem business, buying and selling. He was making good. Then, one day, he was killed, suddenly.

"There wasn't any insurance. The girl found herself widowed, with a stock of gems that had to be sold. She started having the estate probated so that she could get title to the gems, and old Paine sued the administrator.

"It developed that there was an illegality about the marriage. He'd known it all along and had been saving it as a weapon. Therefore, Eva wasn't the boy's widow. Harry Paine was the only surviving relative. There wasn't a will. Paine claimed the gems. The court gave them to him. He and his lawyer took possession of them yesterday afternoon.

"The girl didn't have any money to carry on a fight. But she had some of her husband's old effects. Among these was a key to the house. Apparently, the girl sneaked out to Paine's house after everyone had gone to bed and stole the jewels.

"She'd have made a good job of it, too, because no one suspected she had a key. But she was just a little clumsy in the getaway and knocked over a chair. That woke old Paine up.

"He dashed after the burglar, but she eluded him and got out. He started to chase her in his pajamas, then came back, got into this clothes, and went after her again.

"He told his attorney he'd caught a glimpse of her, running into the wind and rain, and had recognized her. He was furious and wanted to catch her red-handed."

Sidney Zoom shot Captain Mahoney a swift glance.

"Told his attorney? What was his attorney doing there at midnight?"

"He lives in Paine's apartment house. Paine was a funny old codger. He went in for collecting things—stamps, first editions, and whatnot. And he was a litigious old cuss, always in court. He sued his neighbors, sued the dealers who sold him things, sued the paving contractors who worked on his street, sued everybody.

"He got a white-haired old lawyer that he found somewhere, down and out, and took the lawyer to live with him in his house. And he always kept the lawyer busy. Then he got a butler who's a character, looks like an old pug; and there's a Chinese cook. That's the house-

hold. Quite a crew, I'd say."

Zoom nodded.

"That," he said, "is just about how I figured the case."

Captain Mahoney shot him a shrewd glance.

"How'd you figure any of that out?"

"There were legal papers in the pockets of the corpse," he said, "and the latest of them was a case where he'd sued the administrator for title to jewelry his son had had at the time of his death. A copy of the judgment was in his coat pocket at the time. The cop on the beat found it."

Captain Mahoney squinted his eyes.

"Well," he said. "here's the way Gromley reconstructs the case. Old Man Paine started after the girl and didn't catch up with her until he was almost at her apartment. He grabbed at her and clutched a string of synthetic rubies she was wearing, a present from her husband.

"She broke away, shot him, then turned and fled to her apartment. She was panic-stricken, and ditched the jewels and the gun. She probably was so excited she didn't know he'd broken the necklace when he grabbed at her.

"She was afraid they'd be coming for her, however, so she ripped her name off the mail box and then went to her apartment to pack. She heard the sirens and knew any woman who started to leave the apartment house while the police were there would be stopped and questioned.

"So she pretended she'd been in bed asleep, and waited to see if the police were coming. If they hadn't found her she'd have ducked out as soon as the police left. She figured that if they did find her she could stall them off. And she might have done it if it hadn't been for Gromley's questioning."

Zoom shook his shoulders as though to relieve them of some weight.

"That's what I didn't like about Gromley. He's clever, and he used his cleverness—not to reason out what must have happened there at the time of the murder but to trap the girl. It wasn't fair."

Captain Mahoney smiled mechanically.

"Things in this world aren't always fair. But they're fairly efficient. It's the result that counts."

Zoom gave a single expletive.

"Bah!" he said.

"Still believe in divine justice, eh?" asked the police captain.

"I've seen something closely akin to that save several innocent people from jail or the death penalty," said Sidney Zoom.

Captain Mahoney shook his head.

"You've been lucky, Zoom. But it wasn't divine justice. It was your own cleverness, plus the fact that you've got sufficient money to ride your hobby as far as you want to."

Sidney Zoom said nothing.

"That's the place," remarked Captain Mahoney. "The big house with the iron gate and the padlock."

Sidney Zoom made a single comment.

"Yes," he said. "It looks like the type of place he'd have lived in.

"Evidently you didn't take a shine to old Paine."

"No, I didn't. His character showed on his face, even in death."

"It takes all sorts of people to make a world, Sidney."

Zoom's answer was typical: "All sorts of things come up in a garden. But one pulls out the weeds."

Captain Mahoney sighed.

Sidney Zoom abruptly reverted to the clues which had led the officers to the crime.

"Would you ever had found the girl if it hadn't been for the beads?"

"You mean the synthetic rubies broken from the string?"

"Yes."

"Evenutally, I think."

"But the beads were the clue?"

"Naturally. They led from the corpse to the outer door of the apartment."

"Of the apartment *house,* you mean."

"Well, yes."

Sidney Zoom fastened his intense, hawklike eyes upon the man who was staring at him with sudden curiosity.

"Did it ever strike you as being a bit strange, Bill, that the beads only went as far as the *outer* door of the apartment house? Also, that they were spaced so evenly? Why weren't there any beads between the door and the entrance to the girl's apartment?"

Bill Mahoney laughed.

"There you go, Zoom, with one of your wild theories. The beads were the girl's, all right. We've identified those beyond any doubt. And the rest of the string was found behind the mirror in her room where she'd tried to conceal it. She'd put it there. There was the imprint of a finger in the soft surface of the chewing gum. It was her fingerprint.

"What happened was that the man she'd shot broke the string of beads with his death clutch. They were spilling all over the street, but the girl didn't know it until she got to the door of the apartment house. Then she gathered up what was left, probably some that were on a thread that had dropped down the front of her dress.

"She knew she had to hide them. She wanted to put them where the police would never find them. By that time she knew they had been spilling, leaving a trail directly to the apartment house. That's why she pulled the card off of the mail box. She knew the officers would trail those beads and, if they found a card bearing the same last name as the dead man's they'd come right up."

Sidney Zoom stretched, yawned, smiled.

"Did you notice, by any chance, if there was a cut on the fingers of Eva Paine?"

Captain Mahoney's glance was gimlet-eyed.

"Yes. There was. What made you think there might be?"

"The edges of the card container on the letter box were pretty sharp, and she was in a hurry. I thought she might have cut herself."

"And that such cut accounted for the red stain on the mail box?"

"Yes."

"I think," said Captain Mahoney, very deliberately, "that we'll go on in. You've told me too much—and not enough."

Zoom uncoiled his lean length from behind the steering wheel, grinned at the officer. "Come on."

They walked up a cement walk, came to the porch of the house. An officer on duty saluted the captain, regarded Zoom curiously. The police dog padded gravely at the side of his master.

The door sung open. Two men stood in the hallway.

Captain Mahoney spoke their names to Zoom in a voice that was informative, but not social.

"Zoom, this is Sam Mokeley, the butler, and Laurence Gerhard, the lawyer."

Zoom nodded, stalked into the hallway, suddenly turned to the two men.

"I want to see two things," he said. "First, the room from which the jewelry was taken; second, the bed where Harry Paine slept."

The lawyer, white-haired and cunning-eyed, swept his pale eyes over Zoom's tall figure, keyed up with controlled energy.

"Show him, Mokeley," he said to the butler.

The man nodded. "This way, sir."

He was all that Captain Mahoney had described — massive, heavy-handed, his ear cauliflowered.

"Here is the room, sir. The gems were in a concealed cabinet back of the bookcase. Only a very few people knew of that bookcase."

But Sidney Zoom did not even glance at the place of concealment. Instead, he dropped to his hands and knees and started crawling laboriously over the edges of the carpet, his fingers questing over every inch of the carpeted surface.

He remained in that position, searching patiently for some three or four minutes. If he found anything he gave no sign. As abruptly as he had assumed the position, he straightened to his full height, then looked at the two men.

"The bedroom," he said.

"This way, sir," said the butler.

They trooped into the bedchamber. It was a dank, chilly place, suggestive of fitful sleep or restless thoughts.

Zoom inspected the cheerless room.

"Where," he asked of the butler, "did Paine keep his gun?"

The lawyer cleared his throat.

Zoom shot him a glance.

"I asked the butler," he said.

The butler's face was wooden.

"I haven't seen him with a gun for some time, sir. He used to have one, a thirty-eight, Smith and Wesson, sir."

Zoom strode to the dresser, started yanking open the drawers.

There were suits of heavy underwear, coarse socks, cheap shirts. In an upper drawer was a pasteboard box with a green label on the top. The sides were copper-colored. Zoom pulled out the box, ripped open the cover, turned it upside down.

On the dresser cascaded a glittering shower of brass cartridges—cartridges for a .45 automatic.

The lawyer cleared his throat again. Then he shrugged and turned away. Zoom stared fixedly at Captain Mahoney. "I want to see the Chinese cook."

Captain Mahoney motioned to the butler.

"Come with me and let's find the cook."

They left the room. The lawyer cleared his throat.

"Going to say something?" asked Zoom.

"Yes," said the attorney. "I was about to remark that it was a nice day."

The door opened again and Captain Mahoney escorted the butler and the Chinese cook into the room. The cook was plainly nervous.

"Ah Kim," said Captain Mahoney.

Zoom looked at the man. The slant eyes rotated in oily restlessness.

"Ah Kim," said Zoom, "do you know much about guns?"

Ah Kim shifted his weight.

"Heap savvy," he said.

Zoom indicated the pile of shells.

"What gun do these fit?"

"Alla samee fit Missa Paine gun. Him forty-five, automatic."

Zoom turned on his heel, faced the lawyer.

"You made Paine's will."

It was a statement rather than a question. The pale eyes of the lawyer regarded Zoom unwaveringly

"Yes," he said. "Of course I did."

"Who were the beneficiaries?"

The lawyer pursed his lips.

"I would rather answer that later, and in private."

Captain Mahoney glanced at Zoom, then fixed the attorney with his dark, thoughtful eyes.

"Answer it now," he said.

The lawyer bowed. "Very well. The property—what there is, and it's considerable—is left share and share alike to the two servants, Ah Kim and Sam Mokeley."

The Chinese heard the news with a bland countenance that was utterly devoid of expression. Sam Mokeley gave a gasp of surprise.

"What!" he said.

The lawyer bowed.

"I wasn't going to tell you until

the investigation was over, but Paine left his property to you two."

"He didn't leave anything to Eva Paine?" asked Zoom.

"Naturally not," said the lawyer. "The girl was utterly unscrupulous. She testified falsely in the lawsuit over the gems. She broke into the house and committed burglary."

Sidney Zoom nodded careless acquiescence.

"Do you ever read the Bible, Mr. Gerhard?"

The white-haired man smiled.

"I have read it," he said, dryly.

"It is an excellent passage," commented Sidney Zoom, "which remarks that the one who is without sin may throw the first stone."

The lawyer's lips settled in a straight line.

"If you mean anything personal by that," he snapped, "you had better watch your tongue. There is a law in this State against libel. Your attitude has been hostile ever since you entered this place."

It was apparent that the grizzled veteran of many a courtroom battle was very much on the aggressive whenever his personal integrity was assailed.

Zoom bowed.

"You are mistaken," he said. "My attitude is that of an investigator."

He turned to Captain Mahoney.

"The murder," he said, "is solved."

Captain Mahoney stared at him.

"Who killed him?"

Zoom smiled. "Since there is a law against defamation of character, I will say nothing, but will refer you to absolute means of proof. A step at a time and we will uncover the matter . . . Rip, smell the gentlemen."

And Sidney Zoom waved his hand—a swift flip of his wrist.

An animal trainer would have known that it was the gesture more than the words that made the police dog do what he did. The effect was uncanny. The dog walked deliberately to each of the three men and smelled their clothing with bristling hostility.

"Come, Captain," said Sidney Zoom.

He turned and stalked from the room, Rip following.

"We will leave the car parked here," said Zoom as they reached the porch, leaving behind them three very puzzled individuals, "and start walking by the shortest route toward the girl's apartment."

Captain Mahoney fell into step.

"Zoom," he said quietly, "have you any idea of just what you're after?"

Zoom's answer was a monosyllable.

"Yes."

They strode forward, walking swiftly.

"Search," said Zoom, and waved his arm.

The dog barked once, then started to swing out in questing semicircles, ranging ahead and to either side of the two men.

They walked rapidly and in silence. Captain Mahoney was hard put to keep the pace. From time to time, his anxious, speculative eyes turned upward to Zoom's face. But the rigid profile was as though carved from rock.

It was not until they had approached the place where the body of the murdered man had been found that the dog suddenly barked three times, came running toward them, then ran back toward a vacant lot.

Here was a patch of brush, back of a signboard. The ground was littered with the odds and ends that invariably collect in vacant lots.

"I think," said Zoom, "the dog has found something."

Captain Mahoney sprinted and was the first to arrive at the patch of brush. He parted the leaves. The dog pawed excitedly, as though to help.

Captain Mahoney straightened and whistled.

"Call back the dog, Zoom. There's a forty-five automatic on the ground here. There may be fingerprints—if so, I want to preserve them."

Zoom gave a swift command.

The dog dropped flat on his belly, muzzle on forepaws.

Captain Mahoney took a bit of string from his pocket. He lowered it until he had it slung under the barrel of the automatic; then he tied a knot and raised the gun.

Zoom mutttered his approval. For there were fingerprints on the weapon.

"Now, Captain, if you don't mind, we'll return to the house where Paine lived and see if we can identify the gun. As a favor to me, I wish you'd tell no one where this gun was found."

Captain Mahoney sighed.

"Zoom, I'm going to give you a free hand, for a little while."

"Come on then," said Zoom.

They returned to the house as rapidly as they had made the trip from it, presenting a strange pair —the tall man with the hawklike eyes, the shorter officer, carrying a gun dangling on a string.

The butler let them in.

Zoom ordered him to summon the lawyer and the cook.

They gathered in the living room, a restless group of men, evidently under great nervous strain.

"Ah Kim," said Zoom, "is that Mr. Paine's gun?"

The Chinese let his eyes slither to the gun, then to Zoom's face.

"Same gun," he said.

"Beg your pardon, sir," interposed the butler, "but it's *not* the gun. Mr. Paine's gun had a little speck of rust on the barrel, just under the safety catch."

Zoom's grin was sardonic.

"Oh," he said, "I thought you described Paine's gun as being a thirty-eight revolver, not a forty-five automatic."

The butler's face was like a mask.

"Yes, sir," he said.

Captain Mahoney regarded the man curiously.

"Anything further to say, Mokeley?"

"No, sir."

Zoom nodded. "No," he said, "he wouldn't."

Captain Mahoney's eyes were thoughful.

"We've got to have proof, you know, Zoom. We may satisfy ourselves of something, but before we can do anything, we've got to get enough evidence to satisfy a jury."

Zoom started to talk. His voice was crisp, metallic.

"Let's look at the weak points in the case they've built up against the girl. Let's analyze the clues and see what must have happened.

"Paine had the gems here. He heard a noise, found the gems gone —stolen.

"Something made him sufficiently positive to start out after the girl. That something must have been some tangible evidence. Let's suppose, as a starting point, it was finding part of a broken necklace—some synthetic rubies strewn over the floor.

"Naturally, he scooped up those rubies, to be used in confronting the girl. He started after her. He was walking toward the wind. It was raining. He got wet. That didn't deter him. As I see his character, Paine was a very determined man.

"But before he reached the apartment where the girl lived, something caused him to turn back. What was that something? We can be fairly sure he didn't get to the apartment. Otherwise he'd have raised a commotion—he was that sort. And he was facing in the other direction when he was shot from behind, with his own gun.

"Now what would have caused him to turn back? What would have caused him to surrender his gun? Certainly someone, in whose advice he must have had implicit faith, overtook him and convinced him that he was going off on a wrong track, that he should return and summon the police.

"Then, when that person had secured possession of the gun, he waited for a clap of thunder and shot Paine in the back of the head.

"That person had picked up more of the scattered rubies. He used them to leave a trail to the front door of the apartment house where the girl lived. Those rubies weren't spaced the way they would have been had they dropped off a necklace. They have hit the sidewalk in a bunch and scattered. They were spaced just as they would have been had someone dropped them with the deliberate intent of causing the police to go to that apartment house.

"Now the only person I can think of who would have been able to dissuade Mr. Paine, cause him to surrender his gun, and turn him back, is . . ."

Sidney Zoom stared at the lawyer. Gerhard laughed.

"Cleverly done, Zoom, but not worth a damn. Your theory is very pretty, but how are you going to prove the necklace was broken here in this room? You got down on your hands and knees when you first came in here. You were looking for some of the rubies. But you were disappointed. Your interest in the girl has led you to concoct an ingenious theory. But it won't hold water—before a jury."

Zoom turned to the Chinese.

"Bring me the vacuum cleaner, Ah Kim," he said.

The servant glided out.

The butler exchanged glances with the lawyer.

The Chinese returned with the vacuum cleaner. Sidney Zoom opened it and took the bag of sweepings from the interior. He opened it on the floor.

Instantly it became apparent that the dust contained several of the rubies. They glowed redly in the light which came through the massive windows.

"Yes," said Zoom, "I looked for the rubies here. When I couldn't find them I knew I was dealing with an intelligent criminal. But I did see that a vacuum cleaner had been run over the floor very recently."

The butler looked at the lawyer, wet his lips. The lawyer frowned.

"That, of course," he said, "is rather strong evidence, Zoom. Ah Kim would have profited by the death. He has acted suspiciously several times. There's a chance you may be right."

Zoom's smile was frosty.

"Ah Kim couldn't have dissuaded Harry Paine from going on to the girl's apartment," he said, slowly, impressively. "And I don't think it will be Ah Kim's prints that we find on that gun."

The attorney regarded the gun intently.

"Ah, yes," he said, "the fingerprints on the gun. Well, it's certain they're not mine, since I wouldn't have profited by the death of my client. I have lost by it. He kept me in a law practice."

The butler squirmed.

"Meaning that you're directing suspicion at me?" he asked.

The attorney shrugged. "The fingerprints," he said, "will speak for themselves."

Sam Mokeley regarded the attorney speculatively.

"Well," said Captain Mahoney, "we'll take the fingerprints of the men here, and—"

"Perhaps," suggested Zoom, "we can also look over the clothes closets. We might find evidence that one of them was out in the rain last night. And it's peculiar that the bed of Harry Paine shows no evidence of having been slept in. Everyone agrees he jumped out of bed to pursue the burglar.

"I wouldn't doubt if there were clean sheets put on the bed, and

the bed made up fresh because the old sheets and pillowcase might have shown that he kept a gun under his pillow."

The attorney spoke slowly.

"The fingerprints on the gun are the most important evidence. A jury will act on those. The other things are mere surmise."

Captain Mahoney stared at the lawyer.

"As a matter of fact," pursued the attorney, "the butler *was* out for a little while last night. I tried to locate him just after Mr. Paine went out and—"

The butler's motion was so swift that the eye could hardly follow it. He had edged near the gun which lay on the table. With a sweep of his hand he scooped it up and fired, all in one motion.

The attorney's stomach took the bullet. A look of surprise spread over his countenance; the look was wiped out by the impact of two more bullets.

Sam Mokeley jumped back, waving the gun at Zoom and Captain Mahoney.

"Get your hands up," he said.

But he had forgotten something —the police dog.

The animal sprang, a tawny streak. Teeth clamped on the wrist that held the gun. Seventy-five pounds of hurtling weight, amplified by the momentum of the rush, crashed downward on that extended arm. The dog flung himself in a wrenching turn.

The weapon dropped from nerveless fingers.

Captain Mahoney stepped forward, handcuffs glistening.

"Let go, Rip, and lie down," said Zoom.

The police dog relaxed his hold.

Sam Mokeley extended his wrists for the handcuffs, the right wrist dripping blood from the fangs of the dog.

"Put 'em on," he said, his voice calm, his face utterly without emotion. "I got that lying, cheating, murdering doublecrossing lawyer. You're right in everything, only both Gerhard and I went after Paine.

"The lawyer put up the plan to me. I have a criminal record. He knew it. He got me the job here. He proposed that we had a chance to kill off old Paine and blame the murder on the girl. He'd stick by me, and I'd split my inheritance with him.

"He made me do the shooting so I'd be in his power. But I don't know how in hell you ever found the gun. We took it down to the bay and dumped it in the water."

Captain Mahoney turned to Sidney Zoom, who was smiling a cold efficient smile.

"Certainly, Captain. I had to victimize you a little to set the stage just the way I wanted it. Rip's well trained and intelligent, but even he couldn't have done what he appeared to do. The fingerprints on the gun are my own. I

knew that the murder had been committed with a single shot from a forty-five automatic. Therefore I bought a similar gun, put fingerprints on it, and buried it where Rip could see it.

"When I told him to search for the gun, he naturally thought we were playing a game. He went to the place where I had planted the weapon—after I'd led him to the general vicinity. I thought it might help us in a third degree."

Captain Mahoney stared angrily at Zoom.

"And you left it loaded, ready to shoot, because you thought that—"

Zoom shrugged.

"As you said, you need evidence to convict."

Captain Mahoney sighed.

"Zoom, you're the most ruthless devil I ever saw work on a case . . . And how about the girl? Even if you have the right hunch about her, she must have come here and stolen the gems. She broke the necklace, didn't realize it until she got back to her room. Then she found a part of the string, and, of course, tried to conceal it . . . and she tore the name off the mail box. I wonder if she didn't conceal those gems in the mail box. Do you know?"

Sidney Zoom met his gaze.

"Do you know, Captain, you're rather clever—at times. But I don't think even you are clever enough to ever find out what became of those gems—or to get a provable case against the girl for their theft. You know it takes evidence to convict.

"Personally, I have an idea those gems will eventually be sold to a collector who will be glad to pay a top price with no questions asked—and that eventually the girl will receive the present of a sum of money."

Captain Mahoney licked his lips.

"Zoom, your ideas of justice are, perhaps, all right at times. But you're sworn to enforce the law. You've got to do your duty."

Zoom grinned.

"You forget you made me turn in my badge and special commission. Come, come, Captain, you're going to get lots of credit for having solved a murder case so swiftly and efficiently. You'd better let it go at that.

"And while you're talking about the law, remember there's always a higher law than those made by man."

Captain Mahoney took a deep breath.

"Zoom, what a strange mixture you are! Big-hearted about some things to the point of taking risks, ruthless about others!"

"I live life as I see it," Zoom observed.

Captain Mahoney went to the telephone.

"Send the homicide squad, the coroner, and the wagon," he said, when he got headquarters, "and tell Sergeant Gromley to lay off that Paine woman. He's got a wrong hunch."

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MARGERY ALLINGHAM**
TITLE:	***The Neatest Trick of the Month***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Albert Campion
LOCALE:	London
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Melanie the Mink, alias Miss Know-It-All, won a fabulous mink coat on a TV quiz show. Then she pulled an impossible crime that had even Scotland Yard stumped ...*

MR. ALBERT CAMPION, THE CELebrated private detective, was drifting unobtrusively down the corridor toward Chief Inspector Luke's room at the Central Office when he first saw Melanie and he thought then that any young woman who could look quite so smugly pleased with herself was courting disillusionment.

At that time Campion was fully occupied with his own affairs but he noticed her particularly because of her smile. A clerk in uniform was showing her out of the building and she was trotting a little ahead of him, her spiked heels squeaking on the stone and her round hips rolling in her tight skirt. Campion supposed she was about twenty-five. She looked curved, petite, and purposeful, and appeared to be struggling to keep her expression strictly noncommittal; but just as she passed the lean and elegant private detective, whose pale eyes were so misleadingly blank behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, her inner satisfaction bubbled over. The small mouth in her greedy little face widened suddenly and a grin of pure triumph appeared and vanished.

Mr. Campion glanced after her

involuntarily and when he turned back, he saw that Chief Inspector Charles Luke himself had come into his doorway and that he too was watching his departing visitor.

The Chief's dark face cleared as he caught sight of Campion and his welcome was cordial. The two were old friends who had worked together on many occasions and although Luke was a giant of a man, inclined to dwarf the thinner, fairer Campion, he never made the mistake of underestimating the intelligence that lay behind the other man's gentle exterior. It was Mr. Campion who mentioned the girl as they went into the office together.

"A satisfied client, no doubt?" he suggested innocently.

Luke's face grew slowly savage. "I call her 'Little Miss Know-It-All'," he said bitterly. "You recognize her, of course."

"Ought I to have?" Mr. Campion looked puzzled. "The face is vaguely familiar but I can't place it. She makes me think of rabbit for some reason."

"Rabbit!" Luke's laugh was hollow. "You're on the track but a few thousand pounds out. That's the fur coat girl, Melanie the Mink. Did you see her on 'telly'?"

"Ah!" The appropriate card in Mr. Campion's mental filing system popped up before him. "She won the main prize in the commercial quiz, the modern version of Kim's game—what do they call it now?"

"'*Line of Vision*'" Luke said. "The players wander round a whole curiosity shop of unlikely objects for four minutes, then are blindfolded and put into soundproof booths. The winner is the one who can list the most items accurately from memory. One week's winner takes on a new team the next session."

Campion nodded. "I remember it now," he said. "The standard became amazingly high. She won, did she? Her observation must be phenomenal."

"She's too clever by half!" Luke spoke bluntly. "She's now set out to beat the police and as far as I can see she's in danger of doing it. Frankly, Campion, I don't quite see where to go from here."

Mr. Campion bowed to the inevitable. He knew his old friend when he spoke like this. He sat down in the visitor's chair and composed himself to listen while Luke, talking like a dynamo, strode up and down the rug.

"Her name is Melanie Miller. She works behind the Enquiries Desk in Cuppage's Stores and until she won the quiz no one had ever heard of her," he said. "But she went through session after session, beating team after team, and finally she won the big prize which was a remarkable coat presented by a federation of the Fur Trade boys. It was an advertising stunt. The fur was a sapphire mink fully insured for eight thousand pounds, and she also made about four hundred pounds by posing in it for trade

photographers." He paused and smiled briefly. "She was expected to turn it in for cash. I gather she was offered four thousand and a coat in beaver in exchange for it. But she isn't that kind of girl. Her coat is insured for eight thousand pounds and she has a literal mind."

Mr. Campion appeared interested. "She wanted to wear it, I suppose?"

"She couldn't wear it." Luke objected irritably. "No one could wear it without stopping the traffic. It was an embarrassment on a 'bus and a liability in a tea shop, and as soon as they saw it, the neighbors in Lilac Maisonets, Plum Street, North East—where she lives with her Mum — started an agitation. They contended that its presence in the buildings constituted an invitation to burglary . . . If it was that which gave her the idea I don't know."

Mr. Campion looked up in the midst of lighting a cigarette. "I remember now—I read it. She's had it pinched, hasn't she? Dear me, quite providential! How do you come to be involved, Charles? I should have thought you were a bit too eminent for larceny."

"But not for adverse publicity," said Luke grimly. "Nor do I care to see my chaps made monkeys of. Look here, Campion, we're confronted with a tale which would make a child suspicious. The story is like a conjurer's cabinet—there's a hole in it somewhere, there must be. But we simply cannot find it."

"Has she presented you with a miracle or does she offer any explanation?"

"Oh, she's got a scapegoat—she's no fool." Luke jerked his dark head. "I think that is what is making me so spiteful. It's a mean explanation which we might fall for if we decided to be lazy. Little Miss Know-It-All doesn't care whom she hurts." He sat down on the edge of the desk and stretched his long legs out before him.

"When she won the prize just over a month ago, she did a very extraordinary thing," he began. "Taking her coat and her four hundred pounds, she moved into a furnished apartment in a small block of mansion flats called Sweetwater Court, Knightsbridge. It isn't at all what you'd expect, but very respectable and very dull. The doors are shut tight at eleven every night and a porter is on duty in the hall all day. She only took the place for a month—her story is that she just wanted to see what it would be like to live 'up West'—but she appears to have chosen the block very carefully. At any rate, she went to an agency and asked them to find out if any tenant of Sweetwater would rent her a short lease of his apartment. They were not hopeful, they told us, but they did as they were asked and succeeded. Melanie paid over the odds, but she got what she wanted—an old resident with a flat

on the second floor obliged her for four weeks at twenty pounds a week."

Mr. Campion sat up.

"How very curious," he said. "You interest me, Charles. Was there nothing extraordinary about the block? No past history of crime there?"

Luke burst out laughing. "You don't miss much, do you?" he said. "That was the only possible reason I could think of for her picking it. This time last year, there was an abortive attempt at daylight robbery there and the story made the papers. The girl's memory is extraordinary and she may have recalled it. Otherwise, the place has a clean sheet. The tenants have been there for years and so has the porter. Yet the morning after the evening on which Melanie was seen to move in, coat and all, she struggled to the telephone to report that she had been drugged and robbed. A dirty glass on her table contained traces of chloral. Nothing but the mink had gone—but that certainly had vanished."

Mr. Campion leaned back in his chair and blinked.

"How nice and tidy," he murmured primly.

"Wasn't it? It sounds as if we ought to have seen through that tale without any difficulty. That's what we each thought until we dug into it. Unfortunately, her story appears to be watertight." Luke raised a long hand with the fingers outstretched and ticked off his points as he made them. "The coat was seen to enter the flat. The woman had no key to the main door—she had left the one the tenant had left for her, with the agent 'by mistake on purpose.' The coat could not have been destroyed without trace or otherwise disposed of in the flat. It could not have been passed out of a window because there are only three and they are all of a patent type which permit ventilation without opening. It has been proved that these windows have not been opened for years. Finally, the blessed coat could not have been stuffed up a chimney because there are no chimneys, nor put under the floorboards because in pure exasperation I've had 'em up."

The thin man avoided any hint of sympathy. "You said something about a scapegoat," he ventured.

Luke scowled. "That's the unforgivable bit . . . I'm not all that stirred by the losses of Insurance Companies but some things get under my skin. When Miss Know-It-All took over the apartment on a Tuesday evening she paused at the porter's box—partly, no doubt, to let him get an eyeful of the sapphire mink, but ostensibly to tell him that she expected a Mrs. Pegg to call in with some laundry and to ask him to send her straight up."

Mr. Campion's eyebrows rose behind his spectacles.

"How old-world!"

"That's what the porter thought.

He's an intelligent chap, an ex-sergeant named Bravington. He's had the job for years and, as he said, he was surprised because old women don't come trotting round with the washing in these days."

"Yet she arrived, I suppose?" Mr. Campion was very alert. "Basket and all, no doubt."

"Basket and all," Luke agreed. "It's a pleasure to work with you, chum. She arrived but, unless I'm losing my grip, she wasn't an accomplice. I've taken her pretty well to pieces, poor old thing, and I think she's genuine. See how you feel." He slid off the desk to cross the room to an inner door. "I've just been having a session with the two of them face to face," he explained. "Perhaps I'm round the bend but I think this one is innocent." He went out to return a moment later with a withered scrap of a woman whose shabby, man's overcoat was buttoned across an overall as gay as a flowerborder. She wore an infant's knitted cap of pink wool and, to Mr. Campion's incredulous astonishment, still carried a shallow basket complete with a piece of faded chintz tied over its mouth. The moment she spoke, however, she convinced him that if she was an anachronism she was certainly no phoney.

"You're lookin' at me basket," she said huskily, her old eyes peering into his own. "I brought it, see, to shew the gentlemen it wouldn't hold no fur coat. It couldn't *take* it —wouldn't go *in*. I see the coat in 'er drorin' room when I called. Lying there on the studiho couch voluptuous it was, like it was alive. It was big, you know, big as an animal."

"Just a minute, Ma." Luke dropped a hand on her shoulder while he spoke to his friend. "Mrs. Pegg here used to be a cleaner at Cuppage's Stores and Melanie Miller knew her there. Then early this year Mr. Pegg, her husband, had a little—uh—trouble which resulted in the shop dismissing her and . . ."

"'E went inside for burgalry, dear." Mrs. Pegg lowered her voice confidingly, making Mr. Campion feel honored by true friendship. "It 'appens to 'im from time to time although a better bloke never lived, I'll say that. But the manager at the store 'ad to put me orf. I was a good worker, 'e said, but 'e dursent let me 'ave the key, see? Then some of the girls said it was a shame and they give me what work they could. That's why when Miss Importance says, 'Oo, could you oblige me by bringin' my sheets round to my noo flat ternight?' Well, I did. To 'elp 'er, see? After all, while Pegg's restin' I've got to live."

"Of course." Luke sounded as if he had known her all his life—as, indeed, he had, in type. "She brought the washing round to Sweetwater Court, Campion, and was admitted to the flat. There she had a drink—"

"Only one!" Mrs. Pegg put in

quickly. "She 'ad it ready for me when I come in. 'Oo, Mrs. P.' she says. 'I'm just 'aving a nightcap, will you 'ave one?' Then she poured it out and I drank it while she took the barsket into the bedroom."

"She left her own drink unfinished on the table while she did this, I think you said?" Luke put in.

"That's right, Duck. But I didn't put nothink in it. I wouldn't be so wicked for one thing and I 'adn't got nothink to put for another. Anythink the police found she put there for them to find. When she come back she said 'Cheers' and knocked the drink back and then give me my money. I come away then and the downstairs doors was locked, so the porter 'ad to open up for me. I wasn't carryin' no sapphire mink, boys." As her husky voice ceased, she stood looking up at them, a bright-eyed bundle as feckless and tousled as the London sparrow she resembled. "' Ow *could* I?" she demanded.

Mr. Campion rose with sudden decision. His smile was an echo of Luke's. "How, indeed?" he murmered. "Charles, it appears to be up to us to prove that point. Perhaps you and I could have a word with the porter, Bravington?"

The commissionaire's cubbyhole in the hallway of Sweetwater Court was built in the paneling, its open hatch giving directly onto the front door. As soon as Campion saw it, and met the man who kept it, the private detective began to share Luke's bewilderment. Bravington was not the type to let much go past him. His first words confirmed the impression.

"I saw and spoke to the woman Pegg when she left the building that night and she had nothing in her basket which could have been more bulky than a handkerchief. I noticed particularly. Ever since the trouble here last year I've been very careful when dealing with strangers," he announced, standing stiffly before them in his neat blue uniform, his gray head shorn to the bone in the closest of haircuts. "This block of residences is very well kept, the landlord is most particular, and the upset we had last year shook us both properly. I always keep that picture there to remind me." He stepped back from the entrance to his little room to show them a collection of trophies on the tiny shelf over the heater. Among several others there was a framed photograph cut from a newspaper. Mr. Campion adjusted his glasses and regarded it with polite interest. It showed nothing but a leather-bound canvas traveling bag resting on an upholstered bench which he recognized as the one in the hall outside.

"Er . . . quite," he said at last.

Mr. Bravington regarded him severely.

"It was that bag what saved my sight," he said earnestly. "It was about nine o'clock one morning

about this time last year when two young thugs, Teddy boys they were, pushed in here and demanded my keys. One of them took out a bottle of ammonia—to throw in my face, you see—when Mr. Jenner, one of our residents, happened to come down the stairs and saw him. Mr. Jenner was too far away to reach the youngster but, quick as a flash, he pitched the bag he was carrying straight at the brute and knocked the bottle out of his hand."

"And that's the bag?" Mr. Campion looked at the newspaper photograph again. "I see the initials—H. J."

"That's the bag, sir. Mr. Horace Jenner's bag. He always takes it with him when he goes traveling for his business every Wednesday. He comes back on Fridays—he's in the Fine Arts trade. He's been here for twenty years, same as I have, and his wife is most particular. They've got a beautiful flat. She keeps it like a bandbox. If I take anything up there for her, she gets me to change my shoes in the vestibule so I don't mark the floors. You'll notice they're very particular people."

"I do. Why did the newspapermen photograph the bag and not Mr. Jenner?"

"Because 'e was above it, sir. 'The bag saved the porter, not me,' he told them, laughing."

"Heartily, no doubt," Mr. Campion murmured absently. "I see. What about the other residents?"

"We've been into that with our customary thoroughness, I'm afraid." The Chief Inspector spoke with a mixture of pride and regret. "There are very few of them, they are all on the wrong side of forty-five and have each been living here for ten years or more. The whole of the top floor is occupied by a bedridden invalid and his staff of old servants. A couple of businessmen, Mr. Merton and Mr. Long, both in the Tea trade, live with their families in the two apartments below. On the floor beneath them is the flat the girl took, with Mr. Jenner and his house-proud wife across the hall and below that, on the first floor, there is the Town residence of the old Earl of Granchester, which is closed until his lordship returns from South Africa. Each flat was examined on the morning of the robbery. The coat wasn't anywhere in the building."

Again Mr. Campion nodded absently. He knew Luke well enough to be certain that every obvious step had already been taken and that any possibility of an accomplice having been disguised as an early morning deliveryman or postman had been fully explored as a matter of routine.

"Three people and three people only went out to the building that Wednesday morning before Melanie Miller gave the alarm," the Chief Inspector went on. "We've reduced that point to an absolute certainty. Mr. Merton and Mr.

Long left for Mincing Lane together, as they usually did, and a few minutes after them Mr. Jenner came down alone to catch his train. Actually, as he told us, he was late that particular day and had to wait at Euston Station for a second train, but that had no significance." Luke paused and spread his hands. "It's crazy," he said. "Either the coat vanished into thin air or Melanie is right and somehow Mrs. Pegg secreted it in her basket and managed to dispose of it afterwards. I don't know which version I find more unlikely. How do you feel, Campion?"

Mr. Campion sighed.

"If your Little Miss Know-It-All has moved back to Lilac Maisonets and Mum, I think we should drop in on them, don't you know," he murmured. "I see how it was done but I should like to check with the estate office of their buildings." He grinned suddenly. "That triumphant smile will fade when she is persuaded to hand over the cloakroom ticket, I fancy."

"Cloakroom... ? What are you talking about?" Luke's tone was startled and his stare blank. Mr. Campion took his arm.

"Where else *can* the coat be, Charles?" he said gently. "By the way, Bravington, how many bags was Mr. Jenner carrying that morning? Did you notice?"

The porter hesitated. "I can't say, sir," he said at last. "Sometimes he takes a second one. I'm not sure if he had two that morning–but if you'll forgive me for saying so, I can't credit what you're suggestin'. Mr. Jenner wouldn't lend himself to such a thing. He couldn't have even met the young woman and even if he had, he'd have to have a very strong reason before he helped anybody to *that* extent—particularly with Mrs. Jenner about."

Mr. Champion's eyes were serious.

"A very strong reason—yes, indeed," he agreed. "Well, now, Charles, if you're still hunting mink, it's Lilac Maisonets and don't spare the horses."

Half an hour later, Melanie the Mink and her mother, a vast woman who confirmed all one's worst fears for her daughter's future development, confronted the Chief Inspector and his companion across the kitchen table of their home in Plum Street, North East. Luke was holding out his hand. "The cloakroom ticket, please." he insisted. "Who has it? You or your mother?"

"Me?" Mrs. Miller snatched up a cook book, apparently to defend herself. "Why, I never left home all that day! And I've got witnesses to prove it."

"I daresay you have." Luke sounded grim. "I'll have the ticket from you all the same, if you please. That's where it is, is it?" He leaned forward and took a slip of paper, creased to make a marker,

which protruded from the book's greasy pages. As the women watched him he unfolded the ticket on the table.

"Euston Station. Left Luggage Office," he said softly and turned to Campion. "And that's the neatest trick of the month," he announced frankly. "What put you on to it?"

The distressing formalities were over, Melanie was on her way to the station, and Campion and Luke were driving back to Central London when the man in the horn-rims explained.

"It merely turned out to be an exercise in deduction on the elementary or classic pattern, don't you think?" he said modestly. "One follows the rules in these cases and the answer arrives on the penny-in-the-slot principle. When a problem appears to be insoluble because it is contained in a box, one is enjoined to hunt for the 'sliding panel,' starting with any little peculiarity which strikes one as unusual."

Luke grinned. "You can cut the lecture," he said good-naturedly. "I couldn't see anything unusual. That's what foxed me. What was it that made you think twice?"

"The resident who forced the porter to change his shoes in the vestibule," said Mr. Campion promptly. "The unusual thing about a woman like that is when a husband puts up with her. As soon as I considered that point, I realized that Mr. Jenner *didn't* live with his house-proud wife all the time. His habit was to spend two and a half days of every week somewhere else. Not unnaturally, therefore, I asked myself if it were possible that he spent these days in some humbler but happier establishment where the furnishings were not taken so seriously. In Lilac Maisonets, perhaps. I then looked at the newspaper picture of his bag and I thought that to a very observant eye like Miss Know-It-All's it was a distinctive sort of item, its travel stains well defined. The initals H.J. too are not uncommon."

Luke began to laugh.

"I got it," he said. "As soon as we called at the estate office and discovered that there was a traveler living in the next block to the Millers named Herbert Johns—who was away most of the time but who always came home for Wednesdays and Thursdays—I saw it at once. Melanie read about the attempted robbery in the paper and recognized the bag, I suppose. She *would*. Nosey and remembering, that's Melanie."

"Not attractive traits," Mr. Campion agreed. "To do her justice, though, I don't suppose she thought of using the information until after she won the mink and was thinking how to beat the Insurance people. Then she sought out Jenner and applied the acid."

"Before she took the flat?"

"Oh, no!" Campion looked scandalized. "Jenner wasn't in it until the very last moment. I'm sure of that. She shocked him into it. That's how she got him to play. I think you'll find, Charles, that when Mr. Jenner said goodbye to his fussy wife and stepped out of his front door that Wednesday morning, he walked unexpectedly into the arms of a young woman whom he recognized with horror as a neighbor in his other life. I think all the young woman did was to hand him a canvas traveling bag, remarkably like the one he was already carrying and say softly but very clearly, *"Put this in the cloakroom at Euston for me, Mr. Johns. You can drop the ticket through the letter box at mother's when you go home to Lilac Mansions tonight."*

"Phew!" Luke shook his head. "That must have been a facer. And he fell for it, poor chap. The request did not appear criminal, of course. All the same he shouldn't have done it. It was asking for trouble."

Mr. Campion cocked an eye.

"He might have asked for even more trouble if he had retreated into his apartment with Melanie after him," he murmured.

Luke's eyes widened. "You've got something there!" he said heartily. "She might not have changed her shoes in the vestibule, might she? And that just wouldn't do!"

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **WENZELL BROWN**

TITLE: ***Midnight Call***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: Three Palms, Florida

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *What do you do when a guy with a crazy laugh, a guy with the giggles, calls you up and confesses to a murder? Crank? Crackpot? And why you? Why not the police?*

WHEN YOU WORK THE GRAVEyard shift for a rag like the Three Palms *Gazette,* you get used to a bunch of wisenheimers calling you up late at night just for laughs: high school kids with corny jokes; guys with a few drinks under their belts, wanting to settle a bet on who won the World Series in 1948; hysterical dames reporting a "prowler" to the local newspaper instead of the cops. It's all in the game. But like I said, you get used to it.

This was a Saturday night—past midnight—and I was all alone in the Gazette Building except for Old Bert who acts as watchman, runs the elevator, and holds down the office if I feel like ambling over to Tabby's for a beer. Nothing was stirring, not even a breeze; so Bert and I were sipping cokes and having a slow game of chess.

Old Bert can really surprise you. He looks like a stumblebum, but he's plenty shrewd. He drifted into the *Gazette* office a year or so ago and hung up his hat. He had a big yen to be a reporter but when he saw that was out, he took the watchman post just to be around a newspaper. I hadn't paid much attention to him until one night he challenged me to a game of chess. I'm pretty good at the game—no Capablanca, you understand – but I learned I had to be on my toes every move or Bert would take me.

Bert had just called "Check," with checkmate four moves away,

when the telephone jangled. I reached over irritatedly and lifted it to my ear. It was a man's voice, all shrill and excited.

"Is this Bill Chambers?" The voice was a little fuzzy.

"Yeah, that's me."

The guy gave a crazy sort of laugh. "You better listen carefully. This is good."

"What's good?"

"Oh, 'tis good."

This guy is a real weirdie, I thought, or else he's tanked. I almost slammed down the receiver but suddenly the guy was giggling and the giggles sent shivers along my spine.

I repeated clearly, "What's good?"

"Me. I'm good."

"Sure. You're perfect."

"You don't understand. That's my name." He spelled it out. "G-O-O-D-E, Otis Goode."

"All right," I said grudgingly. "You're Goode. So what, Mr Goode?"

"I want to confess to a murder."

Silly as it sounds, I was now excited. This guy sounded crazy enough for anything—even murder. I grabbed a pad and pencil and tried to keep my voice casual. "Sure," I said, "who'd you kill, Goodie-boy?"

The man's manner turned cagey. "You sure nobody's listening in up there?"

"Not a soul," I said truthfully. But just then I saw old Bert's hand steal over to one of the extensions. I coughed to cover the click. Apparently Goode hadn't heard because his voice ran on, getting shriller and shriller.

"You remember a dame called Laura Keppel who was murdered on the beach two summers ago? Well, I was the one who knocked her off."

I remembered the case, all right. So far as I knew, it was Three Palms' only unsolved murder. Laura Keppel had been a pretty girl, just turned nineteen, when she was killed. She'd been going around steady with a local boy named Ron Packard. Ron got called up for the draft and just before his induction the two of them became officially engaged.

It was a bad time for Laura, so she took to roaming the beach alone. Three Palms is about sixty miles from Miami and the beach can be mighty lonely even in the daytime, especially when the tourist season is over. Laura's folks had tried to warn her that what she was doing was dangerous, but she wouldn't listen.

One evening a couple of boys found her body spreadeagled on the sand close to the water's edge. By the time the cops got to the scene, the water was lapping over one leg and one outstretched arm. Captain Briggs didn't have any difficulty reconstructing the crime: someone had come up behind the girl, probably moving soundlessly on the damp sand, and struck her a hard blow

on the back of the head, fracturing her skull. The police didn't have to look far for the weapon. It had been tossed into the sand only a few feet away—a strip of board broken off one of the old benches the town had put up in the park that bordered the beach. The board was studded with metal, making it heavy and lethal. Laura hadn't been molested and her purse was missing, so robbery was the apparent motive, although Captain Briggs admitted that the purse might have been washed out to sea.

The cops had rounded up all the floaters who hung around the beach. Briggs had grilled them until they sizzled, and some of them he'd tossed in pokey for a cooling-off period. But in the end he'd had to let them all go and the slaying of Laura Keppel was still listed as an Open File on the police books.

While I was remembering all this, Goode was growing more and more impatient—I could hear his breath humming over the wire. "What you doing?" he asked nervously. "You calling the cops?"

"No—just recalling the case. Look here Goode, why are you telling me this? Why are you confessing to the *Gazette?*"

"Because I'm sick of living with this on my mind. I want to die in the chair—but it's got to be fast. I don't want to rot in jail. I got to die, and die fast. Will you help me, Chambers?"

"I'll do what I can," I said uneasily. It all sounded flukey to me.

"You put in a word with the judge—that's all I ask. Will you do that for me?"

"Sure—sure I will," and my voice cracked.

"Then that's settled." He actually sounded relieved. "Now come and get me."

The guy was a hundred per cent crackpot and that was for sure. But was he really a killer or just a psycho leading me on a wild goose chase?

"Where are you?" I asked cautiously.

"I'm calling from the lobby of the Bagby Hotel in Miami—you know where it is. But I don't want to hang around here. I'll go down to the all-night drug store on the next corner. I'll meet you right out in front."

"That's sixty miles, Goode. Maybe all you want is a free ride to Three Palms. Besides, how do I know you'll be there when I arrive?"

"I'll be there as long as you don't bring the cops. I can smell cops a mile away and if I get one whiff, I'll fade so fast you'll never catch up with me."

He started that high-pitched giggling again. Murderer or not, the guy wasn't safe on the loose. "How'll I know you?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm easy enough to spot. I got a piece of mustache."

"A piece of mustache? What's that?"

"Don't be dense, Chambers. I'm

just starting to grow a mustache. I got a piece but not a whole one. See?" There was a sudden click of the receiver and the line went dead.

I looked up at Old Bert's face, only a foot or so from mine. He was grinning. "Man, it looks like you got a scoop for yourself."

"What do you think?" I asked. "This guy leveling?"

Old Bert shrugged. "Could be. Or maybe he's a screwball. You know, the padded-cell type."

"I'd better check with Briggs," I said, lifting the phone again. "He'll probably be mad as a hornet if I wake him up at this hour. But if I don't, he'll chew me out later."

Captain Briggs was grumpy at first but pretty soon he got interested. "I remember Goode," he said. "We were plenty suupicious of him at the time the Keppel girl was killed. We held on to him for over a week but we couldn't pin a thing on him. So after a while we had to spring him."

"How do we handle this?"

"Why not let Goode call the tune? You meet him like he asked. Maybe if he gets the idea you're playing ball, he'll really open up and spill everything. But once the cops show, he's likely to make a run for it or clam up and say nothing. Why don't you drive down to Miami and get him? Roy and I will be waiting in your office when you come back."

I hesitated and Briggs added, "If Goode's telling the truth, you get an exclusive. Anyway, what have you got to lose?"

Plenty, I thought. A sixty mile ride with a psycho who was probably a murderer wasn't my idea of a pleasant jaunt. But I couldn't back out—it might be too big a story.

I turned the office over to Old Bert. His eyes were bulging with excitement and he almost begged to go along with me. But I told him no dice—he'd queer the pitch with Goode and besides, someone had to stay with the paper.

I found Goode just where he said he'd be, standing in the neon glare of the drug store entrance. The artificial light made his straggly mustache stand out clearly, giving it a bluish tinge. I spotted him right away and honked my horn. He came over to the car, cool as you please, and hopped in next to me.

"I'm Goode," he said, "Otis Goode."

And that was all I could pry out of him until we hit the main highway and he was convinced I hadn't brought the cops along. Then he began to talk as fast as he could, confessing to the murder of Laura Keppel, giving me all the details.

So far as I could tell, he had everything straight, but he could have picked up most of it from reading the papers. He went through the whole story three times, almost word for word. His voice still had that high eerie pitch and he talked as if he were driven by some inner compulsion. Finally, he eased off

and sat back, almost crouching, and chain-smoked until we reached the *Gazette* office.

I'd thought that maybe Goode would blow his top when he found Captain Briggs waiting for him there, but it didn't seem to faze him at all. He went straight into his act. Briggs kept nodding and looking over at me, letting me know that all the details were clicking into place.

Briggs was treating Goode with kid gloves. And Roy, his assistant, was getting everything down in shorthand.

Goode's story was pat enough. He'd had a shack not far from the beach and he'd watched the Keppel girl go by several times. He hadn't meant to kill her, he said, just to knock her out and steal her purse. As soon as he'd grabbed the purse, he started to run, keeping close to the water's edge so that the incoming tide would wash away his footprints. He couldn't remember what was in the purse—just the sort of junk a woman carries around, and some small change and a couple of dollar bills. He'd taken out the money, then stuffed a rock in the purse, and thrown it out to sea as far as he could.

By the time Briggs had put him through the hoops, the sky was streaked with golden light. Briggs nodded to Roy to close his notebook, then turned to Goode and asked him if he'd mind re-enacting the crime.

Goode gave his high-pitch giggle and nodded. "Sure. Why not?"

They started tramping out of the office but I hung back—I was anxious to shoot my story to the wire services. Briggs looked over his shoulder and said, "Aren't you coming, Bill?"

I hesitated. You never could tell what would happen in a re-enactment, but the story was too hot to hold back. Then my eyes fell on Old Bert. His eyes were pleading like those of a spaniel. The old guy was shrewd enough to pick up anything of value—I'd learned that by playing chess with him. I gave him the nod and turned to the telephones.

Captain Briggs came back in a couple of hours. He was grinning from ear to ear and I didn't have to ask him if he'd got his man, but I did anyhow.

"Sure, we got him — dead to rights."

"Are you sure, Cap? Some guys are screwy enough to confess to anything."

"I know—we get more phony confessions than real ones. That's why we always hold back one fact. It's a gimmick — something the cops know and no one else, except the man who committed the crime."

"What was the gimmick this time?"

"Those old benches out on the beach. Just before the Keppel girl was killed, the slats had been freshly painted in red, white, and blue. The guy who clobbered Laura

pulled the whole bench apart getting the board he wanted—the middle slat because of the iron brace on it. Well, the middle slat was white, and we never let the color of the murder slat leak out."

I raised an eyebrow. "Goode could have said the white slat just by chance. It's a one to three gamble."

"Yeah, but the point is he didn't. He said it was the back slat—the red one."

"Proving what?"

"That Goode didn't kill Laura Keppel."

"But you said—"

"That we got the murderer? Right. You see, one guy started yelling out Goode's mistake, a guy who had no business knowing the right color of the murder slat. So now we got a confession, a genuine one that's airtight. We gave Goode a free ride out of town."

I shook my head. "What are you talking about? Who's the killer?"

"Lauterbach," Cap said.

"Lauterbach!" I echoed. "Who the hell is he? I never even heard of him."

Briggs gave me a scornful glance. "You mean Old Bert's been puttering around here for more than a year and you never learned his last name? Look, the old goat's got a screw loose somewhere—he's a more dangerous psycho than Goode. He'd been floating around the beach all during the summer the Keppel girl was murdered. He watched her for a week or so before he made the kill. He claims all he wanted was the money in her purse, but I think he had something more on his mind and got scared off. The guy was clever and went to ground afterward, then landed himself a job here at the *Gazette* where he wouldn't be noticed. But for my money, he's still crazy as a loon. Because he was genuinely proud of his crime. He was green with envy at Goode's taking all the credit for it. I don't know what's going to happen to Old Bert—maybe he'll rate the chair, maybe the nuthouse. Either way you better get his name straight because it's going to be spread all over the headlines just where he wants it. Yeah, pretty soon a lot of people are going to know all about Old Bert Lauterbach."

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Daniel Defoe, Detective***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALES: London and Edinburgh

TIME: The year 1719

COMMENTS: *If Daniel Defoe failed to unravel the plot against him, more than his very life was at stake . . . Meet Tuffley playing "Watson" to Daniel Defoe's "Sherlock Holmes."*

I, SAMUEL TUFFLEY, IN THE YEAR of our Lord 1719, was awakened from my bed at an advanced hour by a loud and imperious knocking at the door of my house in Bury Street, London, and descended to discover my brother-in-law, Daniel Defoe, who at the sight of me clapped his hands upon my shoulders.

"I'm setting off at once for Edinburgh, Tuffley," he said, "and I'm most wishful that you come with me."

"But it is late, Daniel," I said. "Cannot political matters wait until the light of day, or will they not bear it?"

"'Tis no political matter that calls me," Daniel said. "I go to meet a man who calls himself Rogers. If I learn from him what I expect, the knowledge may change my life. And in truth, Tuffley, the secret advisor in my soul warns me to change it anon, else I may not live long. The 'high fliers' and the Jacobites would kill me if they could, and even my own Whigs no longer trust me!"

"'Tis true, Daniel," I cried. "'Tis not safe for you to be abroad in London alone at this hour!"

"That is why I wish you to accompany me to Edinburgh, Tuffley. Your reliable sword at my side would set my mind at peace."

I sighed, looking at Daniel's broad, determined chin shining white in the moonlight, then bade

him wait below while I retired to dress. All the while my wife Margaret scolded from her bed, wishing to Heaven my sister Mary had never married Defoe, or that I were not so pusillanimous as to accept what she termed his impositions.

I silenced her, reminding her how generous Daniel had been to us when his star was high, setting me up as a hose factor, in which trade I had prospered. Now that Daniel had thrice seen the inside of Newgate prison for writing seditious pamphlets, and was, it was rumored, losing favor in the minister Harley's eyes, it was the least I could to do to succour him. Besides, I admired greatly his facile political genius, and always felt my own wits sharpened in his presence.

Daniel and I left London within the hour, not pushing our mounts, but at Daniel's request, deliberately taking the most round-about way. I could see my brother-in-law was burdened with anxiety, and suggested that the man he went to Scotland to see must certainly, in spite of Daniel's avowal otherwise, represent a significant political figure.

"I tell you no!" Daniel cried in sudden rage. "Why should I lie to you, Tuffley? All the years I've spent in politics, writing in behalf of our party, have given me no rest nor surcease from worry. I cannot prolong it without danger to my self. Meeting and talking with this man may provide a way out of it for me!"

But poor Daniel was an opportunist, no matter how brilliant he might be, and I fear I did not altogether believe him.

We made but slow progress for several days, because the ground, being damp and sandy, offered much difficulty to our horses. After we crossed the Trent at Nottingham, we found the road much harder and made better time.

On the fifth evening, while Daniel and I sat in the public room of an inn in Newcastle, a tall, spare fellow with tortured brown eyes, looking like a fanatic, entered and engaged in conversation with the landlord.

Daniel, at the sight of him, flushed red; then he rose quietly and went above stairs to his chamber. After a bit, I followed him, knocking, since Daniel, in spite of his thrifty nature, always insisted upon engaging a chamber to himself whenever we travelled outside London.

Defoe stood in stockinged feet before the meager flames of the little fireplace, his hands clasped behind him, his head turned in a listening attitude. I realized how below middle-size he was, and how large his head in proportion to his body, even though he had removed his wig, and his brown hair was close-cropped. In profile, his nose appeared sharply hooked in a predatory way, and his clean-shaven chin more stubborn than ever.

"Is that gangling fanatic fellow the cause of your leaving?" I asked.

"I've seen him before," he replied at last, rubbing the mole on his chin reflectively, "in London and at Whitehall, and just night before last, at the tavern in Leeds!" Then he sat himself at the table and surprised me by thumping it with his fists until the candle in its holder jumped crazily.

"Have I waited too long, Tuffley?" he exclaimed strangely distraught. "Am I doomed to die before my time?"

"Tell me about it, Daniel," I said gently, laying my hand on his wrist and feeling his pulse race.

"A fortnight ago, in London," he said, "someone entered my bedroom and tried to kill me. Only because I heard him in time, rolled off the bed and made an outcry, did the villain fail of his purpose. But first he leapt upon where I had been lying, and I heard the very bed-frame tremble with the weight of him. I'm sure he came to strangle me, but he got clean away."

"Without a clue to who he was?"

"Only this," Daniel said, throwing a metal disk upon the table. It was the size of a shilling piece, but common iron, and in relief upon either side appeared the simple figure of a cross.

"He was one of the Squadroni who carried this, a fanatic religious who fears that the English ministry is backing the pretender. You know, Tuffley, I am no Jacobite, but a certain publication of mine which I wrote in irony was notoriously misunderstood by many, and doubtless the Squadroni also took offence."

"You think this fellow downstairs—?"

"I think he follows us, at the very least."

"Mayhap I should have *tête à tête* with him. With my open, country-looking face—"

"No, no!" Daniel cried. "We must leave here at once. If we see him again at Edinburgh, it will be time enough to act. Quickly, Tuffley, tell the boy to bring our horses!"

And so, fleeing through the rear of the inn to escape the notice of the fanatic, Daniel and I set out northward again in the middle of the night, through a driving rain. Daniel stopped ever and again, listening for the sound of a follower's horse, but none did we hear, and we reached Edinburgh late the following day without having seen or heard signs of pursuit.

Daniel led me at once to The White Swan, an inn in the northern part of the city, where the innkeeper, a rubicund Scot named McClain greeted him with a warm embrace—Daniel having stayed at this inn on his frequent trips to Edinburgh—and showed him to his finest and largest room. To me the innkeeper gave the smallest and dingiest, but it was ever so

when I accompanied the famous Defoe on his political journeys, and I made no complaint.

After resting a bit from the fatigues of our journey, Daniel and I descended to the public room and were served fine beef and a mug of porter by a personable young serving-maid.

Besides ourselves, there were two others dining in the room—one a young man in square-cut clothes, with a reddish face, a scoop of a nose, and a wide, flexible mouth; the other an older man, with grey hair and beard and chill, grey eyes, precise in his gestures, looking like a merchant from Aberdeen or Perth. After the first look at Defoe and me as we entered, neither man gave us further attention—which was strange, I thought, since we had always found the Scottish inns such friendly places.

I could see that Daniel was disappointed that the man he had come to converse with, Rogers, had not yet arrived, and he kept constantly glancing towards the door.

Finally Daniel said: "He's a master's mate on His Majesty's ship, *Weymouth*, which is now anchored in the Firth, McClain tells me. Rogers ought soon to be here."

After dinner, Defoe ordered a tass of brandy, and as the maid served it, she accidentally tipped the cup so the contents ran all over the table.

Never have I seen an innkeeper in such a mountainous rage over so little. McClain, red in the face, his blue eyes blazing struck the serving-maid roughly on the cheek. She retired cringing behind the counter, and McClain mopped up the offending liquor with his towel, complaining to Daniel the while.

"'Tis muckle discouragin', Mr. Defoe, to have your business ruined by sluts who have nae manners. If my own daughter was here now, that wouldnae happen. You remember my daughter, Mr. Defoe?"

"She had red hair," Daniel said obligingly.

"Aye, that's my Nan. She was a great help to her father she was, before she went away—"

I sat marvelling at what solicitation fame attracted to itself. If the serving-girl had spilled brandy into *my* lap, I was sure there would have been no great ado. Fame had its compensations, I reflected, although as I looked at Defoe's anxious face, I knew it also had its grave penalties.

As the innkeeper mourned his lost Nan without replacing the tass of brandy, the door opened and a sailor entered. He was a large, crude-looking fellow with small eyes and a dark beard spotted with white; I judged him to be in his forties. He thrust his legs apart as if bracing them for battle, and looked belligerently around the room.

"Mr. Rogers?" Daniel asked, rising.

"Aye, my name's Rogers," the

man said with a strong Scottish accent, advancing to our table. "Mr. Defoe?"

The sailor put out his hand, stopped when he saw the innkeeper staring at him, and asked harshly: "What business have *you* with me?"

The landlord shrugged and moved ponderously behind the counter the while Rogers sat down with us.

"You will stay the night here so we may talk?" Daniel asked eagerly.

"That was the agreement," the sailor replied.

"And you are willing to give me your permission in writing to use any or all of the material you give me tonight?"

"Aye, for the price agreed upon in your letter."

"Very well," Defoe said, satisfied. "Take a room of your own now, and then we shall talk." He motioned to the innkeeper placing a restraining hand upon my arm as I started to rise, and whispered that he'd rather speak alone with Rogers; so I remained where I was.

As Defoe and Rogers went out, with the innkeeper lumbering after them, the other two men, who now sat smoking before the fireplace, looked after Defoe. The blond young man seemed frankly curious, and the older one cast a sidewise look that was in no way friendly.

I went over to them and introduced myself, and in turn learned the bearded man was a wine-merchant from Liverpool, and the boy, a fervid young Scot, was returning to Aberdeen from an educational trip to the continent.

"And do you know the famous journalist Defoe?" I asked. "That was he who went just now upstairs."

The boy, Alan McGregor, shook his head. "A distinguished gentleman, to be sure, but I dinnae ken him."

"I do," the merchant, Hector Masham, said sharply. "A conniving cheat who writes to suit his political master in Whitehall! Did you ken," he said, addressing the boy, "that Mr. Defoe advocates in the Scottish press itself, that England and Scotland be united?"

"Na, na," McGregor said, flushing with ire. "That will never-r-r be! The clans will rise and march again at the verra thought. Such a man as this Mr. Defoe is a wicked tool of the devil!"

I had hot words upon my lips when the inn door opened and another traveller entered, put down his bundle near the counter, and called to the serving-girl for an ale.

"And I want a room for the night," he said in a voice that proclaimed his English origin.

The serving-girl nodded and drew his ale, and I said no more, but withdrew to the rear of the room to watch.

For the new lodger was the

fanatical, brown-eyed man whom Daniel had noted the night before in the public room at Newcastle.

I was awakened in my chamber around the middle of the night by someone shaking me.

At first I could see nothing, but outside I could hear the rain sluicing down, and the wind thundering against the windows from across the Firth. The window lighted up with wild fire, then just as suddenly went black again; but in the flash I saw Daniel's white face hovering over me.

"Tuffley, wake up!" he cried. "Something dreadful has happened!"

"I'm awake, Daniel," I said.

"Listen, then. I talked with Rogers until very late. He told me what I wanted to know, and then you came to the door and informed me the fanatic had come. I mentioned to Rogers that I feared I was being followed, and might be attacked in my bed again. He laughed and said he would change rooms with me. 'Let them try it with me,' he said. And so I agreed; I went to sleep in his room, and he stayed in mine. After a while I woke up with several more questions in my mind, and fearing that Rogers might be gone by morning, I went to the room to speak with him. The door was unlocked. I entered and found him strangled, and his neck broken." Daniel shook me again. "Don't you see, Tuffley? Whoever it was, thought *I* was in that room. If we hadn't exchanged—"

I was up and had a candle lit by this time, and when I turned to Daniel he was sitting in his dressing-robe on the edge of my bed, deep in sober and somber thought. Finally he said, slowly, "If word of this gets back to my enemies in London, they'll twist the story to make it appear as if *I* am the murderer. They'll try to destroy what little reputation I have left by sending me to Newgate again. I cannot let them do that. My back is against the wall now, Tuffley, and I needs must fight. I must discover who murdered Rogers."

Indeed Daniel looked firmer and more resolved in his mind; gone was the fear in his eyes, and when he seized my hand it was with a steady purpose.

"Get dressed, Tuffley," he said. "We have only tonight in which to do our work."

Poor Rogers lay across the bed, his head hanging over the edge at an acute angle, so that his face with its great staring eyes, seemed to look at us upside-down as we entered. The bedclothes had been whipped into a tumulus which half covered his body, and indicated the mighty struggle that had taken place.

Daniel gripped my wrist and whispered: "Abide here, Tuffley," and then slipped through the door

and was gone. I put the candle on the table and covered the awful staring face with a corner of the blanket, and sat down to wait. Outside the storm was raging.

Daniel was back again shortly. "I awakened the groom," he says, "and gave him a guinea to come tell me if any lodger demands his horse, although I think it unlikely that any would leave, for it would brand him guilty. Now we must be a law unto ourselves, Tuffley, if we are to uncover within the night the villain who committed this crime. Are you willing to help me?"

"Why else have I come?" I asked.

"Good. In what chamber did the landlord lodge the fanatic?"

"Come, I will show you," I said, and taking up the candle, led Defoe to the proper door.

First Daniel tried the latch, but found it locked; then he knocked gently.

After a moment there was a stir inside, and the creak of a floorboard.

"Who it is?" the man whispered from within.

"The landlord," Daniel said, keeping his voice low but heavy. "I have a message for ye."

As the door opened, Daniel pushed his way in and I followed. The fanatic, in his long nightgown and touseled hair, looked harmless enough.

"What do you want?" he asked in a dry whisper.

Daniel pushed him roughly upon the bed, which was a dumbshow to intimidate the fellow, for Daniel was not a violent man, and he said in a convincing tone: "Murder has been done this night, sir, and we think you have committed it. Unless you tell us why you have been following us from London to Edinburgh, we shall call the constable at once and hand you over to him."

"No, no," the man cried, his brown eyes wilder than ever. "I have done no murder!"

"Tell us then who you are, and what is your business here?"

"My name is Dunton — Philip Dunton," said the other. "It is true I followed you, Mr. Defoe, but only so I might report upon your activities here in Edinburgh. I intended no violence."

"Search his pockets for a Squadroni disk," Daniel said to me, pointing to Dunton's clothes upon a chair.

"Who sent you?" he demanded of Dunton.

"Must I tell you that, sir?" But seeing Defoe's relentless look, Dunton bowed his head, and said in a whisper: "The minister, Mr. Robert Harley."

"Even we Whigs do not trust one another, it seems," Defoe said bitterly. "Anything, Tuffley?"

"No disk," I said, completing my search.

"Come, then," he said, opening the door. "You will not leave until

morning, my spying Mr. Dunton."

"I cannot," said the other. "I have been assigned to stay and watch you."

Daniel went next below stairs and rapped at the door to the landlord's quarters. When McClain heard of Rogers's murder, he wanted at once to send the groom for the constable; but Daniel stopped him and argued that since the attempt had been made upon his, Defoe's life, he had every right to attempt to run down his would-be assassin without immediate interference.

But Defoe's assumption of authority did not work as well with McClain as it had with Dunton. The innkeeper grew red with rage and swore great oaths, saying this was his inn and he was a law-abiding citizen, and he would call the constable at once. He made for the door, and Defoe, desperate at seeing his chance of vindication disappear, sent a gin bottle flying after McClain. The bottle landed on the innkeeper's head with a mighty crack, and felled him on his own threshold like an ox.

I dragged the monumental McClain inside and shut the door against the storm, and as I looked up, I saw that two of the lodgers had descended to the public room—the boy McGregor and the wine-merchant, Masham.

"What animal combat takes place here?" Masham, in a dressing-gown, inquired angrily. "We lodgers cannot be expected to sleep through such Roman antics."

Before Daniel could reply, the serving-maid looked out the door from McClain's room, staring white-faced at the fallen innkeeper.

"He's all right," I assured her. "He just bumped his head."

She gave me the look of a trapped wild animal, then pulled back and slammed the door.

The boy McGregor leaned over the innkeeper and whistled. "He's got the devil's own peg on the head—from a gin bottle, too."

"Gin is the devil's own drink," Daniel said with perfect gravity. "Please sit down, gentlemen, and name your drink. I will be the host."

The two men looked sharply at Daniel, then sat down at the long table near the shrinking fire. I threw on a log and moved the bulky McClain close to it, so he would not be chilled, and joined the others at the table. A round of introductions ensued, then Daniel explained what had happened. Finally, he took a place at the head of the table.

"Do you mean you suspect one of *us* of having attempted to murder you?" Masham asked frigidly.

"Or of actually murdering Mr. Rogers—put it how you please, the answer is *yes*," Daniel said with authority.

"Then I will not drink with you!" Masham blurted out, rising.

"Sit down, Mr. Masham," Daniel said, with even deadlier authority.

"Yes, sit down," I echoed, fingering the hilt of my short sword.

Masham looked from one to the other of us, then sat down and glared sulkily into the fire.

Young McGregor spoke up then, and his clear eyes never left Defoe's face.

"I'll put it plain to you, Mr. Defoe," he said. "I belong to a group of young men in Edinburgh who are mighty resistant to the idea of unification of Scotland and England. We would give our lives to prevent such a calamity. Your coming here tonight was heralded, and I was sent to speak to you, lest you continue to wield your talented pen in Scottish newspapers in favor of unity. I come to warn you, if you like."

"Then why did you not speak with me before?" Daniel asked.

"I was told you were closeted with that sailor fellow," said the other, "and planned to wait until morning."

"But earlier you said you did not know Mr. Defoe when I pointed him out to you," I reminded him.

McGregor hesitated. "I did not wish to become involved—in case something should happen."

"Something did happen," Defoe said. "Someone tried to kill me. Was that what you feared to be involved in?"

"Yes," McGregor answered promptly. "The fact is, Mr. Defoe, you are a verra unpopular man with many parties."

A creak at the top of the stairs brought Daniel suddenly to his feet and across the room. He clapped the newel post, crying: "Come on down, Mr. Dunton!"

Harley's tool descended timidly, full dressed, his bundle in his hand.

"You were trying to sneak off," Daniel accused. "Why?"

"I can do no further good here," Dunton said, forlornly.

"Sit there," Daniel ordered, pointing to a place at the table next to me.

"Yes, join the prisoners at the gaol board," Masham said with a sneer. "And answer the insulting qustions put by this insolent usurper of authority."

"Usurper!" Defoe cried. "The word comes easily to your lips, Mr. Masham, as it would naturally to any one who feared the pretender coming to the throne. Usurper is the word most frequently on the lips of Squadroni!"

Masham paled; his hand fluttered up to the lapel of his robe, then fell to his lap again.

"What do you have there?" Daniel demanded as Masham started pushing his chair back from the table. "Answer me!"

Masham rose as Daniel stepped forward and flipped the lapel so that the underside showed. I caught the glint of metal and knew what

it was—the disk of the Squadroni.

"You are the one who tried to kill me!" Daniel cried as his hands shot out and seized Masham around the throat, crushing the wine-merchant's beard, and bending the man backwards to his knees.

"No! No!" Masham struggled to speak. "I did not attack you!"

Suddenly Daniel released him; Masham fell to floor and sat there, fingering his bruised throat.

"Tell your miserable organization they misunderstood me," Defoe said, his voice distant, as if another matter claimed his mind. "I do not and never have encouraged enthronement of the pretender. I am a Whig, pure and simple, one of the little business men of England who is loyal to His Majesty. Yes, tell them they have misunderstood!"

When he had finished speaking, Defoe stood looking with a queer expression at the fire; then he strode purposefully to the door of the landlord's apartment, threw it open, and pulled the serving-maid into the room. She had been listening to all that had transpired.

Now she trembled in her thin robe and looked terrified at us.

"I shall take you at once to the constable for the murder of Mr. Rogers, if you do not tell me the truth," Daniel thundered.

"No, no, not the police!" the girl moaned.

"Then tell us the truth!"

"He did it," she cried, pointing at the prostrate McClain, whose eyelids were beginning to flutter. "He swore he'd kill the man who lured away his daughter, Nan. Although it wasn't really Mr. Rogers's fault. Nan followed him, and he spurned her, and Nan drowned herself in the Firth. But *he* blamed Mr. Rogers for it—only his name is not Rogers—"

"I know," Daniel intervened. "Go on."

She pointed again at McClain, who was half conscious now.

"He overheard Mr. Rogers agree to change rooms with you, Mr. Defoe, and thought this was his chance to kill the sailor without himself being suspected, for he told me you were a marked man. That's why he was so eager to send for the constable — so the constable would look for *your* enemies . . . Then he came down and threatened to kill me if I ever spoke a word about what he'd done—"

McClain had heard her last words, and so great was the vitality of the man, he rose with a roar and would have killed the serving-maid upon the spot, had not four men held him back while he trumpeted and cursed and made his guilt plain to all of us.

Daniel and I jogged along side by side late the next morning, on our way back to London.

I said: "Why did you suddenly

leave off throttling Masham and turn to McClain as the guilty one? How were you so sure it was not Masham after all, or Dunton, or McGregor that did the deed?"

"It was elementary," Daniel said, fingering the mole on his chin. "When I put my hands around Masham's throat, *his beard scratched my hands.* Well, my enemies know I am clean-shaven. They would not continue to strangle a man after feeling a beard — they would know it was not I. Yet Rogers, who had a beard, was strangled. That meant that his murderer knew whom he was strangling and did it deliberately.

"Now none of the lodgers had a grudge against Rogers. They couldn't have—he was a non-political figure, just as I assured you. They were only after me. That left McClain, who, by the way, was the only one big enough to subdue a hearty fellow like Rogers. I remembered the innkeeper's dirge about the lost Nan, recalled the look in the serving-girl's eye when she first looked out from McClain's room and saw him on the floor—"

"I see," I said after a while. "But there is still another mystery, Daniel. Why did Rogers come to the inn under an assumed name? And who was he?"

"His coming to the inn was entirely my fault," Defoe explained. "I insisted upon The White Swan as our meeting place, although he objected; but since I was paying his bill, he finally agreed. I didn't know that he had experienced an unfavorable episode there until the serving-girl mentioned it. The beard was new, I think, but McClain recognized him nevertheless. And do you remember how aggressive Rogers was to the landlord when he first entered? Why, unless there existed bad blood between the two men already?"

"Who was Rogers?" I asked.

Daniel sighed.

"Remember I told you I wished to quit politics? I mean to do so. I have already bought a house in a quiet section of Stoke Newington, where I plan to retire and write novels instead of pamphlets. For my first novel I have chosen a theme dear to the hearts of the English public—the story of one man struggling alone against the forces of Nature. But before I began writing, I felt it was imperative that I should hear the true story from the lips of the one man in England who had actually experienced that struggle on an island, all alone—one Alexander Selkirk—"

"Then Rogers was Selkirk!" I cried.

"Yes, poor fellow. And although I cannot use his real name and have decided to call him Robinson Crusoe, my novel shall really be his epitaph. It's the least I can do for the man."

"It might even assure him a kind of immortality," I said.

"Possibly," said Defoe.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**ELLERY QUEEN**
TITLE:	***Long Shot***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Ellery Queen
LOCALE:	Hollywood and environs
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The first assignment that Ellery Queen, the real-life authors, got from Hollywood was to write a screenplay about a horse race. Now, it is an absolute fact that neither half of Queen had, up to that time, ever visited a track or placed even a $2 bet!*

ONE MOMENT, DEAR. MY FAVORITE fly's just walked into the parlor," cried Paula Paris into her ashes-of-roses telephone. "Oh, Ellery, do sit down! . . . No, dear, you're fishing. This one's a grim hombre with silv'ry eyes, and I have an option on him. Call me tomorrow about the Loren excitement."

And, the serious business of her Hollywood gossip column concluded, Miss Paris hung up and turned her lips pursily toward Mr. Queen. Ellery had cured Miss Paris of homophobia, or morbid fear of crowds, by the brilliant counter-psychology of making love to her. Alas for the best-laid plans! The patient had promptly succumbed to the cure and, what was worse, in succumbing had infected the physician.

"I do believe," murmured the lovely patient, "that I need an extended treatment, Doctor Queen."

So the poor fellow absently gave Miss Paris an extended treatment, after which he rubbed the lipstick from his mouth.

"No oomph," said Miss Paris crit-

ically, holding him off and surveying his gloomy countenance. "Ellery Queen, you're in a mess again."

"Hollywood," mumbled Ellery. "The land God forgot. No logic. Disorderly creation. Paula, your Hollywood is driving me c-double-o-ditto!"

"You poor imposed-upon Wimpie," crooned Miss Paris. "Tell Paula all about the nasty old place."

So, with Miss Paris's soft arms about him, Ellery unburdened himself. It seemed that Magna Studios, to whom his soul was chartered, had ordered him as one of its staff writers to concoct a horse-racing plot with a fresh patina. A mystery, of course, since Ellery was supposed to know something about crime.

"With fifty writers on the lot who spend all their time—and money—following the ponies," complained Ellery bitterly, "of course they have to pick on the one serf in their thrall who doesn't know a fetlock from a wither. Paula, I'm a sunk scrivener."

"You don't know *anything* about racing?"

"I'm not interested in racing. I've never even *seen* a horse race," said Ellery doggedly.

"Imagine that!" said Paula, awed. And she was silent. After a while Ellery twisted in her embrace and said in accusing despair, "Paula, you're thinking of something."

"The wrong tense, darling, I've *thought* of something!"

Paula told him all about old John Scott as they drove out into the green and yellow ranch country.

Scott was a vast, shapeless Caledonian with a face as craggy as his native heaths and a disposition no less dour. His inner landscape was bleak except where horses breathed and browsed; and this vulnerable spot had proved his undoing, for he had made two fortunes breeding thoroughbreds and had lost both by racing and betting on them.

"Old John's never stood for any of the crooked dodges of the racing game," said Paula. "He fired Weed Williams, the best jockey he ever had, and had him blackballed by every decent track in the country, so that Williams became a saddle-maker or something, just because of a peccadillo another owner would have winked at. And yet—the inconsistent old coot!—a few years later he gave Williams's son a job, and Whitey's going to ride *Danger,* John's best horse, in the Handicap next Saturday."

"You mean the $100,000 Santa Anita Handicap everybody's in a dither about out here?"

"Yes. Anyway, old John's got *Danger* and a scrunchy little ranch and his daughter Kathryn and practically nothing else except a stable of also-rans and breeding disappointments."

"So far," remarked Ellery, "it sounds like the beginning of a Class B movie."

"Except," sighed Paula, "that it's

not entertaining. John's really on a spot. If Whitey doesn't ride *Danger* to a win in the Handicap, it's the end of the road for John Scott . . . Speaking about roads, here we are."

They turned into a dirt road and plowed dustily toward a ramshackle ranch-house. The road was pitted, the fences dilapidated, the grassland patchy with neglect.

"With all his troubles," grinned Ellery, "I fancy he won't take kindly to this quest for Racing in Five Easy Lessons."

"Meeting a full-grown man who knows nothing about racing may give the old gentleman a laugh. Lord knows he needs one."

A Mexican cook directed them to Scott's private track and they found him leaning his weight on a sagging rail, his small buried eyes puckering on a cloud of dust eddying along the track at the far turn. His thick fingers clutched a stop watch.

A man in high-heeled boots sat on the rail two yards away, a shotgun in his lap pointing carelessly at the head of a too well-dressed gentleman with a foreign air who was talking to the back of Scott's shaggy head. The well-dressed man sat in a glistening roadster beside a hard-faced chauffeur.

"You got my proposition, John?" said the well-dressed man, with a toothy smile.

"Get the hell off my ranch, Santelli," said John Scott, without turning his head.

"Sure," said Santelli, still smiling. "You think my proposition over, hey, or maybe somethin' happen to your nag, hey?"

They saw the old man quiver, but he did not turn; and Santelli nodded curtly to his driver. The big roadster roared away.

The dust cloud on the track rolled toward them and they saw a small, taut figure in sweater and cap perched atop a gigantic stallion, black-coated and lustrous with sweat. The horse was bounding along like a huge cat, his neck arched. He thundered magnificently by.

"2:02-4/5," they heard Scott mutter to his stop watch. "*Rosemont's* ten-furlong time for the Handicap in '37. Not bad . . . Whitey!" he bellowed to the jockey, who had pulled the black stallion up. "Rub him down good!"

The jockey grinned and pranced *Danger* toward the adjacent stables.

The man with the shotgun drawled, "You got more company, John."

The old man whirled, frowned deeply; his craggy face broke into a thousand wrinkles and he engulfed Paula's slim hand in his two paws. "Paula! It's fine to see ye. Who's this?" he demanded, fastening his cold keen eyes on Ellery.

"Mr. Ellery Queen. But how is Katie? And *Danger?*"

"You saw him." Scott gazed after the dancing horse. "Fit as a fiddle. He'll carry the handicap weight of

a hundred twenty pounds Saturday and never feel it. Did it just now with the leads on him. Paula, did ye see that murderin' scalawag?"

"The fashion-plate who just drove away?"

"That was Santelli, and ye heard what he said might happen to *Danger*." The old man stared bitterly down the road.

"Santelli!" Paula's serene face was shocked.

"Bill, go look after the stallion." The man with the shotgun slipped off the rail and waddled toward the stable. "Just made me an offer for my stable. Hell, the dirty thievin' bookie owns the biggest stable west o' the Rockies—what's he want with my picayune outfit?"

"He owns *Broomstick*, the Handicap favorite, doesn't he?" asked Paula quietly. "And *Danger* is figured strongly in the running, isn't he?"

"Quoted five to one now, but track odds will shorten his price. *Broomstick's* two to five," growled Scott.

"It's very simple, then. By buying your horse, Santelli can control the race, owning the two best horses."

"Lassie, lassie," sighed Scott. "I'm an old mon, and I know these thieves. Handicap purse is $100,000. And Santelli just offered me $100,000 for my stable!" Paula whistled. "It don't wash. My whole shebang ain't worth it. *Danger's* no cinch to win. Is Santelli buyin' up all the other horses in the race, too?—the big outfits? I tell ye it's somethin' else, an' it's rotten." Then he shook his heavy shoulders straight. "But here I am gabbin' about my troubles. What brings ye out here, lassie?"

"Mr. Queen here, who's a—well, a friend of mine," said Paula, coloring, "has to think up a horse-racing plot for a movie, and I thought you could help him. He doesn't know a thing about racing."

Scott stared at Ellery, who coughed apologetically. "Well, sir, I don't know but that ye're not a lucky mon. Ye're welcome to the run o' the place. Go over and talk to Whitey;-he knows the racket backwards. I'll be with ye in a few minutes."

The old man lumbered off, and Paula and Ellery sauntered toward the stables.

"Who is this ogre Santelli?" asked Ellery with a frown.

"A gambler and bookmaker with a national hookup." Paula shivered a little. "Poor John. I don't like it, Ellery."

They turned a corner of the big stable and almost bumped into a young man and a young woman in the lee of the wall, clutching each other desperately and kissing as if they were about to be torn apart for eternity.

"Pardon *us*," said Paula, pulling Ellery back.

The young lady, her eyes crystal with tears, blinked at her. "Is—is that Paula Paris?" she sniffled.

"The same, Kathryn," smiled Paula. "Mr. Queen, Miss Scott. What on earth's the matter?"

"Everything," cried Miss Scott tragically. "Oh, Paula, we're in the most awful trouble!"

Her amorous companion backed bashfully off. He was a slender young man clad in grimy, odoriferous overalls. He wore spectacles floury with the chaff of oats, and there was a grease smudge on one emotional nostril.

"Miss Paris—Mr. Queen. This is Hank Halliday, my—my boy-friend," said Kathryn.

"I see the whole plot," said Paula sympathetically. "Papa doesn't approve of Katie's taking up with a stablehand, the snob!"

"Hank *isn't* a stablehand," cried Kathryn. "He's a college graduate who—"

"Kate," said the odoriferous young man with dignity, "let me explain, please. Miss Paris, I have a character deficiency. I am a physical coward."

"Heavens, so am I!" said Paula.

"But a man, you see . . . I am particularly afraid of animals. Horses, specifically." Mr. Halliday shuddered. "I took this—this filthy job to conquer my unreasonable fear." Mr. Halliday's sensitive chin hardened. "I have not yet conquered it, but when I do I shall find myself a real job. And then," he said firmly, embracing Miss Scott's trembling shouders. "I shall marry Kathryn, papa or no papa."

"Oh, I hate him for being so mean!" sobbed Katie.

"And I—" began Mr. Halliday somberly.

"Hankus-Pankus!" yelled a voice from the stable. "What the hell you paid for, anyway? Come clean up this mess before I belt you one!"

"Yes, Mr. Williams," said Hankus-Pankus hastily, and he hurried away. His lady-love ran sobbing off toward the ranch-house.

Ellery and Miss Paris regarded each other. Then Ellery said, "I'm getting a plot, b'gosh, but it's the wrong one."

"Poor kids," sighed Paula. "Well, talk to Whitey Williams and see if the divine spark ignites."

During the next several days Ellery ambled about the Scott ranch, talking to Jockey Williams, to the bespectacled Mr. Halliday—who, he discovered, knew as little about racing as he and cared even less—to a continuously tearful Kathryn, to the guard named Bill—who slept in the stable near *Danger* with one hand on his shotgun—and to old John himself. He learned much about jockeys, touts, racing procedure, gear, handicaps, purses, stewards, the ways of bookmakers, famous races and horses and owners and tracks; but the divine spark perversely refused to ignite.

So on Friday at dusk, when he found himself unaccountably ignored at the Scott ranch, he glumly drove back to Hollywood.

He found Paula in her garden soothing two anguished young people. Katie Scott was still weeping and Mr. Halliday, the self-confessed craven, for once dressed in an odorless garment, was awkwardly pawing her golden hair.

"More tragedy?" said Ellery. "I should have known. I've just come from your father's ranch, and there's a pall over it."

"Well, there should be!" cried Kathryn. "I told my father where *he* gets off. Treating Hank that way! I'll never speak to him as long as I live! He's—he's *unnatural!*"

"Now Katie," said Mr. Halliday reprovingly, "that's no way to speak of your own father."

"Hank Halliday, if you had one spark of manhood—!"

Mr. Halliday stiffened as if his beloved had jabbed him with the end of a live wire.

"I didn't mean that, Hankus," sobbed Kathryn, throwing herself into his arms. "I know you can't help being a coward. But when he knocked you down and you didn't even—"

Mr. Halliday worked the left side of his jaw thoughtfully. "You know, Mr. Queen, something happened to me when Mr. Scott struck me. For an instant I felt a strange —er—passion. I really believe if I'd had a revolver—and if I knew how to handle one—I might easily have committed murder then. I saw—I believe that's the phrase—red."

"Hank!" exclaimed Katie.

Hank sighed, the homicidal light dying out of his faded blue eyes.

"Old John," explained Paula, winking at Ellery, "found these two cuddling again in the stable, and I suppose he thought it was setting a bad example for *Danger,* whose mind should be on the race tomorrow; so he fired Hank, and Katie blew up and told John off, and she's left his home forever."

"To discharge me is his privilege," said Mr. Halliday coldly, "but now I owe him no loyalty whatever. I shall *not* bet on *Danger* to win the Handicap!"

"I hope the big brute loses," sobbed Katie.

"Now Kate," said Paula firmly, "I've heard enough of this nonsense. I'm going to speak to you like a Dutch aunt."

"Mr. Halliday," said Ellery formally, "I believe this is our cue to exit."

"Kathryn!"

"Hank!"

Ellery and Miss Paris tore the lovers apart.

It was a little after ten o'clock when Miss Scott, no longer weeping but facially still tear-ravaged, crept out of Miss Paris's white frame house and got into her dusty little car.

As she turned her key in the ignition lock and stepped on the starter, a bass voice from the shadows of the back seat said, "Don't yell. Don't make a sound. Turn

your car around and keep going till I tell you to stop."

"Eek!" screeched Miss Scott.

A big leathery hand clamped over her trembling mouth.

After a few moments the car moved away.

Ellery called for Miss Paris the next day and they settled down to a snail's pace, heading for Arcadia eastward, near which lay the beautiful Santa Anita race track.

"What happened to Lachrymose Katie last night?" demanded Ellery.

"Oh, I got her to go back to the ranch. She left me a little after ten, a very miserable girl. What did you do with Hankus-Pankus?"

"I oiled him thoroughly and then took him home. He'd hired a room in a Hollywood boarding house. He moaned on my shoulder all the way. It seems old John also kicked him in the seat of his pants, and he's been brooding murderously over it."

"Poor Hankus. The only honest male I've ever met."

"I'm afraid of horses, too," said Ellery hurriedly.

"Oh, you! You're detestable. You haven't kissed me once today."

Only the cooling balm of Miss Paris's lips, applied at various points along U.S. Route 66, kept Ellery's temper from boiling over. The roads were sluggish with traffic. At the track it was even worse. It seemed as if every soul in Southern California had converged on Santa Anita at once, in every manner of conveyance, from the dusty Model T's of dirt farmers to the shiny metal monsters of the movie stars. The magnificent stands seethed with noisy thousands, a wriggling mosaic of color and movement. The sky was blue, the sun warm, zephyrs blew, and the track was fast. A race was being run, and the sleek animals were small and fleet and sharply focused in the clear light.

"What a marvelous day for the Handicap!" cried Paula, dragging Ellery along. "Oh, there's Bing and Bob and Rock! . . . Hello! . . . and Marilyn and Clark and Jayne . . ."

Despite Miss Paris's overenthusiastic trail breaking, Ellery arrived at the track stalls in one piece. They found old John Scott watching with the intentness of a Red Indian as a stablehand kneaded *Danger's* velvety forelegs. There was a stony set to Scott's gnarled face that made Paula cry, "John! Is anything wrong with *Danger?*"

"*Danger's* all right," said the old man curtly. "It's Kate. We had a blowup over that Halliday boy and she ran out on me."

"Nonsense, John. I sent her back home last night myself."

"She was at your place? She didn't come home."

"She didn't?" Paula's little nose wrinkled.

"I guess," growled Scott, "she's

run off with that Halliday coward. He's not a man, the lily-livered—"

"We can't all be heroes, John. He's a good boy, and he loves Katie."

The old man stared stubbornly at his stallion, and after a moment they left and made their way toward their box.

"Funny," said Paula in a scared voice. "She couldn't have run off with Hank—he was with you. And I'd swear she meant to go back to the ranch last night."

"Now, Paula," said Ellery gently. "She's all right."

But his eyes were thoughtful and a little perturbed.

Their box was not far from the paddock. During the preliminary races, Paula kept searching the sea of faces with her binoculars.

"Well, well," said Ellery suddenly, and Paula became conscious of a rolling thunder from the stands about them.

"What's the matter? What's happened?"

"*Broomstick,* the favorite, has been scratched," said Ellery dryly.

"*Broomstick?* Santelli's horse?" Paula stared at him, paling. "But why? Ellery, there's something in this—"

"It seems he's pulled a tendon and can't run."

"Do you think," whispered Paula, "that Santelli had anything to do with Katie's . . . not getting . . . home?"

"Possible," muttered Ellery. "But I can't seem to fit—"

"Here they come!"

The shout shook the stands. A line of regal animals began to emerge from the paddock. Paula and Ellery rose with the other restless thousands, and craned. The Handicap contestants were parading to the post.

There was *High Tor,* who had gone lame in the stretch at the Derby the year before and had not run a race since. This was to be his comeback; the insiders held him in a contempt which the public apparently shared, for he was quoted at 50 to 1. There was little *Fighting Billy.* There was *Equator,* prancing sedately along with Buzz Hickey up. There was *Danger,* glossy black, gigantic, imperial. Whitey Williams was having a difficult time controlling him and a stablehand was struggling at his bit.

Old John Scott, his big shapeless body unmistakable even at this distance, lumbered from the paddock toward his nervous stallion, apparently to soothe him.

Paula gasped. Ellery said quickly, "What is it?"

"There's Hank Halliday in the crowd. Up there! Right above the spot where *Danger's* passing. About fifty feet from John Scott. And Kathryn's not with him!"

Ellery took the glasses from her and located Halliday.

Paula sank into her chair. "El-

lery, I've the queerest feeling. There's something wrong. See how pale he is . . ."

The powerful glasses brought Halliday to within a few inches of Ellery's eyes. The boy's eyeglasses were steamed over; he was shaking, as if he had a chill; and yet Ellery could see the globules of perspiration on his cheeks.

And then Ellery stiffened abruptly.

John Scott had just reached the head of *Danger;* his thick arm was coming up to pull the stallion's head down. And in that instant Mr. Hankus-Pankus Halliday fumbled in his clothes; and in the next his hand appeared clasping a snub-nosed automatic. Ellery nearly cried out. For, the short barrel wavering, the automatic in Mr. Halliday's trembling hands pointed in the general direction of John Scott; there was an explosion, and a puff of smoke blew out of the muzzle.

Miss Paris leaped to her feet, and Miss Paris did cry out.

"Why, the crazy young fool!" said Ellery dazedly.

Frightened by the shot, which apparently had gone wild, *Danger* reared. The other horses began to kick and dance. In a moment the place below boiled with panic-stricken thoroughbreds. Scott, clinging to *Danger's* head, half turned in an immense astonishment and looked inquiringly upward. Whitey struggled desperately to control the frantic stallion.

And then Mr. Halliday shot again. And again. And a fourth time. And at some instant, in the space between those shots, the rearing horse got between John Scott and the automatic in Mr. Halliday's shaking hand.

Danger's four feet left the turf. Then, whinnying in agony, flanks heaving, he toppled over on his side.

"Oh, gosh; oh, *gosh,*" said Paula, biting her handkerchief.

"Let's go!" shouted Ellery, and he plunged for the spot.

By the time they reached the place where Mr. Halliday had fearfully discharged his automatic, the bespectacled youth had disappeared. The people who had stood about him were still too stunned to move. Elsewhere, the stands were in pandemonium.

In the confusion, Ellery and Paula managed to slip through the inadequate track-police cordon hastily thrown about the fallen *Danger* and his milling rivals. They found old John on his knees beside the black stallion, his big hands steadily stroking the glossy, veined neck. Whitey, pale and bewildered-looking, had stripped off the tiny saddle, and the track veterinary was examining a bullet wound in *Danger's* side, near the shoulder. A group of track officials conferred excitedly nearby.

"He saved my life," said old John in a low voice to no one in parti-

cular. "He saved my life, poor lad."

The veterinary looked up. "Sorry, Mr. Scott," he said grimly. "*Danger* won't run this race."

"No, I suppose not." Scott licked his leathery lips. "Is it—mon, is it serious?"

"Can't tell till I dig out the bullet. We'll have to get him out of here and into the hospital right away."

An official said, "Tough luck, Scott. You may be sure we'll do our best to find the scoundrel who shot your horse."

The old man's lips twisted. He climbed to his feet and looked down at the heaving flanks of his fallen thoroughbred. Whitey Williams trudged away with *Danger's* gear, head hanging.

A moment later the loudspeaker system proclaimed that *Danger,* Number 5, had been scratched, and that the Handicap would be run immediately after the other contestants could be quieted and lined up at the barrier.

"All right, folks, clear out," said a track policeman as a hospital van rushed up, followed by a hoisting truck.

"What are you doing about the man who shot this horse?" demanded Ellery, not moving.

"We'll get him; got a good description. Move on, please."

"Well," said Ellery slowly, "I know who he is."

They were ushered into the Steward's office just as the announcement was made that *High Tor,* at 50 to 1, had won the Santa Anita Handicap, purse $100,000, by two and a half lengths . . . almost as long a shot, in one sense, as the shot which had laid poor *Danger* low, commented Ellery to Miss Paris.

"Halliday?" said John Scott with heavy contempt. "That yellow-livered pup tried to shoot me?"

"I couldn't possibly be mistaken, Mr. Scott," said Ellery.

"I saw him, too, John," sighed Paula.

"Who is this Halliday?" demanded the chief of the track police.

Scott told him in monosyllables, relating their quarrel of the day before. "I knocked him down and kicked him. I guess the only way he could get back at me was with a gun. And *Danger* took the rap, poor beastie." For the first time his voice shook.

"Well, we'll get him; he can't have left the park," said the police chief grimly. "I've got it sealed tighter than a drum."

"Did you know," murmured Ellery, "that Mr. Scott's daughter Kathryn has been missing since last night?"

Old John flushed slowly. "You think—my Kate had somethin' to do—"

"Don't be silly, John!" said Paula.

"At any rate," said Ellery dryly, "her disappearance and the attack here today can't be a coincidence. I'd advise you to start a search for

Miss Scott immediately. And, by the way, send for *Danger's* gear. I'd like to examine it."

"Say, who the devil are you?" growled the chief.

Ellery told him and the chief looked properly awed. He telephoned to police headquarters, and he sent for *Danger's* gear.

Whitey Williams, still in his silks, carried the high small racing saddle in and dumped it on the floor.

"John, I'm awful sorry about what happened," he said in a low voice.

"It ain't your fault, Whitey."

"Ah, Williams, thank you," said Ellery briskly. "This *is* the saddle *Danger* was wearing a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Exactly as it was when you stripped it off him after the shots?"

"Yes, sir."

"Has anyone had an opportunity to tamper with it?"

"No, sir. I been with it ever since, and no one's come near it but me."

Ellery nodded and knelt to examine the empty-pocketed saddle. Observing the scorched hole in the flap, his brow puckered in perplexity.

"By the way, Whitey," he asked, "how much do you weigh?"

"Hundred and seven."

Ellery frowned. He rose, dusted his knees, and beckoned the chief of police. They conferred in undertones. The policeman looked baffled, shrugged, then hurried out.

When he returned, a certain familiar-appearing gentleman in too-perfect clothes and a foreign air accompanied him. The gentleman looked sad.

"I hear some crackpot took a couple o' shots at you, John," he said sorrowfully, "and got your nag instead. Tough luck."

There was a somewhat quizzical humor behind this ambiguous statement which brought old John's head up in a flash of belligerence.

"You dirty, thievin'—"

"Mr. Santelli," greeted Ellery. "When did you know that *Broomstick* would have to be scratched?"

"Broomstick?" Mr. Santelli looked mildly surprised at this irrelevant question. "Why, last week."

"So that's why you offered to buy Scott's stable—to get control of *Danger?"*

"Sure." Mr. Santelli smiled genially. "He was hot. With my nag out, he looked like a cinch."

"Mr. Santelli, you're what is colloquially known as a cockeyed liar." Mr. Santelli ceased smiling. "You wanted to buy *Danger* not to see him win, but to see him lose!"

Mr. Santelli looked unhappy. "Who is this," he appealed to the police chief, "Mister Wacky himself?"

"In my embryonic way," said Ellery, "I have been making a few inquiries in the last several days and my information has it that your bookmaking organization covered a lot of *Danger* money when

Danger's odds stood at five to one."

"Say, you got somethin' there," said Mr. Santelli, suddenly deciding to be candid.

"You covered about two hundred thousand dollars, didn't you?"

"Wow," said Santelli. "This guy's got ideas, ain't he?"

"So," smiled Ellery, "if *Danger* won the Handicap you stood to drop a cool million dollars, didn't you?"

"But it's my old friend John some guy tried to rub out," pointed out Mr. Santelli gently. "Go peddle your papers somewhere else, Mister Wack."

John Scott looked bewilderedly from the gambler to Ellery. His jaw muscles were bunched and jerky.

At this moment a special officer deposited among them Mr. Hankus-Pankus Halliday, his spectacles awry on his nose and his collar ripped away from his prominent Adam's apple.

John Scott sprang toward him, but Ellery caught his flailing arm in time to prevent a slaughter.

"Murderer! Scalawag! Horse killer!" roared old John. "What did ye do with my lassie?"

Mr. Halliday said gravely, "Mr. Scott, you have my sympathy."

The old man's mouth flew open. Mr. Halliday folded his scrawny arms with dignity, glaring at the policeman who had brought him in. "There was no necessity to manhandle me. I'm quite ready to face the—er—music. But I shall not answer any questions."

"No gat on him, Chief," said the policeman.

"What did you do with the automatic?" demanded the chief. No answer. "You admit you had it in for Mr. Scott and tried to kill him?" No answer. "Where is Miss Scott?"

"You see," said Mr. Halliday stonily, "how useless it is."

"Hankus-Pankus," murmured Ellery, "you are superb. You don't know where Kathryn is, do you?"

Hankus-Pankus instantly looked alarmed. "Oh, I say, Mr. Queen. Don't make me talk. Please!"

"But you're expecting her to join you here, aren't you?"

Hankus paled. The policeman said, "He's a nut. He didn't even try to make a getaway."

"Hank! Darling! Father!" cried Katie Scott; and, straggle-haired and dusty-faced, she burst into the office and flung herself on Mr. Halliday's thin bosom. Then she ran to her father and clung to him, and old John's shoulders lifted a little.

In the midst of this reunion the track veterinary bustled in and said, "Good news, Mr. Scott. I've extracted the bullet and, while the wound is deep, I give you my word *Danger* will be as good as ever when it's healed." And he bustled out.

Ellery, his smile broadening, said, "Well, well, a pretty comedy of errors."

"Comedy!" growled old John. "D'ye call a murderous attempt on my life a comedy?"

"My dear Mr. Scott," replied Ellery, "there has been no attempt on your life. The shots were not fired at you. From the very first *Danger,* and *Danger* only, was intended to be the victim of the shooting."

"What's this?" cried Paula.

"No, no, Whitey," said Ellery, smiling still more broadly. "The door, I promise you, is well guarded."

The jockey snarled. "Yah, he's off his nut. Next thing you'll say *I* plugged the nag. How could I be on *Danger's* back and at the same time fifty feet away in the grandstand? A million guys saw this screwball fire those shots!"

"A difficulty," said Ellery, "I shall be delighted to resolve. *Danger,* ladies and gentleman, was handicapped officially to carry one hundred and twenty pounds in the Santa Anita Handicap. This means that when his jockey, carrying the gear, stepped on the scales in the weighing ceremony just before the race, the combined weight of jockey and gear had to come to exactly one hundred and twenty pounds; or Mr. Whitey Williams would never have been allowed by the track officials to mount his horse."

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded the chief.

"Everything. For Mr. Williams told us a few minutes ago that he weighs only a hundred and seven pounds. Consequently the racing saddle *Danger* wore when he was shot must have contained various lead weights which, combined with the weight of the saddle, made up the difference between a hundred and seven pounds, Mr. Williams's weight, and a hundred and twenty pounds, the handicap weight. Is that correct?"

"Sure. Anybody knows that."

"Yes, yes, elementary, in Mr. Holmes's imperishable phrase. Nevertheless," continued Ellery, walking over and prodding with his toe the saddle Whitey Williams had fetched to the office, "when I examined this saddle *there were no lead weights in its pockets.* And Mr. Williams assured me no one had tampered with the saddle since he had removed it from *Danger's* back. But this was impossible, since without the lead weights Mr. Williams and the saddle would have weighed less than a hundred and twenty pounds on the scales.

"And so I knew," said Ellery, "that Williams had been weighed with a different saddle, that when he was shot *Danger* was wearing a different saddle, that the saddle Williams lugged away from the wounded horse was a different saddle; that he secreted it somewhere on the premises and fetched here on our request a *second* saddle—this one on the floor—which he had prepared beforehand with a bullet hole nicely placed in the proper

spot. And the reason he did this was that obviously there was something in that first saddle he didn't want anyone to see. And what could that have been but a special pocket containing an automatic which, in the confusion following Mr. Halliday's first signal shot, Mr. Williams calmly discharged into *Danger's* body by simply stooping over as he struggled with the frightened horse, putting his hand into the pocket, and firing while Mr. Halliday was discharging his three other futile shots fifty feet away? Mr. Halliday, you see, couldn't be trusted to hit *Danger* from such a distance, because Mr. Halliday is a stranger to firearms; he might even hit Mr. Williams instead, if he hit anything. That's why I believe Mr. Halliday was using blank cartridges and threw the automatic away."

The jockey's voice was strident, panicky. "You're crazy! Special saddle. Who ever heard—"

Ellery, still smiling, went to the door, opened it, and said, "Ah, you've found it, I see. Let's have it. In *Danger's* stall? Clumsy, clumsy."

He returned with a racing saddle; and Whitey cursed and then grew still. Ellery and the police chief and John Scott examined the saddle and, sure enough, there was a special pocket stitched into the flap, above the iron hoop, and in the pocket there was a snub-nosed automatic. And the bullet hole piercing the special pocket had the scorched speckled appearance of powder burns.

"But where," muttered the chief, "does Halliday figure? I don't get him a-tall."

"Very few people would," said Ellery, "because Mr. Halliday is, in his modest way, unique among bipeds."

"Huh?"

"Why, he was Whitey's accomplice—weren't you, Hankus?"

Hankus pulped and said, "Yes. I mean no. I mean—"

"But I'm sure Hank wouldn't—" Katie began to say.

"You see," said Ellery briskly, "Whitey wanted a setup whereby he would be the last person in California to be suspected of having shot *Danger*. The quarrel between John Scott and Hank gave him a ready-made instrument. If he could make Hank *seem* to do the shooting, with Hank's obvious motive against Mr. Scott, then nobody would suspect Whitey's part in the affair.

"But to bend Hank to his will he had to have a hold on him. What was Mr. Halliday's Achilles heel? Why, his passion for Katie Scott. So last night Whitey's father, Weed Williams, I imagine—wasn't he the jockey you chased from the American turf many years ago, Mr. Scott, and who had become a saddlemaker? – kidnapped Katie Scott, then communicated with Hankus-Pankus and told him just what to

do today if he ever expected to see his beloved alive again. And Hankus-Pankus took the gun they provided him with, listened very carefully, agreed to do everything they told him to do, and promised he would not breathe a word of the truth afterward, even if he had to go to jail for his crime, because if he did, you see, something terrible would happen to his Katie."

Mr. Halliday gulped, his Adam's apple bobbing violently.

"And all the time this skunk," growled John Scott, glaring at the cowering jockey, "and his weasel of a father, they sat back and laughed at a brave mon, because they were havin' their piddling revenge on me, ruining me!" Old John shambled like a bear toward Mr. Halliday. "And I am a shamed mon today, Hank Halliday. For that was the bravest thing I ever heard of. And even if I've lost my chance for the Handicap purse, through no fault of yours, and I'm a ruined maggot, here's my hand."

Mr. Halliday took it absently, meanwhile fumbling with his other hand in his pocket. "By the way," he said, "who did win the Handicap, if I may ask?"

"*High Tor,*" said somebody in the babble.

"Really? Then I must cash this ticket," said Mr. Halliday with a note of faint interest.

"Two thousand dollars!" gasped Paula, goggling at the ticket. "He bet two thousand dollars on *High Tor* at fifty to one!"

"Yes, a little nest egg my mother left me," said Mr. Halliday. He seemed embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Mr. Scott. You made me angry when you—er—kicked me in the pants, so I didn't bet it on *Danger.* And *High Tor* was such a beautiful name."

"Oh, Hank," beamed Katie.

"So now, Mr. Scott," said Hankus-Pankus with dignity, "may I marry Katie and set you up in the racing business again?"

"Happy days!" bellowed old John, seizing his future son-in-law in a rib-cracking embrace.

"Happy days," muttered Ellery, seizing Miss Paris and heading her for the nearest bar.

Heigh, *Danger!*

BEST MYSTERIES OF 1958

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

To survey the most interesting year of published crime since I took up professional reviewing almost 17 years ago:

The year 1958 led off well with a noteworthy example of the modern novel of detailed routine, police and criminal:

THE MIDNIGHT PLUMBER, *by Maurice Procter* (Harper, $2.95)

January reminded us of the greatness of Tennyson Jesse in her superb editing of a major trial. Her even finer collection of essays was to follow in June—two months before the tragic news of her death.

TRIALS OF EVANS AND CHRISTIE, *edited by F. Tennyson Jesse*
(British Book Centre, $7.50)

MURDER AND ITS MOTIVES, *by F. Tennyson Jesse* (B.B.C., $3.50)

February was, for a reviewer, a grand and joyous month, beginning with the first of 1958's three novels of the 87th Precinct:

KILLER'S CHOICE; KILLER'S PAYOFF; LADY KILLER, *by Ed McBain*
(Permabooks, 25¢ each)

Then came the most sheer whoduniting *fun* of the year:

THE FINISHING STROKE, *by Ellery Queen* (Simon and Schuster, $3.50)

followed by the best of the year's private-eye novels:

THE DOOMSTERS, *by Ross MacDonald* (Knopf, $2.95)

and a striking new fusion of science fiction with mystery-terror:

A STIR OF ECHOES, *by Richard Matheson* (Lippincott, $3)

And also in February came my happiest reviewing experience in years: the discovery of a two-named writer who offered, in all, 3 novels in 1958, all of them fresh, creative, exciting:

THE WOMAN IN THE WOODS; ALL MEN ARE MURDERERS, *by Lee Blackstock* (Crime Club, $2.95 each)

DEWEY DEATH, *by Charity Blackstock* (B.B.C., $3.25)

March and April were enlivened by, respectively, the best American first mystery novel in several years, and an unusually good English debut:

NOW, WILL YOU TRY FOR MURDER, *by Harry Olesker* (S.&S., $2.95)

FINAL EXPOSURE, *by Paul H. Mansfield* (Macmillan, $3)

And in April a Grand Old Pro made one of his rare and magical appearances in

THE STOPPED CLOCK, *by Joel Townsley Rogers* (S.&S., $3.50)

Sometimes a book which looks good in May seems nothing short of excellent when remembered in December, and such a cumulator is

BLIND DATE, *by Leigh Howard* (S.&S., $2.95)

In June and July, for vacation reading, came 1958's brightest collections of, respectively, short stories (chiefly from EQMM) and novelets:

MALICE IN WONDERLAND, *by Rufus King* (Crime Club, $2.95)
AND FOUR TO GO, *by Rex Stout* (Viking, $2.95)

And summer also brought the year's most subtle, sensitive and literate novels (both from England):

THE COLOR OF MURDER, *by Julian Symons* (Harper, $2.95)
HEAT WAVE, *by Caesar Smith* (Ballantine, $2.95)

In summer we said goodby and God love you to Craig Rice, in her posthumous novel and her gathered short stories:

THE APRIL ROBIN MURDERS, *by Craig Rice & Ed McBain* (Random, $3.50)
THE NAME IS MALONE, *by Craig Rice* (Pyramid, 35¢)

and did not know that we were saying goodby to another master, with 1958's best Classic English Puzzler, too fittingly titled

UNTIMELY DEATH, *by Cyril Hare* (MacMillan, $3.25)

August brought a magnificent picaresque comedy of espionage:

THE DEVIL'S AGENT, *by Hans Habe* (Fell, $4.50)

. . . and then began The Incredible Fall of '58, when publishers conspired to bring out mystery novels at the rate of 8 a week. There were many admirable novels in this flood; but the year's earlier highlights tend to linger even more impressively in the memory—though the fall did bring another notable volume of shorts (all from EQMM) and much the best of the year's 5 anthologies:

EIGHT MURDERS IN THE SUBURBS, *by Roy Vickers* (B.B.C., $2.50)
ELLERY QUEEN'S 13th ANNUAL (Random, $3.50)

This was a startling year in sheer quantity—so much so that even I had moments of being tired of murder. But it was almost as startling in quality—the rarest of vintage years, when a reviewer could conscientiously and happily list enough "bests" to provide distinguished reading for each week in the year's calendar. So my special love, with regrets, to Margot Bennett, Owen Cameron, John Dickson Carr, Vera Caspary, Manning Coles, William R. Cox, Harold R. Daniels, Stanley Ellin, E. X. Ferrars, Erle Stanley Gardner, MacDonald Hastings, Michael Innes, Dana Lyon, John D. MacDonald, Vin Packer, and Muriel Spark, whose 1958 books still delight me and should be detailedly listed here if there were world enough and paper.

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- ☐ 1145 Stab In The Dark, *Joe Rayter*
- ☐ 1198 Dragnet, *Richard Deming*
- ☐ 2088 ABC Murders, *Agatha Christie*
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- ☐ 2326 Quick And The Dead, *Ellery Queen*
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Prather, Richard S.	STRIP FOR MURDER	25¢	Jan. 29	Gold Medal Books (Fawcett)	O
Prather, Richard S.	ALWAYS LEAVE 'EM DYING	25¢	Jan. 29	Gold Medal Books (Fawcett)	O
Prather, Richard S.	TOO MANY CROOKS	25¢	Jan. 29	Gold Medal Books (Fawcett)	O
Prather, Richard S.	THE WAILING FRAIL	25¢	Jan. 29	Gold Medal Books (Fawcett)	O
Prather, Richard S.	DAGGER OF FLESH	25¢	Feb. 13	Gold Medal Books (Fawcett)	R
Quentin, Patrick	THE MAN IN THE NET	35¢	Feb. 3	Dell Books	R
Smith, Caesar	HEAT WAVE	35¢	Feb. 15	Ballantine Books	R
Stackleberg, Gene	DOUBLE AGENT	35¢	Feb. 17	Popular Library	O
Sterling, Thomas	MURDER IN VENICE ("The Evil of the Day")	35¢	Feb. 5	Dell Books	R
Stout, Rex	OVER MY DEAD BODY	35¢	Feb. 17	Avon	Reissue
Telfair, Richard	THE BLOODY MEDALLION	25¢	Jan. 29	Gold Medal Books (Fawcett)	O
West, John B.	AN EYE FOR AN EYE	25¢	Feb. 19	New American Library (Signet Book)	O

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DEATH IN FRANCE

by VICTOR CANNING

SVERDOV WATCHED THE FIGURE STANDing at the Embassy window. Outside, the winter sunshine sparkled on the morning frost and into the room came the busy noise of Paris traffic.

The figure turned, revealing a face hard and unmoving as though cut from granite. "The matter is easily arranged, Sverdov. You need use no finesse. The Seine runs at the bottom of your garden and bodies are always being fished out of the river. Dr. Kang is dangerous and he has served our purpose."

Sverdov stood up. He was about forty, a tight, self-contained, neat little man with a pursy mouth and eyes like dirty glass marbles. "It is hard to believe that he has been working for the others as well as for us." His voice was a little shrill, an edge of nervousness in it which did not escape the other.

"There is no doubt about it. All that remains now is to silence him. He knows too much. When does he come to visit you again?"

"Sometime within the week. I cannot say when, but it will be late at night. He is most careful. When he comes I will have everything ready."

The other nodded. "And when it is done, you must leave. The house is not rented in your name?"

"No."

"In Madame Mateur's name?"

Sverdov started. "How did—?"

"Do not be alarmed, Sverdov." The other laughed. "It is recognized that secret agents are human. Also a-woman about the place can be useful."

"I assure you that I do not take her into my confidence."

"Naturally."

When Sverdov had gone, the other picked up his telephone and called a number in the Embassy. "Georgi? Good. I have arranged with Sverdov that Dr. Kang shall be dealt with. Also, Georgi—when it is done—I think Sverdov should be recalled. He is beginning to have the look of a man who has lived too long in the atmosphere of . . . of democratic decadence."

Some nights later, Dr. Kang came up the garden path of a small villa on the banks of the Seine near Paris. In the distance the clocks were striking midnight. He tapped on the lighted French windows of a room overlooking the garden and after a few moments was let in by Sverdov.

Dr. Kang followed him into the room, blinking through his thick glasses at the bright light. A great scarf was wrapped about his throat against the sharp night air, and his

pudgy body was made more bulky by a heavy overcoat. He shook hands with Sverdov, and walked to the fire.

"It is cold, Sverdov. We shall have snow. That will remind you of your beloved fatherland."

Sverdov grunted.

Dr. Kang chuckled. "Maybe you do not wish to be reminded?"

Sverdov said, "Your jokes are in bad taste. You have the papers?"

Dr. Kang opened his coat and pulled a fat envelope from his inside pocket. He tossed it onto the table. "Here they are. It is a pity I have already been paid for them. I need more money."

"You always need money."

"Money is round and rolls away, Sverdov. We both have expensive habits. Have you thought any more of my proposal? It would make us both rich—and I could arrange political asylum for you in any country you name."

"Your jokes, I have told you, are in bad taste, Dr. Kang. I am no traitor."

"A pity. There are so many opportunities for good traitors these days. However . . . I still need money. Do your people wish me to start on the NATO project? I have a very good contact there. But the price, happily for me, will be high."

Sverdov moved uneasily. In many ways he liked Dr. Kang. It was hard to be natural with a man who, in a moment, he was going to kill.

"I put it up to the Embassy a few days ago. They were interested, very interested, but because of your price they needed to think it over. However," he smiled, "a few minutes before you arrived I had a call from them agreeing to your price. So you can go ahead."

"Excellent."

"I thought you would think so." Sverdov went to the sideboard and brought a brandy decanter and two glasses to the table. As he poured brandy for them, he went on, "We will drink to the success of your project. And, please, no more of your joking suggestions. I am a good patriot."

Dr. Kang nodded, but the dark eyes in the placid, Buddha-like face were very still. "A good patriot, maybe, Sverdov. But a nervous one tonight. You are like a man who tries to carry two watermelons under one arm. And why do you tell me a lie?"

"Lie?"

"Yes, Sverdov. Your Embassy has not agreed to the NATO project. They could not have telephoned you about it a few minutes ago."

"But they did."

"No. You say that for some reason I do not understand yet. But they did not telephone you. I have been watching outside this villa for an hour. I always do that before I come in. And this evening, when I arrived, I cut the telephone wires."

Sverdov stared at Dr. Kang. "Why should you cut the wires?"

Dr. Kang smiled and his right hand coming out of his coat pocket held a revolver. "Because, Sverdov, I have had an offer for all I know

and for the contents of your safe over there. A most generous offer. I cut the wires because I do not want you to raise an alarm for me too soon after I leave."

"But this is treachery!" shouted Sverdov.

"Of course," agreed Dr. Kang blandly. "But is not that our business? Now, I should like the key to the safe." He held out his left hand. "Come, Sverdov, don't be obstinate." He took a step towards the man. "Listen, I am generous. My offer is still open. You can open the safe willingly and come in with me. With what we both know, we could command an even higher price."

"Never!"

"Regrettably, then—" As Dr. Kang spoke, his right hand smashed forward with astonishing speed for so bulky a man. The heavy revolver hit Sverdov on the side of the head and he crashed backward to the floor.

Dr. Kang bent down and went over his pockets for the key to the safe. He found it quickly and, in a few moments, had the safe open. Using two of Sverdov's brief cases which were on top of the safe, he carefully emptied the contents into them. There was a happy smile on his face as he worked. There was enough stuff here to keep him in luxury for years. Money in the purse, he told himself, like a woman in the arms, kept a man happy.

When he had finished he came back to Sverdov. The man was still unconscious.

At this moment the door of the room opened and a woman came swiftly in. She was a fine, warm, good-looking woman, thought Dr. Kang . . . and with a depth to her eyes that would let no man be certain of her. Dr. Kang had met Madame Mateur before and had long thought she was wasted on Sverdov.

"I heard a noise." She looked from Dr. Kang suddenly to the figure of Sverdov.

"There is no need for alarm, madame," said Dr. Kang. "He slipped on the rug and hit his head."

As he spoke Sverdov groaned and began to stir. Dr. Kang reached for his glass on the table behind him.

"Here, give him some brandy. It will bring him round."

Madame Mateur took the glass from him and kneeled down by Sverdov. Cradling his shoulders in one arm she held the brandy to his lips. Dazed, still partly unconscious, Sverdov swallowed the liquid.

He was dead within five minutes.

Two hours later Dr. Kang and Madame Mateur—who was now rapidly recovering from her shock—were on the night train to Boulogne and England. And Dr. Kang understood why Sverdov had lied about the telephone call and the NATO project. Dr. Kang would surely have drunk a toast to its success in poisoned brandy, and Sverdov would have watched him die . . . When a man has been so near death, thought Dr. Kang, it was good to have an understanding companion.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**LEE SHERIDAN COX**
TITLE:	***The Male Io Glasses***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Andy Blair and Willie Perkins
LOCALE:	The home of Tom Sawyer, the Merriwells, the Rover Boys, Penrod—and you!
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Remember "A Simple Incident; or, Andy Blair and Willie Perkins, Private Eyes" in EQMM's June '55 issue? Well, here is "The Truth About Ronald; or, The Second Case of Blair & Perkins, Boy Sleuths"—and utterly charming!*

RONALD PRUITT IS THE KIND OF person that if a teacher wants to send a note to another teacher she picks Ronald to deliver it. He is also the type who not only reads the note but looks in everybody's locker on the way down the hall. What I mean, Ronald Pruitt is a born creep.

I keep telling Willie Perkins how having Ronald to guard against all our lives has toughened us up and prepared us for the detective business. But lately Ronald has been making a certain remark about Willie, and Willie is getting so he can't see the bright side any more. So he has been urging me to write up our second big case and let everybody know the truth about Ronald.

What has happened, we had an assignment in English last week to write *A Simple Incident,* and I turned in a story on Willie's and my first big case as private eyes, which Miss Hawkins, our seventh grade English teacher as everybody knows, praised for three minutes and eight seconds. I know this for a fact because Willie, who is pretty scientific, timed it. It was the longest anyone was praised. Ronald was praised one minute and forty-seven

seconds. So Ronald is mad and he has been going around saying about me that the reason I asked Miss Hawkins not to read my paper in class is that I'm the kind of writer who makes it up.

But this certain remark he is making about Willie is even worse.

To explain beforehand, so no one will get the wrong idea about Willie, when we entered Junior High School this year, everything was different from grade school. We didn't know our way around the building, and we had a whole bunch of teachers' dispositions to get used to instead of just one. The first day when we got to our last class, which was Health and Safety, the teacher wasn't there when the bell rang. We were all walking around kind of getting the feel of the room when the teacher appeared in the doorway and yelled in her scary voice, "In your seats!"

Willie, who was up at the pencil sharpener getting his pencils ready, said later he had a chill go clear down his backbone. He made a run for a seat and who should be making a run from a different direction but Jackie Carr. Running into Jackie is just like hitting an innerspring mattress. Willie bounced off Jackie and shot backwards with his arms waving right into the teacher, which she may have taken as a personal insult. When everything got settled down, she told us that we were to be in our seats when the bell rang or else, but she concentrated the telling most on Willie.

Well, the next day Willie and I got to Health and Safety a couple of minutes early, and Willie asked the teacher if he could go to the rest-room. He got back to his seat just as the bell was ringing. Then at mid-period, when the teacher said we'd have a study period, Willie, who was looking sweaty, asked could he look for the rest-room again because he couldn't find it the first time.

The teacher rushed Willie out and showed him where to go and told him that when he had permission he could ignore her rule about being in his seat when the bell rang. Willie said she acted helpful but she still scared him so much he hated to think what this class was going to do to his own personal health and safety. Anyway, what Ronald has been saying around is that Willie is the kind of detective that can't even find a rest-room. Which is a lie since Willie is a good detective, as everyone will see in this true story coming up.

Because when Willie kept urging me to write our second case and let it be read in class, I got to thinking how Ronald might have a stroke if I wrote up a bunch of Willie and my cases and got famous and also how I'd be ready ahead of time for these writing assignments we keep having. I don't know what the next assignment is to be called yet, but just about any title will fit this story. There's just

one drawback. Willie thinks maybe all this thinking and sitting will stunt my growth, so he's going to measure my height and muscles before and after each story to keep a scientific check. If I seem to be getting stunted, I will have to drop the whole idea. I'd rather be big than famous.

Well, to go back to the beginning of our detective career, after we got paid three dollars twice right there on the playground in front of everybody for successfully solving our first case (this was two years ago in the fifth grade), we were hired for several minor jobs. We located missing articles: Jackie Carr's Boy Scout knife, which it turned out his little sister had sold to Freddie Clark for two cents; Jackie Carr's baseball glove, which it turned out his little sister had sold to Freddie Clark for fifteen cents; Jackie Carr's bicycle, which it turned out his little sister had sold to Freddie Clark for sixty-three cents; and finally, Jackie Carr's little sister, which it turned out he was supposed to be taking care of only he forgot about her until time for his mother to get home, and we found her sitting in front of the doctor's office with dark glasses and a cup and sign saying, *Help The Blind.* She had seventeen cents in the cup.

Jackie was our best customer. Only it got so he was calling us all the time to locate something, and then he always charged it. The only job he paid for was when we found James, his dog, who had been missing two days. This was a minor case, but it proves how fast Willie developed as a detective. James wasn't the kind of dog you wanted to find, but Jackie swore he would not charge it to his account with Blair & Perkins, Private Eyes. He swore in blood. We had to cut Jackie's little sister's finger because Jackie was afraid to cut his, and it had to be his family's blood to be legal. And Jackie's little sister likes to be in on everything.

We started the investigation in our usual methodical way. Willie went over to Freddie Clark's to look around, while I started questioning Jackie. I didn't have much luck because Jackie's mind wanders around so much, until I asked if James had seemed upset lately. Jackie said James had been steady as a rock, and then he gave us—Willie had come back—our first clue. He said that twice when Mrs. Dewey had come calling on his mother, James was lying in the driveway and instead of moving when old Mrs. Dewey drove her car right up to his nose, he just sort of bunched himself up growling, and Mrs. Dewey finally had to back out instead of going on around the drive.

I said I thought this was a clue. I said we had to get into James's mind.

Willie said if he was a dog that had just bluffed a car, he would try a train next. Which just shows

the kind of detective Willie is. Because, sure enough, there was James pretty dead down on the railroad tracks. Jackie said he could just see old James standing in the middle of the track not giving an inch, and he was so pleased that he borrowed some money from his little sister and paid us in banana splits.

We were getting a lot of practice with Jackie but no cash, so we went to see Willie's Aunt Gertrude, who needed a detective more than anyone else we could think of, and she gave us the job of finding her glasses which she had mislaid and couldn't see to find. Willie located them right away. He sat down on a table to think over where they might be and there they were—under him.

You find out a lot about human nature in the detective business. Aunt Gertrude didn't even offer to pay us after we had found the glasses. Willie said the way she carried on about a little crack you could hardly notice in one lens you'd have thought he sat on her eyeball.

We had counted on a lot of business after our first case was so successful, so you can see how disappointing it was to have bankrupts like Jackie Carr and welshers like Aunt Gertrude for our only clients. And the worst thing was that we live in a town where I can't remember anybody ever getting even close to being murdered, except maybe Willie and me by our fathers that time we found the keys in Willie's father's car and drove halfway around the block before Aunt Gertrude came along taking our side of the road.

And then, right when everything was blackest, Homer XVIII, Willie's frog, got loose and started our second big case. Willie almost always has a frog on him. He kept Homer in his desk at school, and at recess time on this particular day when he was taking Homer out for a breath of fresh air, Homer got away behind a table and a filing cabinet in the back of the room.

Willie told me about it later. He was under the table trying to reach Homer when Miss Easter, our geography and history teacher, and Miss Crockett, another teacher, came back into the room. They didn't see Willie, and naturally he kept quiet because the day he had lifted the lid on his desk and Homer had unexpectedly jumped on Betsy Miller, Miss Easter had taken Betsy's part, which was really a surprise. I mean, here Miss Easter wore eyeglasses that had a sort of butterfly thing in jewels on one corner of the frame. Willie had checked up on the name of it in a scientific book, and as Willie said, you'd think anybody who would go around all the time with a male Io up over one eye would be fond of wild life. But she had told Willie very definitely to leave Homer at home, which was impossible. Willie's mother is against frogs.

So Willie kept quiet waiting for them to leave and he couldn't help hearing this conversation about Mr. Barrie. As everybody knows, Mr. Barrie was always talking to Miss Easter in the hall and coming into her room on errands. He got his own class taught and spent a lot of time in our room too, which shows how much the tax payers were getting for their money out of Mr. Barrie. Also, he's a teacher who tells you about important things. For instance, one day he brought in a praying mantis, which he said ate flies, and Freddie Clark happened to have some dead ones wrapped up in paper in his desk. Freddie is very saving. But Miss Easter, instead of being pleased, made Freddie clean out his desk, and then as an afterthought made Willie clean his, too.

That's the kind of person Miss Easter is. She is all right. She looks kind of like Marilyn Monroe with glasses, only not so plump. But she was always having desk inspection. Mr. Barrie didn't care what you kept in your desk. And he was nicer to Miss Easter than she was to him, which was funny since he was my pick of the two.

Anyway, in this conversation Miss Easter was criticizing Mr. Barrie and praising Tod Reed, a creep who works in his father's bank and chases girls, as everybody knows. Willie said it was plain to see that Miss Easter really hated Mr. Barrie, which was funny since everybody else in the world, I guess, liked him. Except for owning a Jaguar, Tod Reed couldn't hold a candle to Mr. Barrie, who owned a 1949 Chevy. But Willie said Miss Easter couldn't find anything good to say about Mr. Barrie except that he was insufferable. This is true, because although Mr. Barrie is getting middle-aged, at least twenty-seven by now, he is healthy and has a lot of muscle.

Willie, who can get things pretty mixed-up, said it seemed to him Miss Easter was mad because Mr. Barrie wasn't mad when she got friendly with Tod Reed. Willie admitted this did not make sense, but he said none of the conversation hung together much, although they kept using the same words over and over, like men and husbands. The only thing that was absolutely clear, Willie said, was that Miss Easter hated Mr. Barrie because he didn't know his own mind.

Willie said Miss Easter really looked down on men who didn't know their own minds. And she said the men who got ahead in the world were the ones who made things happen, not those who just waited for something to happen. Willie was relieved when they left the room and he could crawl out from under the table with Homer XVIII and get back in his seat. He said it was a really punk recess, all things considered.

But that afternoon, when we were going home from school, I

got to thinking about Miss Easter saying you should make things happen, instead of just waiting for them to happen.

"You know," I told Willie, "I think she's got something there. If we could just figure out how to *start* a case that would get everybody's attention, then we could solve it and build up our reputation."

I was remembering something I read once where somebody sent a letter to a lot of people saying, "All is discovered. Get out of town"—and how if we sent that to the most suspicious people in town, then when they left, we could work on why they beat it out of town. I didn't want to tell Willie about this yet though, because Willie is the type that always wants to get started fast, and I thought it needed some thinking over. But the next morning during recess Willie came up to me looking as if he'd just won the hundred yard dash.

"I got it," he whispered. "About making things happen. It came to me just like that. C'mon around here."

We went around to the back of the building where we had found a loose brick we could pull out and there was a little place where we kept things we might need any minute, like water pistols and gum. Willie looked over his shoulder like in "I Led Three Lives," then jerked out the brick.

I almost died. I'd have recognized that male Io anywhere.

"Miss Easter's glasses!" I said.

"Boy, was that a good idea of yours," said Willie.

"*My* idea?" I said. "I'm for law and order."

"Sure we are," said Willie. "And now we can prove it. It came on me like a flash. Just now I was sneaking back in the room to get Homer, and there were Miss Easter's glasses lying on her desk, and I remembered what a racket Aunt Gertrude made about hers and yet how it wouldn't be stealing to take them because who would want anyone else's glasses? So now we find Miss Easter's glasses for her and build up our reputation just like you said."

Well, I could see it from Willie's point of view. But then I got to seeing it from my father's point of view. Willie said Miss Easter herself would approve because basically it was her own idea. But I said if Willie's dad ever found out about it, what would his basic idea be, and he was twice as big as Miss Easter. So then Willie got to seeing it from his dad's point of view, and we decided to put the glasses back.

We didn't get a chance. I had them in my pocket ready to put them on her desk when we went in from recess, but I couldn't get near it. Miss Crockett was running around looking on all the book shelves and tables and filing cabinets, and Miss Easter was opening and shutting her desk drawers and looking under and behind everything on her desk.

I was getting so nervous that it was a relief when she gave up the search and started geography recitation. Boy, her eyes are not worth a nickell She had Freddie Clark point out the Euphrates River on the map, and when he pointed at the Nile River, she said, "Very good." I think she was afraid we would find out she couldn't see us because she kept telling Jackie Carr to pay attention, which is always a pretty safe thing to say. But once he was. And Ronald Pruitt looked cross-eyed four times when he recited, and you could tell she didn't even know it.

I didn't get a chance to put the glasses back in the afternoon either, and having them in my pocket was hard on my nerves. After lunch Miss Easter asked the class if anyone knew where they might be, and I almost died when Willie held his hand up. But he just suggested maybe she had laid them on the window sill and they had fallen out into the bushes. Miss Easter was trying everything, so she sent Willie out to look, and he looked all through history lesson. Willie hates history because it's all over. Besides, he wasn't as worried as I was, since the glasses weren't making a bulge in *his* pocket.

But I had heard there was going to be a teachers' meeting after school, so just as soon as they marched us out that afternoon, Willie and I hung around for about fifteen minutes, then sneaked back into the building. We could hear the Principal up in the room where they hold meetings to talk about us, but we peeped around Miss Easter's door just to be sure the coast was clear, and who should be cleaning the blackboard but that creep Ronald Pruitt. He is always doing this to get in with the teacher. He has probably washed more blackboards than the average janitor.

So Willie and I slipped into Mr. Barrie's room next door to talk things over. And then I remembered that right after lunch, when some of the teachers were hunting for the glasses again, Mr. Barrie had offered, if they did not turn up before evening, to drive Miss Easter home from school and take care of getting her car home, since she could not see good enough to drive. Miss Easter had said in an unfriendly tone that she would ride with Miss Crockett, but Miss Crockett said that unfortunately she had to stay and grade papers after the teacher's meeting. For some reason Miss Crockett winked at Mr. Barrie. So Miss Easter said perhaps she'd better just call a taxi anyway. So Mr. Barrie laughed and said after she got her glasses back, he was willing to remember that a state of war—and at that point Miss Easter looked hard at us kids who were standing around interested and told us to go to our seats and the bell hadn't even rung.

Anyway, I decided since Mr. Barrie was the one stuck with driving

her home, I would put the glasses on his desk. That way he could find them, and it would save him the trip. After we got outside again, Willie complained because he said the whole thing had caused even more excitement than he had hoped, and we were losing the chance of a lifetime. But, personally, I was glad it was all over.

You can imagine how I felt next morning when there was Miss Easter still bumping into things. Willie and I could hardly believe our own eyes! There was a regular search going on all over the building with even the janitors looking, because Miss Easter said that at first she had thought she laid them on her desk but now the more she tried to remember, the less she was sure where she had taken them off.

"What's going on anyway?" said Willie when we got together at recess. "Do you suppose Mr. Barrie found out Miss Easter hates him, so he's paying her back by keeping her glasses?"

"That's impossible," I said, "because he's stuck with driving her home. Somebody took those glasses before he got back in his room."

"Then there *is* a thief in school," said Willie very pleased, "an honest-to-goodness, lowdown thief."

"And we got a case," I said. "We're responsible for those glasses."

"I don't feel responsible," said Willie. "We put them back."

"I mean because we're the only private-eye detectives in school," I said.

"What I mostly feel responsible for," said Willie, "is Ronald making all that money."

What he meant, Ronald had brought a bunch of comic books to school and was renting them at two cents a magazine. The day before, when Ronald was looking cross-eyed, he had been checking on just how near-sighted Miss Easter was in case the information would ever come in handy. I mean, most people like to look cross-eyed just for fun. But Ronald is the kind of person who always has a purpose, a deep purpose. And sure enough, he'd been able to pass the comic books around the room and collect all morning, and Miss Easter hadn't noticed a thing except to compliment us on how quiet we were. I will admit they were good comic books, all pretty gory.

Anyway, Willie and I decided to get together later and work on our theories. That is, Willie already had a theory that the jewels on the male Io were real and that an international gang of jewel thieves had heard about it. I didn't have any theory yet, but I figured I'd have one by noon.

But I thought all day, and the only person I could think of who would have a reason for taking Miss Easter's glasses was Willie. Which shows what a tough case this really was. That evening Willie and I

were sitting on the curb in front of my house thinking some more, when Miss Easter and Mr. Barrie drove by with Ronald Pruitt. They all waved to us. We watched as they drove up Ronald's driveway.

"Look at that," said Willie. "That's what you get when you wash the blackboard. He wouldn't be such a teacher's pet if she knew he made forty-six cents today renting comic books."

Mr. Barrie turned the car around after letting Ronald out and they drove past and waved again, looking very smiley.

"Look at that," said Willie. "I don't get it. Driving to school with him and to lunch and home in the afternoon after everything *she* said! Somebody ought to tell Mr. Barrie how she hates him. Maybe she stole those glasses herself to save on gas."

"No," I said. "You got to admit that even though she doesn't like Homer and Mr. Barrie, you can't figure her as a thief. But there are a lot of queer things about this case. I keep having the funny feeling something is going to happen. To us, I mean. It keeps me from concentrating. I don't like Ronald's look. Did you notice his expression when he went by just now?"

"Yeah," said Willie. "He looked that way at Freddie's birthday party when Homer VII turned up in the bottom of the pitcher of lemonade, and I got spanked just because Homer was my frog."

"And the time someone let the air out of my uncle's front tires and left *my* tool kit by the wheel," I said.

"He had that same expression that time at Children's Day Exercises," said Willie, "when you and Betsy Miller were singing a duet and a garter snake somebody put in your pocket crawled on Betsy right in the middle of a high note."

Willie and I know Ronald, all right. Whenever he gets a certain look, it means something unpleasant is sure to happen to an innocent bystander, namely Willie or me.

"He *would* be thinking up something right now when we have to keep our mind on the case," said Willie. "Do you suppose he is planning to find the glasses himself and muscle us out of the detective business?"

"He doesn't want them found," I said. "His comic book business is too good." And that's when the idea hit me. "Willie!" I said.

"Don't bust my eardrum," said Willie in a sort of depressed way. Ronald is a depressing subject.

"When we go swimming," I said, "does Ronald ever go in the water first?"

"Of course not," said Willie. "He waits until someone else sees how cold it is. Everybody knows that."

"At scout camp when Jackie Carr is cook, does Ronald ever take the first bite?"

"You know he doesn't," said Willie. "He never takes a chance. What

are you getting at?" he asked me.

"Well, *he brought those comic books to school this morning!*" I said. "How'd he know Miss Easter wouldn't find her glasses all of a sudden and catch him in the act?"

This was really funny. I mean, Ronald is real careful. Willie got the point right away, but he didn't get the answer. He stared at me with his mouth open. This was the time we looked the most like two detectives.

"He was cleaning blackboards yesterday afternoon," I said. "He probably went snooping around the rooms during teachers' meeting."

Willie slapped himself so hard that accidentally, as he discovered later, he killed Homer XVIII. None of Willie's frogs live very long. "Andy," he said, "as a detective, you are a natural-born. Boy, what a brain! We got it. Ronald is the thief."

"But how are we going to prove it?" I said.

"You could wrestle him down tomorrow at recess and go through his pockets. I'll watch for teachers."

"Ronald wouldn't have the evidence *on* him. He wouldn't take a chance. What we got to do is get into his mind. He's planning something."

"Well, I ain't getting into no mind like that," said Willie. "Imagine him stealing those glasses! How lowdown can you get? Besides, I got into James's mind and now it's your turn."

So we agreed that next day in school I would take the dirty job and concentrate on the inside of Ronald's head and Willie would keep an eye on his hands and feet. But twenty-four hours later we had to admit we were not any closer to figuring out what Ronald had done with the glasses or just what he was planning. All day he had tended to his comic book business and when he wasn't making change, he was making a good impression. Ronald is the type who likes to wave his hand in the air and recite. But all the time he had this look I mentioned that he gets when something is going to happen to Willie or me. It would have made anybody but us nervous.

We were talking about this on the way home from school that day when suddenly Willie slapped his pockets. "Jeepers," he said, "I was so busy keeping an eye on Ronald that I forgot and left Homer XIX in my desk. I've got to go back for him. He hates school so far."

As it turned out for us, it was a good thing Willie was absent-minded that day. We decided it would be more interesting to go back through the window. Our classroom was on the ground floor, but when we'd worked our way around to it behind the shrubbery we found that the windows were too high up for Willie. But I could make it easy if Willie got on his back.

I climbed up and looked in the

room. There was Ronald Pruitt washing the blackboard and Miss Easter grading papers. Everything was quiet except the sound of Ronald swishing the sponge across the board. It was funny. Ronald kept looking over his shoulder at Miss Easter and washing the same piece of blackboard over and over again.

"My back's breaking," Willie whispered. "What's keeping you?"

Just then Miss Easter left the room. The minute the door swung to, Ronald shot over to Freddie Clark's desk. He reached down under Freddie's books and pulled something out. I couldn't see what it was. Then he went to Willie's desk and lifted the lid. Right at this point Willie's back gave way. However, we didn't make any noise because luckily for us I landed on Willie's head. Willie's worst fault as a detective is wanting to talk all the time. So while I was still on his his head I whispered to him to be still, because Ronald was in Willie's desk and we had to find out why. It turned out Willie was too stunned to talk anyway.

Pretty soon Ronald went down the walk carrying the brief case which he had brought the comic books to school in. He had this look so strong now you could practically hear him ticking. We waited until he was out of sight, then Willie got on his hands and knees again and I climbed in through the window.

I had just opened Willie's desk when I heard Miss Easter's voice in the hall. I wanted to run, but I didn't. A detective stays cool, even if he's wrapped up in cement and thrown into the river. So although Willie's desk had about everything in it and I wasn't sure exactly what I was looking for, and although Miss Easter's voice was getting louder, I kept on investigating. I had to. There had to be some reason for Ronald running from Freddie's to Willie's desk so fast.

Miss Easter had almost reached the door when down in the corner of Willie's desk, under a cheese sandwich, I saw a glasses case. I grabbed it and just made it through the window as Miss Easter came back into the room. It was a close shave. When Willie saw the expression on my face as I came through the window, he naturally left in a hurry, and we ran until we got to the alley behind my house. Then we opened the case—and there were Miss Easter's glasses.

Well, we had solved the case and found the glasses and proved Ronald was the thief, but we went to school the next morning feeling pretty depressed. We couldn't inform even on Ronald, even though he was fixing things so that an innocent person like Willie would get blamed. Besides, who would believe us? So it looked as if all we could do was slip the glasses back to Miss Easter, and no one would ever know what good de-

tectives were or the truth about Ronald.

But it turned out different because of Mr. Barrie hanging around Miss Easter's desk until after the bell rang. I'd have taken a chance on putting the glasses back if only Miss Easter had been there, but Mr. Barrie's eyes are too good. So class started with me still stuck with the glasses.

In the excitement the evening before we had forgotten all about Homer XIX. We were reminded of him suddenly when Betsy Miller opened her desk just after Miss Easter called the roll, and Homer jumped out. He hit against Betsy's neck, then fell into her lap, then hit her neck again. Homer XIX was a good jumper. But Willie said later that Homer XIX turned out to be the most nervous frog he ever had, and he thought it was all a result of Betsy Miller's yelling the way she did. Willie said Betsy gave Homer a shock he never recovered from.

Anyway, the upshot of all this after Willie got bawled out for ten minutes was that Miss Easter said we would have desk inspection. Ronald, with this certain look on his face, went to get the wastebasket. Ronald always carried the wastebasket when we had desk inspection, as a reward for having the neatest desk in the room.

Planting Homer on Betsy Miller was really a pretty neat way for Ronald to arrange for desk inspection. You got to hand it to Ronald —he may be a creep but he's not a dumb creep. That's why I was in such a tight spot. Teachers always put Willie and me in the front of the room, so Willie was sitting in the first seat in the first row and I sat right behind him. Miss Easter always started desk inspection with Willie, and I knew when the glasses didn't turn up in Willie's desk, Ronald would be looking and would be sure to see the big bulge in my jeans pocket.

I didn't know what to do and I had to do something fast. Ronald's desk was right across from me in the second row, so when he was getting the wastebasket, I slipped the glasses case into his desk. Nobody noticed except Freddie Clark because everybody else was busy trying to get his desk clean before inspection except Freddie, who knew he couldn't. But Freddie never tells on anybody. You could twist Freddie's arm clear off up to the socket and he wouldn't talk. What I intended to do after Miss Easter and Ronald had passed me and were at the back of the first row was to get the glasses again.

But it was funny the way it worked out. I mean, I didn't have any intention of planting those glasses on Ronald, who was guilty, even though he had planted them on Willie, who was innocent. I mean, there are some things you just don't do, unless you are a creep. But what happened, Willie was

emptying his desk and Ronald was pretending to help him and Miss Easter, who was standing between my desk and Ronald's, was saying, "For goodness' sake, what is that?" and then getting excited when it turned out to be a collection of chewed bubble gum or a box of beetles. Miss Easter always got so worked up over Willie's desk that I couldn't see why she wanted to look.

But anyway, all of a sudden, while she was bawling Willie out for the cheese sandwich, she said, "I wish, Willie, that you'd try to follow Ronald's example. Just see how neat Ronald's desk is."

She lifted the lid as she said this. I suppose most of the time Miss Easter wouldn't have paid much attention to a glasses case on top of Ronald's books, but she couldn't quite see what it was, so she picked it up. And then, in an absent-minded sort of way, I suppose having glasses on her mind, she opened the case.

I guess it was probably the biggest shock Ronald ever had. His head was down in Willie's desk, but he sensed something was wrong and he came out looking as if he had swallowed a wooly-worm. It was a shock to Miss Easter, too. She put the glasses on and then just looked at Ronald like Betsy Miller looking at Homer.

Then she gave the rest of us an assignment and led Ronald into a little room where she takes us to improve our character. They were still there when the recess bell rang. Miss Easter came out and dismissed us. She was looking upset. We caught a glimpse of Ronald. He was looking calm. Ronald never sweats. The door wasn't quite shut when Miss Easter went back into the room, so Willie and I hung around and listened.

"Now let me see whether I have this story straight," Miss Easter said. "You found the glasses on Mr. Barrie's desk. But later you were afraid to give them to me because you thought I wouldn't believe you had found them there, since Mr. Barrie hadn't returned them. So after putting them into a case to protect them for me, you didn't know what to do."

"That's it," said Ronald.

The world sure isn't safe with people like Ronald Pruitt in it.

I grabbed Willie and we went as fast as we could to find Mr. Barrie. There wasn't anything else to do but warn him so he could be ready to tell the police the truth. With Ronald framing him and Miss Easter hating him the way she did, Mr. Barrie might be arrested any minute. So we found him in his room and told him the whole story.

At first, Mr. Barrie had trouble realizing the danger he was in, and then he had such a bad cold he kept having coughing spells. But finally he understood the whole thing. Under stress, Willie remem-

bered a whole lot more of the conversation he had overheard that day Homer XVIII got loose, and it certainly showed that Miss Easter was Mr. Barrie's enemy, all about how conceited he was and how indifferent to other people's feelings and how he took people for granted. Mr. Barrie said he hadn't realized how much Miss Easter hated him and he hoped that as reliable private eyes we would regard the matter as confidential, which of course we said we would.

And I told him how Willie taking the glasses was Miss Easter's own idea since she said men should make things happen, not just wait for them to happen, but how we had decided to put the glasses back because of our fathers' ideas. Mr. Barrie said our decision to put them back was the right one and though in special circumstances Miss Easter's idea might be helpful, could he count on us being guided in the future by our fathers' ideas, and we said he could.

So then Mr. Barrie said if our part in the case were known there might be some people who wouldn't realize how much we were in favor of law and order, and so if we could do without the publicity of having solved the case, he thought he could give Miss Easter an explanation about her glasses which would not involve us. Willie, who was still afraid Mr. Barrie might be arrested, told him to remember that we would stand by him and be ready to swear in court that Ronald was the real thief. Mr. Barrie really had a bad cold, he was so choked up. But he told us he could handle the situation, now that we had given him some very interesting information he hadn't had before.

So that's about all of our second big case, which we never got any publicity for as Mr. Barrie thought it was better to keep it private. I don't know what he told Miss Easter, but the funny thing was he kept driving her to school even after she got her glasses back and they are now married, as everybody knows. I guess she decided to overlook the fact that Mr. Barrie is not the kind of person who makes things happen.

So that's all of this story, which I did not make up no matter what Ronald Pruitt will try to tell everybody. And I guess this proves that Willie and I are good detectives to spot a criminal right away, though you don't have to be a detective to know Ronald Pruitt is a creep.

P.S. I checked with Mr. Barrie to see would it be ethical to turn this in for an English assignment and he said he would leave the ethics of the case to you with a plea for leniency for all four culprits. He spelled this out for me but I don't get it. I mean Ronald is naturally a culprit, and you might stretch a point and call Willie and me culprits, but why blame Homer XVIII? He was dead most of the time anyway.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DON BERRY**

TITLE: ***You Got To Play It Smart***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Near Portland, Oregon

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Young Danny Selden considered himself an old pro—especially with a pair of dice. If he could add to his stake, here in the logging camp, he'd be ready for the big pitch, the big killing, in San Francisco.*

HE FELT PRETTY GOOD. HE PUSHED open the swinging glass doors of the Sate Employment Agency and walked out into the bright sunlight. It was flat and hot on his face, a very hot sun for Oregon, and he smiled a little at the warmth.

It had been good in Spokane, $1200; better in Seattle, $1500; and now he was in Portland, and he thought to himself it would be good here, too. If he could get $1000 here it would be fine for him.

He walked down the street, rattling the two little cubes in his pocket. He walked swiftly until he came to the main part of the business district. Then he slowed down and enjoyed himself looking in the windows of the department stores, studying the nice sports jackets and shoes and shirts and the bright ties.

He smiled at his reflection in one of the store fronts. The reflection smiled back, distorted by some defect in the glass.

Well, Danny Selden, he thought to the reflection, *this is a good year for you.*

The Danny Selden in the window silently agreed. He raised one long white hand and pushed a lock of hair back from his forehead. His hair was long and loose, a shiny blue-black; it always kept

falling over his forehead. Danny frowned briefly at that. It was real *young,* somehow. It didn't fit with his profession, and Danny regarded himself as an old pro. That thought in itself comforted him. After all, his youth was an asset in lots of ways. He smiled again at himself and straightened his tie.

Two days he had spent in the employment office—two days sitting on the hard benches, once in a while going over to the big blackboards and looking at the new jobs chalked up. It had taken him only two days to find the one that he wanted, and that was good. But he had looked for a job hard; he had gone in when they opened in the morning and hadn't left until they closed at night.

Whistling softly to himself, he walked down to the cheap hotel on Third Avenue where he'd taken a room when he got in from Seattle the week before. The dingy wallpaper and roach-ridden bureau didn't depress him—he felt too good for that; but he'd be glad to get out of it just the same. *San Francisco next,* he thought.

He rolled four straight sevens with an honest pair of dice before he went to bed. It made him sleep like a baby.

The next morning Danny packed the battered Gladstone with all his clothes. The black silk shirt and draped suit he put down at the bottom where nobody would see them accidentally, and he put the carefully brushed suede shoes beside them. He would need those clothes in San Francisco, maybe, but he didn't need them now. He dressed in a faded and worn levi jacket; his gray work pants were rolled up to the ankle with his high boots showing beneath. The boots looked a little too new, but he decided it didn't make any difference.

He paid his bill, lugged the Gladstone up to the bus station, and bought his ticket. When he got on the bus he took a folded piece of paper out of his pocket and showed the driver what was scribbled there.

"King-Mackley camp?" the driver said. "Yeah, I go by there. You got to walk in from the road, though."

"That's fine," Danny assured him. "I like to walk." He took a seat at the rear of the bus and watched the other passengers file in.

He didn't like to walk, actually. He *never* walked if he could avoid it. But for some reason it had pleased him to tell the driver that. He settled down in the seat and clicked the dice together in his pocket.

After about an hour the big Greyhound pulled off to the shoulder of the road, throwing yellow dust in a great cloud behind as it rolled heavily to a stop. The silence was almost shocking after the steady roar of the engine for so long.

Danny Selden grabbed his bag

from the overhead rack and pushed it ahead of him up the aisle.

"Camp's about a mile in," the driver told him, pointing along the dirt road that came into the main highway.

"Thanks," said Danny.

The driver looked at him for a moment before opening the door. Danny waited, knowing he was taking in the thin shoulders, the pale, drawn kid's face, and the loose black hair, contrasting it with the work clothes he wore.

"You a logger?" asked the driver curiously. "You don't look like a logger."

"No," said Danny pleasantly. The driver amused him.

When the young man offered no further information, the driver shrugged slightly and opened the door. Danny got out and started down the dirt road without looking back. Behind him he heard the bus go into gear and pull away. Then he looked back. He said something obscene softly, and spat on the ground.

When the ponderous whine of the big bus died away, Danny began to hear the faint sounds of working equipment from the woods ahead. The roar of the big Cats was faint, fairly steady. Occasionally it would be counterpointed with the screech of a chain saw chewing at a log, or the rumble of a donkey engine straining. Danny sorted the sounds out in his mind; they were familiar to him, like the voices of people he didn't like.

He walked along, kicking up little puffs of dust ahead of him. Soon he noticed that his boots were covered with dust. They didn't look so new any more, and it pleased him a little. He changed hands on the bag, swinging it around to his other side. Once he stopped by the side of the road and smoked a cigarette, looking around him at the tall stand of fir. The trees were big; Danny absently figured it for a first-growth stand, and smiled at the thought. It was funny how much boring information a guy picked up in the logging camps.

He was tired by the time he got to the clearing where the main camp was set up, and he put his bag down. He stood there for a minute, fingering the black spotted cubes in his pocket, looking the camp over. It was a relatively permanent camp. They had set up a dozen or so quonset huts for the loggers, and one of the huts had toilets and wash basins and showers. Next to that one was the mess hall, and Danny regarded it with distaste. That was where he would work. He looked at it for a long moment, then shrugged and picked up his suitcase, now covered with yellow dust.

There was one frame building in the clearing with a faded white sign that announced *KING-MACKLEY CORP.* Danny walked

in and set the bag down heavily to get the attention of the man who sat with his back to the door.

The man looked around. He was blond, heavy-set, working in his shirt sleeves.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I'm Danny Selden. I'm supposed to work here."

"You the new flunkey?"

"Yeah."

"Oh. What'd you say your name was?" Danny repeated it carefully and the man checked it against something on his desk. "Okay," he said. "The agency called us. Go down to the mess hall and ask for Jensen. He'll tell you what to do."

"Where do I stay?" Danny asked him.

"Jensen'll find you something," said the man, and turned back to the papers on his desk.

"Okay," Danny said to his back. "Thanks very much," he said, wishing he could put an ax right in the middle of the broad back. Outside the office he stopped for a second to calm down. *Easy,* he told himself. *They treat you like a punk kid 'cause that's what you're supposed to be. That's what you want, isn't it?*

Still, it made him mad. He wished that just for once he could tell these suckers he was a better man than any of them. *Well, they'll find out,* he thought. *The hard way.*

He was almost cheerful by the time he got to the mess hall, remembering the advice he'd been given a long time ago. *Don't let yourself get too involved, Danny. It's a game you play with the marks. You get yours in the end.*

The kitchen was steamy. There were three cooks, wearing dirty aprons and white shirts with their sleeves rolled up. Sweat on their faces from bending over the steam table; little beads of sweat clung to the hair on their arms. They were working very fast. Danny went over to the biggest of them.

"Jensen?" he asked. Silently the man pointed to another, standing by one of the two huge caldrons of coffee.

"I'm Danny Selden," Danny said, trying to make his voice sound slightly shy. "The new flunkey."

Jensen, a small man, only slightly taller than Danny, with a lined ferret-face, glanced at him glumly.

"You ever flunkey before?"

"No," Danny lied. There wasn't any reason to lie, but he always played the same role and saw no sense in changing it. It worked fine. The part of a young kid, maybe still in college, just picking up a summer job, Shy, uncertain, gullible. He knew he'd take a lot of ribbing from the loggers, sending him for impossible equipment, taking him on snipe hunts. It was all right—they could have all the fun with him they wanted. He got paid for it. Sometimes, when it rankled him, he figured out how

much he got paid by the hour for being treated like a punk.

Jensen launched into a short lecture on how when these men wanted to be fed, they wanted to be fed *now*. He wanted Danny to be on his toes. He wanted there to be coffee and butter on all Danny's tables all the time. He wanted Danny to *run* for seconds, not walk. He didn't want any guff from Danny, of any kind, any time.

Danny listened quietly, nodding his abject submission. All these bull cooks were the same—petty tryants, lording it over the other cooks and the flunkies and the dishwasher, working their tails off for a miserable few hundred bucks a month. Danny had nothing but contempt for Jensen and all his breed.

"There's a bunk in Hut Six," Jensen said. "I'll take you over."

He took Danny to Hut Six, which he would share with five other men. It was pretty good. It was clean, and the beds were okay, and it wasn't too crowded. There was a little black wood-stove in the exact center of the hut, and bare electric bulbs were strung in two lines down either side. The only other light came from the small window high in the wall opposite the door. Some of the beds had pin-up pictures taped to the bare, curving metal wall above them, and there were dog-eared magazines in piles underneath.

"I'll put you to work in the morning," Jensen said. "You just look around today. You go to work four thirty, off at seven thirty. Then you can have breakfast and do anything you want till eleven. Then you serve lunch. Got it?"

Danny nodded.

Jensen put his thin, wiry hand on Danny's shoulder just before he left. "Don't worry about it, kid," he said. "You'll do all right. Everybody makes mistakes at first." He smiled at Danny.

Go to hell, mucker, Danny thought.

"Thanks, Mr. Jensen," he said. "I sure hope so."

When Jensen had gone, Danny shoved his Gladstone bag under the bed and thought the situation over. The loggers were working long hours, plenty of overtime. There should be a lot of money floating around the camp. He flexed his finger absently. Maybe he was setting his sights too low. Maybe he should make the big pitch. It could be better than Seattle, and he was going to need a lot of money in Frisco. Or maybe he could work the pitch over a longer period of time, in smaller amounts.

He discarded that idea. It was too risky. Too steady winnings night after night always looked funny. One "lucky" night was best.

You had to play it smart. Loggers tended to get mad easy if they thought something was crooked.

Danny shuddered. He remembered his older brother's face after

the loggers had finished with him. They'd caught Mike switching dice . . .

But Mike was slow. You had to play it smart. You had to play it smart and not take any chances.

"It's a game, Danny. You can't afford to get involved in it yourself. You got to stand off to the side a little, and play it smart. Don't let yourself get hooked by your own pitch . . ."

Had Mike been hooked by his own pitch? Did he grow too excited in the game, and get clumsy? Danny never found out. But he remembered Mike saying glumly, "You like the dice too much, Danny, too much for your own good. You're too excitable."

Danny took the neat roll out of his bag and counted it. $2300. He counted out $250 and laid it aside. The rest he put behind the loose flap in the top of his bag. He opened the little black box and shook out his dice. They rolled out on the dark-gray blanket with the little black spots looking up at him. He picked up the clean pair, distinguished only to himself, and rolled them across the soft wool surface of the blanket.

He came out craps, with a deuce.

No backboard, he thought angrily, no bounce, the dice were no damn good. It didn't mean a thing.

He spent the rest of the afternoon practicing palming the dice.

Danny Selden had to work hard the first week. But he had flunkied enough to know what he had to do. Jensen was impressed.

Danny worked a split day. Breakfast was a rat race — everything moved too fast. He only had time for a cup of coffee before the men started filing in, talking and laughing and hungry. Then he would dash up and down the aisle between tables, with serving plates balanced three or four on his arm, weaving around the other flunkies, who were moving just as fast as he was.

Then—even more abruptly than it had begun—breakfast was over, and the mess hall was silent except for the clatter of dishes being picked up and dumped in the metal sinks full of scalding soapy water. After that Danny had a few hours of his own to spend before lunch. Lunch was a little easier, not so fast, and then more time off until he had to serve dinner. His working day was over by about 7:30 most nights, and he would go back to Hut Six, tired, and idly thumb through old magazines.

Sometimes he talked to the other men in the hut, getting to know them a little. They weren't the kind of people he liked to know—big, dumb oafs with muscles where their brains ought to be. No style. That was the main thing—no style at all, or flair. But he got to know them a little anyway, because that was safest.

The loggers took him at face value—a young kid, a little scared,

a little shy. He played the part of a punk resentfully, but he did it well, reminding himself that it was as much a part of the game as handling the dice. *You're a pro,* he told himself. *It's all part of the pitch. Don't get touchy.*

He even tried to act a little uncomfortable when they told dirty jokes, and they got a big kick out of that. Sometimes they ribbed him pretty hard, but he took it all with a timid smile, and they liked him all right. They were good marks. They trusted everybody and thought the world was a ball. They *liked* to work in the woods, and in Danny's book that was enough to peg them.

One night, when he came in from cleaning up after dinner, he flopped down on his bed and looked up at the corrugated wall curving above him. The topper they called Moose was in the next bunk, writing a letter. Moose was not a tall man, but his shoulders were broad and his arms filled the wool shirt tightly. He frowned in concentration over the letter.

"Say, Moose," Danny said absently, "what is there to do around here at night?"

"Nothin' much," Moose grunted, still engrossed in his letter. "Why? You always sack out by nine anyway." Danny had carefully established his habit of going to bed early. Just before the men would leave for the nightly crap game in Hut Four.

"Yeah," Danny said. "I'm just bored, is all. Isn't there *anything* to do around here?"

"Crap game in Hut Four," Moose said dubiously. "I don't suppose a kid like you'd be interested in that."

Danny bristled in spite of himself, but he kept his voice casual. "Might be," he said. "Something to do, anyway."

"It's a money game, Danny," Moose said kindly. "For keeps."

Danny shrugged. "Something to do," he repeated sullenly, as if he were slightly insulted.

"You'd do better to save your dough to go back to school," Moose advised him seriously.

"Who knows?" Danny said. "Maybe I'd be lucky."

"You ever shoot craps before?"

"Sure," Danny said gruffly, with just a trace of self-consciousness. "What d'you think I am, a punk kid?"

Moose laughed. "Well, it's an open game," he said. "You can come over if you want to. About nine thirty, usually."

"Maybe I will," Danny reached for a girly magazine, which he opened carefully. "I might just do that." Behind the lurid cover of the magazine he smiled broadly. Now it was established that Moose had invited him into the game.

He didn't go that night. But the next night he went, and he lost two dollars.

His hands were shaking when

he got back to his own hut. Even in a game like that, just fooling around, the excitement got to him —the tension of the players, the rapid-fire chatter, the swift side bets, the squalling and the rhythm of the game, like a steady drum roll.

That's what you got to watch, he told himself, and he could hear Mike's glum voice saying, "You like the dice too much for your own good. Don't get hooked by your own pitch."

Play it smart. And cool. Stand off to one side a little. Don't get involved. Still, his hands were shaking.

They liked to have him there, he knew. It was a kind of comedy relief, his studiedly hesistant roll, sometimes not even reaching the backboard — his over-exuberant, youthful excitement, the way he was obviously trying to imitate some of the more experienced players.

I'm not *involved,* he thought resentfully. *It's part of the pitch. They expect me to be excited. It's all part of the pitch.* Reassuring that part of his mind that spoke with Mike's gloomy voice.

They'd covered his fifty cent bets solemnly, as if it were money to be reckoned with. A lot of the loggers made side bets backing him up, and they shouted their encouragement as he spun the dice down on the table. Once he'd bet three whole dollars, and Moose whistled. "Say," he said in a tone of awe, "big spender from the East!"

They all laughed and Danny rolled and that was when he went three dollars in the hole.

He bet cautiously then, fifty cents a roll on the next two. He rubbed his sweating palm across his shirt front to dry it. Then he came out sevens both times, wining a sum total of one buck. He grinned around the table happily, with obvious pleasure, and it was perfectly sincere.

He was very happy about the rolls, because nobody had seen him pick his own dice out of the slit in his shirt. He was a real pro.

Danny played on several other nights during his second week on the job. He established in everybody's mind the little nervous habit he had of drying his hand on his shirt front. And he watched the game, mapping out its pattern, because every game has its own pattern and its own rhythm, and a hustler has to know what it is.

The loggers weren't too serious, for the most part. They were killing time and having fun. They were in it for the game.

The rhythm in this particular bunch of men broke sharply at a hundred dollars. Until then it was staccato and free. But a hundred dollars was the breaking point, and at that they settled down and

the feel of the game became heavier. It was a good thing to know.

They had a green-shaded light over the makeshift table and it cast a direct, harsh glare straight down, making very black shadows. The shadows helped confuse the swift motions his hand made at the shirt pocket.

In the middle of the third week Danny decided to make the pitch.

After dinner he counted out his $250 carefully on the bed, in plain sight. He took $200 and ostentatiously put them in his pocket; carefully he folded up the remaining $50 and tucked it in his bag.

"What you doing with the money, kid?" Moose asked him.

"Tonight I'm going to shoot some real craps," Danny said boastfully.

"Take it easy, Danny," Moose said, frowning.

"It's *my* dough," Danny said defensively.

"Sure. But don't be silly."

"I feel lucky."

"Look, kid, it's Thursday. Everybody's loaded from payday yesterday. It'll be a big game."

"Sure," Danny said truculently. "And I feel lucky."

After a moment Moose shrugged. "Okay," he said. "You're old enough to look out for yourself." He went back to his interminable composition of a letter to his wife, which he wrote every night.

I sure am, you dumb stiff, Danny thought. *I sure as hell am.*

He was beginning to feel a little nervous, and he lay back on the bed, deliberately calming himself. It wouldn't do to have his hand shake at the wrong time. It didn't mean anything, the nervousness. He always felt this way before a game. A little empty inside. It didn't mean a thing. After a while he went to Hut Four.

They were playing fairly high stakes already, and there wasn't the usual kidding around the table. For a moment Danny considered calling off the pitch. Then he shrugged away the thought. There was money on the table tonight, real money. It could be better than Seattle. Tonight was the best chance he'd get.

And tomorrow he'd be gone, and the day after—San Francisco, with a wad in his pocket. He'd always have his dice if he needed more. There were marks every place. You just had to play it smart. The thought cheered him, and he went into the game feeling good.

He laid ten dollars down when the dice got to him, but nobody seemed surprised. He'd come in late, and Moose had apparently spread the word of Danny's intention to "shoot some real craps."

"Okay, roll 'em, Danny boy!"

"Bet your life," he muttered, and shook the dice loudly and rolled.

They clicked hard off the backboard and came out to a deuce and three.

"Five's the point," somebody said.

"Little Danny's got a five. Let's roll 'em. Danny's got a five to make."

"Five's a point," another voice chanted. "Five-five-little-fever, let's have 'em."

Danny rolled. Pair of fours.

"Ada, sweet Ada, *five's* a point!" Danny took up the dice as they were swept back to him and shook them again, talking to them. There were more voices entering now, and as Danny was caught up by the spinning white cubes the voices dwindled to a steady drone somewhere.

"Five-five-five, feel-a-fever, never make a five, seven coming, seven-seven . . ."

Danny rolled. Six and three.

"Nine from *Car-o-line!* Keep that six up there, Danny boy, and show us a one. Show us a one. Seven coming. Seven coming, keep that six showing, Danny boy, can't make a fever with a six showing."

Danny barely heard. He rolled again. Three and four.

"And a *seven!*" came the voice in his ear. "And the dice moved."

Danny moved away from the head of the table and the next man moved up. He came out craps, decided it wasn't his night, and passed the dice on, content to bet against the roller.

The dice went all the way around, a little money changing hands, nothing much. Then they came back to Danny again.

"You guys are all chicken," he said. "Let's see some money on this table. Cover me for fifty." He slapped the five ten-dollar bills down and listened carefully for the reaction. It was good.

"That's 'a' spirit!" somebody said. "Let's get a little life in the game!" And Danny smiled.

"All right, I got fifty says Danny's lucky. Cover me." Somebody was backing him. He didn't like that; it meant less money for him, but both bets were covered and he shook up the dice in his hand, watching the long table.

"Coming out," he said.

"Bring 'em out nice, Danny," said the man backing him. "Got fifty on you and don't even know the point, bring 'em out nice."

He flung his hand forward and the dice flipped out and away, sparkling.

"Six a point! Pair of threes! Easy point, Danny."

Danny rolled: Eight, five, nine, and — six. His partner whooped with joy.

"He's got it tonight! Keep 'em coming baby, another fifty says he's got it tonight!" Danny licked his lips.

His next point was eight. He sevened out before he got it, breaking even. The dice moved on. Danny stepped back from the table, digging his fingernails into the palm of his right hand. The tension had hold of him and the drum-tattoo of the game was racing in his head.

He watched the dice rolling on the table, bumping against the backboard, flipping and turning and dancing under the glaring light. They were alive, skittering and rolling and spinning down the long table.

His eyes were pinned to their glittering dance, the white-and-bright of the black-eyed cubes.

Then they were back to him and he took them in his hands, caressingly.

He came out with a five and made it on a bet of $50.

He left the hundred lying out in front.

"Cover it," he said, and they covered it. He looked down the length of the table to the backboard and it seemed a long distance away. He rattled the dice in his hand, then spun them out and down the long green path, bumping and rolling, clicking away against the backboard and rebounding high into the air and falling back to the soft green and dying there.

Six.

He rolled with the clean dice and he rolled four, three, nine, eight, then six. He raked the dice in before he touched the money, and rubbed them between his palms.

"Cover it," he said, leaving the two hundred.

He didn't look at any of the men but sensed they were quiet. Two hundred was a big bet, but among them they promptly covered it. One of them left the hut, not interested when the stakes got this high.

Danny came out. Eleven. And with a clean pair of dice.

The table seemed to expand and contract in front of his eyes, growing longer and shorter by turns. He now had $400 in front of him.

"Cover it," he said, and this time he counted the money that was put out to cover the bet. It was right, and he rolled.

He came out nine and quickly made it. He had $800—and all with clean dice.

There was perspiration on his forehead and he wiped it off with his sleeve. $800. He tugged at his lower lip with his teeth.

He wanted a thousand, but hell, a thousand was nothing; he was hot—he'd make fifteen hundred. Would they sit still for eight hundred bet? *Would they?* He'd make two thousand. He was hot. The dice were his and he was hot and they danced for him.

"Betting eight hundred," he said.

There was some muttering, and somebody said, "Take it easy." Someone else left the hut.

"Betting eight hundred," he snapped. "You want to play dice or not?" His voice was edgy, too tense.

Calm down, he told himself. *Relax. Take it easy-easy-easy—you got to play it smart. God, I'm hot!*

"Sure, Danny," said a quiet voice, and Danny vaguely recognized it as Moose's from some memory of

an eternity ago. "We'll play dice. You handle those dice real good, Danny."

There were five of them left and they covered the eight hundred.

He wiped the perspiration off his forehead again. Then he wiped his hand across his shirt front out of habit, but he didn't switch dice. He didn't need fixed dice tonight. He was hot. Tonight he was hot.

His throat felt very dry, full of cotton, and the light was terribly bright in his eyes and the backboard was a long way down an endless green strip. But he knew the dice would get there all the same.

He came out seven and shut his eyes tightly and bit his lip and raked in the dice himself and piled the money in front of him. Under the brightness of the light the backs of his hands were very, very white. He could see the delicate blue tracery of veins just beneath the surface.

"All right," he said, swallowing. "All right. What will you cover?"

There was a salty taste in his mouth where he'd bitten his lip, and a stinging in his eyes where sweat had seeped in the corners. *I'm hot, my god, I'm hot! I'll make three thousand. I'll do it. This is big, this is the big one, this is for me.*

"What do we play?" he asked desperately, looking around him into the blackness that surged at the edge of his vision.

"We'll play sixteen hundred." The voice was very flat, very cold.

Sixteen hundred bet. He'd never seen that much money on a table in his life. $3200. The works. Go for broke. All or nothing. Clean dice—this was it, this was the last one, the big one. He had to make it—he had to!

"Sixteen hundred," he whispered to the dice in his hand. "All right, sixteen hundred," and his hand was shaking and he knew he couldn't get the other dice out of his pocket. He'd have to do it clean.

His fingernails dug into his palm; he could feel a trickle of perspiration running down his back.

He took the dice in his hand. He jerkily shook them up. Automatically he rubbed his palm across his shirt front. He felt his thumb catch on something and heard fabric tear, but for a moment he didn't understand what it meant. The only thing he could think was that he was making it clean.

Numbly he stared down at the table and at the extra pair of dice that were still swirling there. He watched them blankly until they stopped, showing five and two, and then he looked at the clean dice still in his hand and rolled them gently down the table.

He stood up straight in a great silence. He looked into the light and it blinded him, but he could hear the restless shuffling of heavy boots.

He could certainly hear that.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**AGATHA CHRISTIE**
TITLE:	***The Blue Geranium***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	Miss Marple
LOCALE:	St. Mary Mead, England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*Zarida, Reader of the Future, predicted that a blue primrose would mean* warning, *a blue hollyhock would foretell* DANGER, *and a blue geranium—DEATH...*

"WHEN I WAS DOWN HERE last year—" said Sir Henry Clithering, and stopped.

His hostess, Mrs. Bantry, looked at him curiously.

The Ex-Commissioner of Scotland Yard was staying with old friends of his, Colonel and Mrs. Bantry, who lived near St. Mary Mead.

Mrs. Bantry, pen in hand, had just asked his advice as to who should be invited to make a sixth guest at dinner that evening.

"Yes" said Mrs. Bantry encouragingly. "When you were here last year?"

"Tell me," said Sir Henry, "do you know a Miss Marple?"

Mrs. Bantry was surprised. It was the last thing she had expected.

"Know Miss Marple? Who doesn't! The typical old maid of fiction. Quite a dear, but hopelessly behind the times. Do you mean you would like me to ask *her* to dinner?"

"You are surprised?"

"A little, I must confess. I should hardly have thought you—but perhaps there's an explanation?"

"The explanation is simple enough. When I was down here last year we got into the habit of discussing unsolved mysteries—there were five or six of us—Ray

mond West, the novelist, started it. We each supplied a story to which we knew the answer, but nobody else did. It was supposed to be an exercise in the deductive faculties—to see who could get nearest the truth."

"Well?"

"Like in the old story—we hardly realized that Miss Marple was playing; but we were very polite about it—didn't want to hurt the old dear's feelings. And now comes the cream of the jest. The old lady outdid us every time!"

"What?"

"I assure you—straight to the truth like a homing pigeon."

"But how extraordinary! Why, dear old Miss Marple has hardly ever been out of St. Mary Mead."

"Ah! But according to her, that has given her unlimited opportunities of observing human nature—under the microscope, as it were."

"I suppose there's something in that," conceded Mrs. Bantry. "One would at least know the petty side of people. But I don't think we have any really exciting criminals in our midst. I think we must try her with Arthur's ghost story after dinner. I'd be thankful if she'd find a solution to that."

"I didn't know that Arthur believed in ghosts."

"Oh, he doesn't. That's what worries him so. And it happened to a friend of his, George Pritchard—a most prosaic person. It's really rather tragic for poor George. Either this extraordinary story is true—or else—"

"Or else what?"

Mrs. Bantry did not answer. After a minute or two she said irrelevantly, "You know, I like George—everyone does. One can't believe that he—but people do do such extraordinary things."

Sir Henry nodded. He knew, better than Mrs. Bantry, the extraordinary things that people did.

So it came about that evening Mrs. Bantry looked around her dinner table (shivering a little as she did so, because of the dining-room, like most English dining-rooms, was extremely cold) and fixed her gaze on the very upright old lady sitting on her husband's right. Miss Marple wore black lace mittens; an old lace fichu was draped round her shoulders and another piece of lace surmounted her white hair. She was talking animatedly to the elderly doctor, Dr. Lloyd, about the Workhouse and the suspected shortcomings of the District Nurse.

Mrs. Bantry marveled anew. She even wondered whether Sir Henry had been making an elaborate joke—but there seemed no point in that. Incredible that what he had said could really be true.

Her glance went on and rested affectionately on her red-faced broad-shouldered husband as he sat talking horses to Jane Helier, the beautiful and popular actress. Jane, more beautiful (if that were possible) off

the stage than on, opened enormous blue eyes and murmured at discreet intervals: "Really?" "Oh fancy!" "How extraordinary!" She knew nothing whatever about horses and cared less.

"Arthur," said Mrs. Bantry, "you're boring poor Jane to distraction. Leave horses alone and tell her your ghost story instead. You know . . . George Pritchard."

"Eh, Dolly? Oh, but I don't know—"

"Sir Henry wants to hear it too. I was telling him something about it this morning. It would be interesting to hear what everyone has to say about it."

"Oh, do!" said Jane. "I love ghost stories."

"Well—" Colonel Bantry hesitated. "I've never believed much in the supernatural. But this—

"I don't think any of you know George Pritchard. He's one of the best. His wife—well, she's dead now, poor woman. I'll just say this much: she didn't give George any too easy a time when she was alive. She was one of those semi-invalids—I believe she really had something wrong with her, but whatever it was she played it for all it was worth. She was capricious, exacting, unreasonable. She complained from morning to night. George was expected to wait on her hand and foot, and every thing he did was always wrong and he got cursed for it. Most men, I'm fully convinced, would have hit her over the head with a hatchet long ago. Eh, Dolly, isn't that so?"

"She was a dreadful woman," said Mrs. Bantry with conviction. "If George Pritchard had brained her with a hatchet, and there had been any woman on the jury, he would have been triumphantly acquitted."

"I don't quite know how this business started. George was rather vague about it. I gather Mrs. Pritchard had always had a weakness for fortune-tellers, palmists, clairvoyantes—anything of that sort. George didn't mind. If she found amusement in it well and good. But he refused to go into rhapsodies himself, and that was another grievance.

"A succession of hospital nurses was always passing through the house, Mrs. Pritchard usually becoming dissatisfied with them after a few weeks. One young nurse had been very keen on this fortune-telling stunt, and for a time Mrs. Pritchard had been extremely fond of her. Then she suddenly fell out with her and insisted on her going. She had back another nurse who had been with her previously—an older woman, experienced and tactful in dealing with a neurotic patient. Nurse Copling, according to George, was a very good sort—a sensible woman to talk to. She put up with Mrs. Pritchard's tantrums and nerve-storms with complete indifference.

"Mrs. Pritchard always lunched

upstairs, and it was usual at lunch time for George and the nurse to come to some arrangement for the afternoon. Strictly speaking, the nurse went off from two to four, but 'to oblige,' as the phrase goes, she would sometimes take her time off after tea if George wanted to be free for the afternoon. On this occasion she mentioned that she was going to see a sister at Golders Green and might be a little late returning. George's face fell, for he had arranged to play a round of golf. Nurse Copling, however, reassured him.

"'We'll neither of us be missed, Mr. Pritchard.' A twinkle came into her eye. 'Mrs. Pritchard's going to have more exciting company than ours.'

"'Who's that?'

"'Wait a minute,' Nurse Copling's eye twinkled more than ever. 'Let me get it right. *Zarida, Psychic Reader of the Future.*'

"'Oh, Lord!' groaned George. 'That's a new one, isn't it?'

"'Quite new. I believe my predecessor, Nurse Carstairs, sent her along. Mrs. Pritchard hasn't seen her yet. She made me write, fixing an appointment for this afternoon.'

"'Well, at any rate, I shall get my golf,' said George, and he went off with the kindliest feelings toward Zarida, the Reader of the Future.

"On his return to the house, he found Mrs. Pritchard in a state of great agitation. She was, as usual, lying on her invalid couch, and she had a bottle of smelling salts in her hand which she sniffed at frequent intervals.

"'George,' she exclaimed. 'What did I tell you about this house? The moment I came into it, I *felt* there was something wrong! Didn't I tell you so at the time?'

"Repressing his desire to reply, 'You always do,' George said, 'No, can't say I remember it.'

"'You never do remember anything that has to do with me. Men are all extraordinarily callous—but I really believe that you are even more insensitive than most.'

"'Oh, come now, Mary dear, that's not fair.'

"'Well, as I was telling you, this woman *knew* at once! She—she actually blenched—if you know what I mean—as she came in at that door, and she said, "There is evil here—evil and danger. I feel it."'

"Very unwisely George laughed.

"'Well, you have had your money's worth this afternoon.'

"His wife closed her eyes and took a long sniff from her smelling-bottle.

"'How you hate me! You would jeer and laugh if I were dying.'

"George protested and after a minute or two she went on.

"'You may laugh, but I shall tell you the whole thing. This house is definitely dangerous to me—the woman said so.'

"George's formerly kind feeling

toward Zarida underwent a change. He knew his wife was perfectly capable of insisting on moving to a new house if the caprice got hold of her.

"'What else did she say?' he asked.

"'She couldn't tell me very much. She was so upset. One thing she did say. I had some violets in a glass. She pointed at them and cried out. 'Take those away. No blue flowers—never have blue flowers. *Blue flowers are fatal to you—remember that.*'

"'And you know,' added Mrs. Pritchard, 'I always have told you that blue as a color is repellent to me. I feel a natural instinctive sort of warning against it.'

"George was much too wise to remark that he had never heard her say so before. Instead, he asked what the mysterious Zarida was like. Mrs. Pritchard entered with gusto upon a description.

"'Black hair in coiled knobs over her ears—her eyes were half closed – great black rims round them—she had a black veil over her mouth and chin—she spoke in a kind of singing voice with a marked foreign accent—Spanish, I think–'

"'In fact, all the usual stock-in-trade,' said George cheerfully.

"His wife immediately closed her eyes.

"'I feel extremely ill," she said. 'Ring for nurse. Unkindness upsets me, as you know only too well.'

"It was two days later that Nurse Copling came to George with a grave face.

"'Will you come to Mrs. Pritchard, please. She has had a letter which upsets her greatly.'

"He found his wife with the letter in her hand. She held it out to him.

"'Read it,' she said.

"George read it. It was on heavily scented paper, and the writing was big and black.

"*'I have seen the Future. Be warned before it is too late. Beware of the full moon. The Blue Primrose means Warning; the Blue Hollyhock means Danger; the Blue Geranium means Death. . . .'*

"Just about to burst out laughing George caught Nurse Copling's eye. She made a quick warning gesture. He said rather awkardly, 'The woman's probably trying to frighten you, Mary. Anyway, there aren't such things as blue primroses and blue geraniums.'

"But Mrs. Pritchard began to cry and say her days were numbered. Nurse Copling came out with George upon the landing.

"'Of all the silly tomfoolery,' he burst out.

"'I suppose it is.'

"Something in the nurse's tone struck him, and he stared at her in amazement.

"'Surely, nurse, you don't believe—"

"'No, no, Mr. Pritchard. I don't believe in reading the future—that's

nonsense. What puzzles me is the *meaning* of this. Fortune-tellers are usually out for what they can get. But this woman seems to be frightening Mrs. Pritchard with no advantage to herself. I can't see the point. There's another thing—'

"'Yes?'

"'Mrs. Pritchard says that something about Zarida was faintly familiar to her.'

"'Well?'

"'Well, I don't like it, Mr. Pritchard, that's all.'

"'I didn't know you were so superstitious, nurse.'

"'I'm not superstitious; but I know when a thing is fishy.'

"It was about four days after this that the first incident happened. To explain it to you, I shall have to describe Mrs. Pritchard's room—"

"You'd better let me do that," interrupted Mrs. Bantry. "It was papered with one of these new wallpapers where you apply clumps of flowers to make a kind of herbaceous border. The effect is almost like being in a garden—though, of course, the flowers are all wrong; I mean they simply couldn't be in bloom all at the same time—"

"Don't let a passion for horticultural accuracy run away with you, Dolly," said her husband. "We all know you're an enthusiastic gardener."

"Well, it *is* absurd," protested Mrs. Bantry. "To have bluebells and daffodils and lupins and hollyhocks and Michaelmas daisies all grouped into a tangle together."

"Most unscientific," said Colonel Bantry. "But to proceed with the story . . . Among these massed flowers were primroses — clumps of yellow and pink primroses. Well, one morning Mrs. Pritchard rang her bell violently and the household came running—thought she was in extremis. But not at all. She was terribly excited and pointing to the wallpaper; and there sure enough was *one blue primrose* in the midst of the others . . ."

"Oh," said Miss Helier, "how creepy!"

"The question was: Hadn't the blue primrose always been there? That was George's suggestion and the nurse's. But Mrs. Pritchard wouldn't have it. She had never noticed it till that very morning and the night before had been full moon. She was very upset about it."

"I met George Pritchard that same day and he told me about it," said Mrs. Bantry. "I went to see Mrs. Pritchard and did my best to ridicule the whole thing; but without success. I came away really concerned, and I remember I met Jean Instow and told her about it. Jean is a queer girl. She said, "So she's really upset about it?" I told her that I thought the woman was perfectly capable of dying of fright, that she was really abnormally superstitious.

"I remember Jean rather startled me with what she said next. She

said, 'Well, that might be all for the best, mightn't it?' And she said it so coolly, in so matter-of-fact a tone that I was really—well, shocked. Of course, I know it's done nowadays—to be brutal and outspoken; but I never get used to it. Jean smiled at me rather oddly and said, 'You don't like my saying that—but it's true. What use is Mrs. Pritchard's life to her? None at all; and it's hell for George Pritchard. To have his wife frightened out of existence would be the best thing that could happen to him.' I said, 'George is most awfully good to her always.' And she said, 'Yes, he deserves a reward, poor dear. He's a very attractive person, George Pritchard. The last nurse thought so—the pretty one—what was her name? Carstairs. That was the cause of the row between her and Mrs. P.'

"Now I didn't like hearing Jean say that. Of course one had *wondered—*"

"Yes, dear," said Miss Marple placidly. "One always does. Is Miss Instow a pretty girl? I suppose she plays golf?"

"Yes. She's good at all games. And she's attractive-looking, very fair with a healthy skin, and nice steady blue eyes. Of course, we always have felt that she and George Pritchard—I mean if things had been different—they are so well suited to one another."

"And they were friends?" asked Miss Marple.

"Oh, yes. Great friends."

"Do you think, Dolly," said Colonel Bantry plaintively, "that I might be allowed to go on with my story?"

"Arthur," said Mrs. Bantry resignedly, "wants to get back to his ghosts."

"I had the rest of the story from George himself," went on the colonel. "There's no doubt that Mrs. Pritchard got the wind up badly toward the end of the next month. She marked off on a calendar the day when the moon would be full, and on that night she had both the nurse and then George into her room and made them study the wallpaper carefully. There were pink hollyhocks and red ones, but there were no blue ones. Then when George left the room she locked the door—"

"And in the morning there was a large blue hollyhock," said Miss Helier joyfully.

"Quite right," said Colonel Bantry. "Or at any rate, nearly right. One flower of a hollyhock just above her head had turned blue. It staggered George; and of course the more it staggered him the more he refused to take the thing seriously. He insisted that the whole thing was some kind of practical joke. He ignored the evidence of the locked door and the fact that Mrs. Pritchard discovered the change before anyone—even Nurse Copling—was admitted into her bedroom.

"As I say, it staggered George, and it made him unreasonable. His wife wanted to leave the house, and he wouldn't let her. He was inclined to believe in the supernatural for the first time, but he wasn't going to admit it. He usually gave in to his wife, but this time he just wouldn't. Mary was not to make a fool of herself, he said. The whole thing was the most infernal nonsense.

"And so the next month sped away. Mrs. Pritchard made less protest than one would have imagined. I think she was supersititous enough to believe that she couldn't escape her fate. She repeated again and again, 'The blue primrose—warning. The blue hollyhock—danger. The blue geranium—*death.*' And she would lie there looking at the clump of pinky-red geraniums nearest her bed.

"The whole business was pretty nervy. Even the nurse caught the infection. She came to George two days before full moon and begged him to take Mrs. Pritchard away. George was angry.

"'If all the flowers on that damned wall turned into blue devils it couldn't kill anyone!' he shouted.

"'It might. Shock has killed people before.'

"'Nonsense,' said George.

"George has always been a shade pig-headed. You can't drive him. I believe he had a secret idea that his wife worked the changes herself and that it was all some morbid hysterical plan of hers.

"Well, the fatal night came. Mrs. Pritchard locked her door as usual. She was very calm—in almost an exalted state of mind. The nurse was worried by her state and wanted to give her a stimulant—an injection of strychnine—but Mrs. Pritchard refused. In a way, I believe, she was enjoying herself. George said she was."

"I think that's quite possible," said Mrs. Bantry. "There must have been a strange sort of glamor about the whole thing."

"There was no violent ringing of a bell the next morning. Mrs. Pritchard usually woke about eight. When, at eight thirty, there was no sign from her, nurse rapped loudly on the door. Getting no reply, she fetched George, and insisted on the door being broken open. They did so with the help of a chisel.

"One look at the still figure on the bed was enough for Nurse Copling. She sent George to telephone for the doctor, but it was too late. Mrs. Pritchard, the doctor said, must have been dead at least eight hours. Her smelling salts lay by her hand on the bed, *and on the wall beside her one of the pinky-red geraniums was a bright deep blue.*"

"Horrible," said Miss Heiler with a shiver.

Sir Henry was frowning.

"No additional details?"

Colonel Bantry shook his head,

but Mrs. Bantry spoke quickly.

"The gas."

"What about the gas?" asked Sir Henry.

"When the doctor arrived there was a slight smell of gas, and sure enough he found the gas ring in the fireplace very slightly turned on; but so little that it couldn't have mattered."

"Did Mr. Pritchard and the nurse not notice it when they first went in?"

"The nurse said she did notice a silent smell. George said he didn't notice gas, but something made him feel queer; but he put that down to shock—and probably it was. At any rate, there was no question of gas poisoning. The smell was scarcely noticeable."

"And that's the end of the story?"

"No, it isn't. One way and another, there was a lot of talk. The servants, you see, had overheard things—had heard, for instance, Mrs. Pritchard telling her husband that he hated her and would jeer if she were dying. And also more recent remarks. She said one day, apropos of his refusing to leave the house, 'Very well, when I am dead, I hope everyone will realize that you have killed me.' And as ill luck would have it, he had been mixing some weed killer for the garden paths the very day before. One of the younger servants had seen him and had afterward observed him taking up a glass of hot milk to his wife.

"The talk spread and grew. The doctor had given a certificate—I don't know exactly in what terms—shock, syncope, heart failure, probably some medical term meaning nothing much. However, the poor lady had not been a month in her grave before the exhumation order was applied for and granted."

"And the result of the autopsy was *nil,* I remember," said Sir Henry gravely.

"The whole thing is really very curious," said Mrs. Bantry. "That fortune-teller, for instance—Zarida. At the address where she was supposed to be, no one had ever heard of any such person!"

"She appeared once—out of the blue," said her husband, "and then utterly vanished."

"And what is more," continued Mrs. Bantry, "little Nurse Carstairs, who was supposed to have recommended her, had never even heard of her."

"It's a mysterious story," said Dr. Lloyd. "One can make guesses; but to guess—"

He shook his head.

"Has Mr. Pritchard married Miss Instow?" asked Miss Marple in her gentle voice.

"Now why do you ask that?" inquired Sir Henry.

Miss Marple opened gentle blue eyes.

"It seems to me so important," she said. "Have they married?"

Colonel Bantry shook his head.

"We—well, we expected some-

thing of the kind—but it's eighteen months now. I don't believe they even see much of each other."

"That is important," said Miss Marple. "Very important."

"Then you think the same as I do," said Mrs. Bantry.

"Now, Dolly," said her husband. "It's unjustifiable—what you're going to say. You can't go about accusing people."

"Don't be so—so manly, Arthur. Men are always afraid to say *anything*. Anyway, this is all between ourselves. It's just a wild fantastic idea of mine that possibly—only *possibly* — Jean Instow disguised herself as a fortune-teller. Mind you, she may have done it for a joke. I don't for a minute think she meant any harm; but if she did do it, and if Mrs. Pritchard was foolish enough to die of fright—well, that's what Miss Marple meant, wasn't it?"

"No, dear, not quite," said Miss Marple, "You see, if I were going to kill anyone—which, of course, I wouldn't dream of doing for a minute, because it would be very wicked, and besides I don't like killing—not even wasps, though I know it has to be, and I'm sure the gardener does it as humanely as possible. Let me see, what was I saying?"

"If you wished to kill anyone," prompted Sir Henry.

"Oh, yes. Well, if I did, I shouldn't be at all satisfied to trust to *fright*. I know one reads of people dying of it, but it seems a very uncertain sort of thing, and the most nervous people are far more brave than one really thinks they are. I should like something definite and certain, and make a thoroughly good plan about it."

"Miss Marple," said Sir Henry, "you frighten me. I hope you will never wish to remove me."

Miss Marple looked at him reproachfully.

"I thought I had made it clear that I would never contemplate such wickedness," she said. "No, I was trying to put myself in the place of—er—a certain person."

"Do you mean George Pritchard?" asked Colonel Bantry. "I'll never believe it of George—though, mind you, even the nurse believes it. I went and saw her about a month afterward, at the time of the exhumation. She didn't know how it was done—in fact, she wouldn't say anything at all—but it was clear enough that she believed George to be in some way responsible for his wife's death."

"Well," said Dr. Lloyd, "perhaps she wasn't so far wrong. And mind you, a nurse often *knows*. She got no proof—but she *knows*."

Sir Henry leaned forward.

"Come now, Miss Marple," he said persuasively. "You're lost in a daydream. Won't you tell us all about it?"

Miss Marple started and turned pink.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

"I was just thinking about our District Nurse. A most difficult problem."

"More difficult than the problem of a blue geranium?"

"It really depends on the primroses," said Miss Marple. "I mean, Mrs. Bantry said they were yellow and pink. If it was a pink primrose that turned blue, of course, that fits in perfectly. But if it happened to be a yellow one—"

"It was a pink one," said Mrs. Bantry.

She stared. They all stared at Miss Marple.

"Then that seems to settle it," said Miss Marple. She shook her head regretfully. "And the wasp season and everything. And of course the gas."

"It reminds you, I suppose, of countless village tragedies?" said Sir Henry.

"Not tragedies," said Miss Marple. "And certainly nothing criminal. But it does remind me a little of the trouble we are having with the District Nurse. After all, nurses are human beings, and what with having to be so correct in the behavior and wearing those uncomfortable collars and being so thrown with the family — well, can you wonder that things happen?"

A glimmer of light broke upon Sir Henry.

"You mean Nurse Carstairs?"

"Oh, no. Not Nurse Carstairs. Nurse *Copling*. You see, she had been there before, and very much thrown with Mr. Pritchard, who you say is an attractive man. I daresay she thought, poor thing—well, we needn't go into that. I don't suppose she knew about Miss Instow, and of course afterward, when she found out, it turned her against him and she tried to do all the harm she could. Of course the letter really gave her away, didn't it?"

"What letter?"

"Well, she wrote to the fortune-teller at Mrs. Pritchard's request, and the fortune-teller came, apparently in answer to the letter. But later it was discovered that there never had been such a person at that address. So that shows that Nurse Copling was in it. She only pretended to write—so what could be more likely than that *she* was the fortune-teller herself?"

"I never saw the point about the letter," said Sir Henry.

"Rather a bold step to take," said Miss Marple, "because Mrs. Pritchard might have recognized her in spite of the disguise—though of course if she had, the nurse could have said it was a joke."

"What did you mean," said Sir Henry, "when you said that if you were a certain person you would not have trusted to fright?"

"One couldn't be *sure* that way," said Miss Marple. "No, I think that the warnings and the blue flowers were, if I may use a military term," she laughed self-consciously—"just *camouflage.*"

"And the real thing?"

"I know," said Miss Marple apologetically, "that I've got wasps on the brain. Poor things, destroyed in the thousands—and usually on such a beautiful summer's day. But I remember thinking, when I saw the gardener shaking up the cyanide of potassium in a bottle with water, how like smelling salts it looked. And if it were put in a smelling-salt bottle and substituted for the real one—well, the poor lady was in the habit of using her smelling salts. Indeed, you said they were found by her hand. Then, of course, while Mr. Pritchard went to telephone to the doctor, the nurse would change it for the real bottle, and she'd just turn on the gas a little bit to mask any smell of almonds and in case anyone felt queer, and I always have heard that cyanide leaves no trace if you wait long enough. But, of course I may be wrong, and it may have been something entirely different in the bottle; but that doesn't really matter, does it?"

Jane Heilier leaned forward and said, "But the blue geranium, and the other flowers?"

"Nurses always have litmus paper, don't they?" said Miss Marple, "for—well, for testing. Not a very pleasant subject. We won't dwell on it. I have done a little nursing myself." She grew delicately pink. "Blue turns red with acids, and red turns blue with alkalies. So easy to paste some red litmus over a ready flower—near the bed, of course. And then, when the poor lady used her smelling salts, the strong ammonia fumes would turn it blue. Really most ingenious. Of course, the geranium wasn't blue when they first broke into the room—nobody noticed it till afterward. When nurse changed the bottles, she held the Sal Ammoniac against the wallpaper for a minute, I expect."

"You might have been there, Miss Marple," said Sir Henry.

"What worries me," said Miss Marple, "is poor Mr. Pritchard and that nice girl, Miss Instow. Probably both suspecting each other and keeping apart—and life so very short."

She shook her head.

"You needn't worry," said Sir Henry. "As a matter of fact I have something up my sleeve. A nurse has been arrested on a charge of murdering an elderly patient who had left her a legacy. It was done with cyanide of potassium substituted for smelling salts. Nurse Copling trying the same trick again. Miss Instow and Mr. Pritchard need have no doubts."

"Now isn't that nice?" cried Miss Marple. "I don't mean about the new murder, of course. That's very sad, and shows how much wickedness there is in the world, and that if once you give way—which reminds me I *must* finish my little conversation with Dr. Lloyd about the village nurse."

a new story by

RUFUS KING

The Tigress of the Chateau Plage

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	RUFUS KING
TITLE:	*The Tigress of the Chateau Plage*
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	East Coast of Florida
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*The porcelain miniature was an Aladdin's lamp that could bring Henri Pazz his heart's desire—even against so ruthless a foe as* la femme formidable . . .

MADAME DUFOUR EMERGED FROM her mezzanine suite and descended marble stairs to the rococo lounge of the Chateau Plage.

Outside, beyond a bank of plate-glass doors that led to a flagged terrace and an irritable Atlantic Ocean, the late afternoon was miserable. The weather was creating one of those rare mid-January rhapsodies of wind and tropical rain that drive the Chambers of Commerce along Florida's Gold Coast into spells of acute despair and premonitions of bankruptcy.

Madame Dufour both owned and personally operated the Chateau Plage, which remained one of the few finer old hotels left standing along that costly stretch of sand between Miami Beach and Fort Lauderdale.

Madame herself was a perfect specimen of what the French are accustomed to label *la femme formidable*. At the age of ten she had been struck totally bald as the result of typhoid fever, a tonsorial disaster that had naturally distorted the whole course of her childhood and adult life into odd channels. Even the foggiest psychiatrist would have attributed her absolute amorality to this catastrophe of hairlessness, and with no professional bother about stretching her out on a couch.

For years now a naturalized citizen of the United States, Madame had been born in Montreal

during the closing period of Queen Victoria's tightly bodiced reign. Her appearance (whenever she thought to wear one of her scarlet wigs) was superb for her years, while her bold features showed the bland arrogance common to ladies of the French *noblesse* who had managed to retain their heads upon their necks. Her intensely dark hypnotic eyes had the waiting quality of unfired bullets, and the Chateau's selective clientèle naturally—being fed up to their fleshpots and gilt-edged incomes with the commonplace—adored her.

While she crossed the lounge to the reception desk, several bets changed hands among small groups of guests who were marooned indoors by the weather. There was a running book on whether her public appearances would be scarlet-wigged or wigless—in the latter stage, of course, she rather resembled a caricature of Yul Brynner, the bizarre baldness not detracting an iota from her commanding presence and general aura of her reserved power.

She said to the desk clerk, "Let me have the reservations for this evening's arrivals, Enrico."

Enrico, a killingly good-looking type full of rich dark Italian blood, took six cards from the rack. Madame Dufour made a pretense of inspecting them. She was perfectly aware of their contents from her regular early-morning check-up, and she knew exactly the one she intended to put to her uses.

"This one, Enrico. Mr. J. Compton Bell. You will change the location of his room. I wish this number reserved for a Mr. Henri Pazz. It is understood that Mr. Pazz arrives on the evening flight from Montreal."

Enrico shrugged with that Latin effect which translates each gesture into a delicately suggested seduction. He was indifferent to the bedded or unbedded future status of J. Compton Bell, whom he knew to be an inconsequential cousin to the soap dynasty outfit whose 30-room winter home lay a mile or so along the beach.

"But impossible, Madame. We are full up."

Madame's basilisk eyes pinned him coldly. "There is always 1207," she said.

The shock of astonishment stamped itself on Enrico's classic features. "You wish Mr. Bell transferred to 1207?"

"I wish."

Enrico tore the Bell reservation in half. He took a fresh card and assigned the room number being held for J. Compton Bell to this out-of-the-blue Henri Pazz. "Credit rating, Madame?"

Madame Dufour's brief smile reflected the glint of distant icebergs. "Unlimited."

The situation made little sense to Enrico as he took a blank card and assigned the negligible cousin of the soap makers to 1207. It was

a puzzle of magnitude. 1207, a handsome suite of plum velvets, ormolu and Louis Quinze, was a constant vacancy, one held strictly in reserve for the unheralded appearance of some personage of exceptional prominence. Not over four times during Enrico's tenure had it been assigned—the last having been to an ousted South American dictator in passage, incognito, to a Caribbean hideout where reposed three of his eight mistresses and the main bulk of his loot.

That suite 1207 should now be placed at the disposal of this abysmally obscure, this very tiny cake of soap, was a *grotesque*. And how about this Montreal Henri Pazz with his for-the-good-Madonna's-sake unlimited credit? Why had *he* not been awarded this unique distinction of the VIP suite, and the Bell nonentity permitted to retain his more modest and certainly more seemly room-and-bath?

Shortly after seven o'clock Madame Dufour, a monolith of patience in dark violet crêpe-de-Chine, acknowledged the nod of a page boy stationed at the lounge's front entrance by rising from a citron damask love seat and moving toward the shallow staircase that descended to the lobby doors.

A young man entered, followed by a bellboy carrying a winter overcoat and a single suitcase, the latter inexpensively manufactured out of imitation leather in a bilious yellow. Madame stood immobile and regarded with intense if passive concentration the advancing youth. He was a burly young brute, compact, with an acrobat's physique and dressed with a flashy clutch toward elegance. His features stirred sharp and now dreaded memories of long ago.

"It is Henri?"

"Madame."

She signaled to the bellboy. He departed deskward with the overcoat and bag, being evidently under orders.

Madame continued her close study of Henri's face. Yes, it was there, that reluctant cowardice of character no matter how protectively overlaid by a coating of strength.

"You have your grandfather's look. The lashes of his eyes."

"So it is said, Madame."

"You left it cold in Montreal?"

"The winters remain frigid—as perhaps Madame remembers."

She was shepherding him toward the mezzanine stairs, ignoring and bypassing the reception desk.

"I do not register?"

"It is arranged. The card for your signature awaits in my suite. Formalities do not exist between us, Henri. Your luggage is en route to your room."

A smile that was something of an enigma brushed Henri's full and remotely cruel-looking lips. Old fool, he thought. As if he would entrust what was to become a veritable Aladdin's lamp to a flimsy suitcase! "An honor, Madame," he

murmured without obsequiousness.

In the living room of her suite, the windows of which opened directly above the storm-drenched terrace, Madame Dufour took Henri's unbelievably blue felt fedora and deposited it on a console. She went to a cellarette.

"Cognac, *cher enfant?*"

"Please."

She filled two glasses of a larger size than would be considered proper, indicated a comfortable armchair, and herself elected to sit with impressive formality on a side chair, the seat of which was covered in a gros-point bouquet of shallow roses. For a moment or two they regarded each other, the unfathomable old one and the athletic young one, and after a while Madame Dufour said with no inflection whatsoever, "You have come to blackmail me, of course. And how much do you expect, dear boy?"

Henri regarded her with unwilling admiration. A competent adversary, of a fact! His assurance, however, that inner power of sheer animal youth, remained unruffled. "Madame is direct."

Madame accepted the obvious without comment.

"And," Henri added, "clairvoyant."

"A gift I must repudiate, Henri. Your telegram could be read between its lines by a veritable imbecile. Which," Madame Dufour mentioned complacently, "I am not."

"I had no sense of being so gauche. The wording was for your personal convenience, to prevent embarrassment should the wire intrigue the curious." His piglike eyes glanced brightly at her from beneath the beautiful lashes. "Then all is clear?"

"Well, no, Henri. There are shadows." Madame Dufour then asked, dreading the probable answer—and yet she must ask it in order to be *sure*—"Why is it you have waited until now?"

"But surely that is obvious, Madame? Need I do more than mention—with the most abject respect—the name of your grandniece, the virginal and charming young Seraphine?"

A solid lump of ice and rage occupied Madame Dufour's roomy insides, where lay her deepest rooted, most timeworn fear—fear for her beloved Seraphine. Even though she had known what Henri's answer would be, the shock of his avowal was no less acute. She thought, how wise I have been! My plan, each least arrangement shall proceed. Pity for the youth of this creature, compassion for the memory of his grandfather—they would be follies embraced by fools. There is no answer but death.

Seraphine, her grandniece, who had been orphaned at the age of three, had promptly been enveloped by Madame Dufour and translated into the solitary representative of humanity whom Madame

had ever loved. It had been for Seraphine's future that Madame had invested her capital in the Chateau Plage and divorced herself, with infinite safeguards, from any connection with her past in the Province of Quebec.

She had bestowed on Seraphine a rigorous but the most loving of upbringings, an English governess, an exemplary finishing school outside of Washington, and in recent years the religious and intellectual influence of the sisters of Barry College in nearby Miami Shores. And now the ultimate accolade of an approaching marriage, both of prominence and true love . . .

If.

If this cowardly link with that distant Quebec past, who was facing her with the poisonous attention of an assured gila monster, would fall into her trap.

Madame Dufour permitted a hint of the deadly to freight her voice. "There is nothing, there is no person—living, Henri—who shall prevent the marriage ceremony of Seraphine and Jeffrey Sand next week."

"The truth would be able to do so, Madame." Henri again indulged his enigmatic smile. "The exalted Sand family are conditioned by the flexibility of modern society to accepting as a daughter-in-law the grandniece of an hotel keeper. But would they accept the grandniece of a woman notorious throughout the Province of Quebec for having owned and operated a—"

"Silence!"

"Ah!" Henri twisted the knife. "So Madame agrees. There is no defense against it."

Madame allowed a crumbling change to creep over her solid body and her face. "You have me. There is no argument, dear boy. The mere suggestion would spell ruin. Not for me, you understand, because that would not matter, but for the one who is dearer to me than either life or punishment or wealth. No, Henri, there is nothing left but to arrange the terms that will put a lock upon your tongue."

Henri could not repress an expression of surprise, for this was complete capitulation. He did not like it; it worried him. There had been no doubt in his mind but that Madame Dufour would go down, but he had been prepared for her to go down fighting.

Personally, he knew nothing about this woman other than what his grandfather had divulged during the semi-delirious mutterings of his dying hours, while Henri had sat at his bedside. The old man had been under the delusion that he was talking to his son, Henri's father, who had died in Henri's fifth year.

The dying man's babblings had been drunk in by Henri as a draught of liquid gold. And some hours after the old man had passed

on, Henri had managed to locate, in its hiding place among his grandfather's effects, the small oval of porcelain with its damning painting in miniature and ribald doggerel which confirmed the secret that had been fixed in the old man's no longer functioning heart.

But Henri had also gathered from the mutterings that Madame Dufour was a character of indomitable will who could, when put upon, turn into a tigress. There had even been the babbled incident about one of Madame's girls who had attempted extortion upon several of her married clients. The old man had then been the establishment's bouncer and later, after the silly girl had been properly and permanently attended to, a minor partner of Madame Dufour's.

This did not coincide in Henri's opinion with Madame's present lack of resistance and her instant yielding. *En garde!*

"The terms need not be overwhelming," Henri said. "And assuredly not for a woman of Madame's property and wealth." He added with impudent modesty, "Myself, I am of simple tastes."

With an artistically contrived sigh of relief, the falsity of which was difficult to detect, Madame arose, took Henri's empty glass and her own and went with them to the cellarette.

Henri, with a great show of manners, had also risen. He strolled to a window, turning his back to Madame Dufour and the cellarette. Thus he achieved his first tactical mistake. He parted lime draperies, looked out at the black and storm-harassed evening, and down upon the flagged terrace dimly visible only a dozen feet or so beneath him.

"Your card of registration is here on the desk, Henri."

He went over to the desk and wrote his signature on the card, noting that the room to which he was assigned was Number 101.

"We are both on this floor, Madame?"

"Yes. A matter of a few doors along the corridor. It is agreeable?"

"But why not?" He saw that his glass, refilled with cognac, stood near the card. He raised the glass and said with heavy cynicism, "To the approaching and now assured nuptials of your grandniece, Madame."

"Of a surety, dear boy. It is agreed."

Both drank.

Several moments and several remarks of inconsequential fencing later, the eyelids of Henri with their long lovely lashes closed.

Several moments—several hours?—later, the eyelids opened. Madame Dufour, a portrait of resignation, sat facing him. But — of course!—the room had changed. This was a bedroom. Hers? Of her suite? But no. He observed the inner, solid hall door that stood

open into the room. On a white panel in black numerals was the number 101. The outer door, shuttered for ventilation (the Chateau Plage abjured the nonsense of air conditioning, since it remained open only during the lucrative winter season) was closed. So, Henri decided, he had in some fashion been moved to Room 101, his assigned accommodation on the registration card.

The second glass of cognac—a child could deduce the fact—must have been drugged. And the purpose, to Henri's devious brain, was simple: his pockets and wallet had been searched, just as his overcoat and suitcase had been. It was amusing in the extreme.

Surreptitiously his fingers touched the inner side of his left thigh and were reassured. Beneath the trouser cloth the small oval miniature was still taped to his flesh.

But no, it was not amusing in the extreme. Indeed, it was not amusing at all. The collapse of all defenses on Madame Dufour's part, that had struck him at the time as being out of character, must definitely have been an act—a role she was continuing to play even now.

"Dear boy, you awaken," she said. "You feel refreshed?"

Henri looked at his watch. The hour approached midnight. His smile was as cunning as hers. "I—fell asleep?"

"But naturally! A day of exhausting journeying—the nervous pressure of the affairs that brought you here—you were as they say, out on your feet. I, too, am of a physique, Henri. I led you stumbling the few steps along the corridor and have deposited you here in your room."

Henri allowed this rank fatuity to pass unchallenged. Madame Dufour's first move in her counter-attack, the search, had resulted in failure. That was all that immediately mattered. But her second move, for his eyes were opened now to the truth that there would be a second, even a series of moves . . . The sensation of a growing, unknown danger increased.

"The pressure of affairs, as Madame chooses to call it, is felt mutually. Shall we to our muttons? There is a bistro, a small hotel in reality, situated on the banks of the Richelieu River a half hour's drive from Montreal. It is a good property and the price is cheap."

"You wish to own it, Henri?"

"It is my purpose to."

"Ah, yes. And the cost?"

"A mere bagatelle. Thirty-seven thousand dollars."

Madame Dufour waved jeweled fingers through the air. She said with frigid repression, "A triviality indeed. And in return—it is reasonable, Henri, that you do not rely upon your sayso alone to convince the family of Jeffery Sand?"

"Madame is correct."

"Your proof, then?"

"Perhaps, in the years long ago, you will recall a frequent patron of your house, a young artist who later was to become well-known for his miniature paintings? And his gift to you for the fifth anniversary of the opening of Madame's establishment?"

"Ah . . ."

It was an unavoidable intake of breath. Madame Dufour remembered the small porcelain miniature with its ribald doggerel and (now) baneful painting only too well. But (her mind concentrated on the doggerel's exact wording and the detail in the painting) would the miniature of itself be sufficient proof? Would it rather not be simply a suggestive confirmation? When used in conjunction with the verbal knowledge now lying in this viper's poison sac?

Was either one of value without the other? She decided not. Therefore, if one were eliminated, the more dangerous one of the two, the speaking tongue . . . yes, she had been right. Eliminate Henri, and Seraphine's security would be assured. Madame Dufour's philosophy of induced death was medieval.

"So your grandfather was a thief," she said.

"No, a sentimentalist, Madame. The miniature was a souvenir of sentiment, a tangible memory of his services with you. It shall be yours again when our transaction is completed.

"One understands, dear boy, that there are securities to convert? That the bagatelle, as you so wittily describe it, will take a day or two to procure?"

"Naturally."

"During the brief delay you will remain, of course, the Chateau's honored guest. It is arranged that your credit shall rate as unlimited."

"Madame is too kind."

"This room is agreeable?"

Henri could not rid himself of the premonition that he was being led into some subtly clever trap. Madame Dufour's jelly-like submission, her outrageously false anxiety to lull him into a state of vulnerability . . .

"The room serves admirably, Madame."

Henri rose and made a casual tour. He opened a door that disclosed a spacious bathroom, another a roomy cupboard. He swung the solid inner door in upon the shuttered outer one, and noted that it had a brass safety chain that would permit, when in place, the door to be opened for the space of only a few inches.

"Is this chain not unusual, Madame?" he asked quietly. "Does one find them throughout the hotel?"

"No, Henri. It is unique. For several seasons this room was the standing reservation of a rich widow, a Mrs. Artemus Blaine. One found her an eccentric old creature with delusions of pursuit. Each knock on the door presented itself

to her as a menace to her safety. She died, alas, last spring in Antibes from cirrhosis of the liver."

With the quiet power of the *Queen Mary* getting under way Madame Dufour moved toward the hall door, allowing her hypnotic eyes to play directly on Henri's.

"You have shared this knowledge of my past with no one?"

"Do you take me for a chump, Madame?"

"Some *jeune fille* whom you love?"

"I have no use for love. Women, I do not have to bother about. I am beset with them."

Madame Dufour smiled.

"Restez tranquil, cher ami," she said, and left.

The safety chain.

Henri fingered its brass links with wary bemusement after he had shut and locked the door. Madame Dufour's choice bit of *blague* concerning the eccentric Mrs. Blaine could, one must concede, have been true. But why, then, had not the chain been removed after Mrs. Blaine's unhappy liver had put an end to its need?

He examined each link minutely, searching for some indication that the metal had been secretly weakened by a saw and the cut masked with, say yellow soap. There was nothing. The chain had not been tampered with. He latched it in place. He was now secure.

Secure . . .

Was that it? Was this very feeling of security the bait with which Madame Dufour could have set her trap? The trap which Henri had by now convinced himself did in truth exist. Any other supposition seemed an absurdity when one considered this formidable woman.

He was being deliberately lulled.

Into precisely what? To sleep in peace? To sleep for—good? Henri's nature was of a type that entertained elaborate suspicions about every person and thing. Also, as with so many men of trained physical strength, he was both superstitious and afflicted by a fear of the unknown. No personal combat would have bothered him. But a pending combat with secret dangers . . .

A light sweat began to bead Henri's brow as Madame Dufour's imagined plan of attack began to take shape. The Chateau Plage—this particular room with its innocent-looking brass safety chain—was, Henri felt certain, the crux of it. The hotel became transformed in his thoughts into the old tigress's personal jungle, where she could with utmost familiarity maneuver his defeat. And what could that defeat constitute if not extinction?

Did the menace hinge (Henri stabbed at possibilities) on Room Service? She had given him unlimited credit? A poisoned drink that he might order, or a succulent dish that would eventually simulate a fatal attack of ptomaine? Or

was the danger secreted within the room itself? A panorama of scorpions, coral snakes, even water moccasins, paraded across Henri's imagination—all with deadly effect on his nerves.

He would be a fool not to take every possible precaution. He would be a fool to remain here, where from but a few doors along the corridor Madame's poisoned claws could reach out and clutch. An overwhelming urge possessed him to change his base of operations to some obscure hotel.

To leave at once. But could he? Would not the possibility of his departure have been foreseen and appropriately guarded against? Would not Madame Dufour have in her employ some muscled, conscienceless, weapon-adept cat's-paw?

Even though he should encounter no physical barrier on the way out, Henri thought, he would surely be followed. He could be certain that would have been arranged. And any hideout he might select would shortly become known to the tigress.

An unusually strong gust of the storm slashed against the room's seaward windows, drawing Henri's eyes toward them and bringing him the perfect solution to his dilemma. In retrospect he saw himself standing by the parted lime draperies of Madame Dufour's living room and looking down upon the flagged terrace. An insignificant drop for a man of his acrobatic abilities.

Yes—he would leave the hall door locked and chained, secure against any waiting dangers in the corridor, and no watchful eyes would even know that he had left the hotel until morning came. By that time he would be safely incognito and could arrange some rendezvous by telephone to receive Madame's payment for his silence.

Henri checked the papers and the money in his wallet. He untaped the porcelain miniature from his thigh and put it in an inner pocket of his jacket, where it would be more protected from damage should he slip on the wet flagstones upon landing—a possibility remote, considering his athletic prowess, but one that he must consider nevertheless. His suitcase and overcoat he would leave in the room. He could replace them a thousandfold after he had collected his price for silence.

He opened a window and for an instant was blinded by the sheeting rain and pitch darkness of the harried night. He lowered his body over the sill, clung for a second with strong fingers, and then, relaxing his muscles for an athlete's safe landing, Henri let go.

Madame Dufour paused before the desk in the living room of her suite and observed the registration card on which Henri had written his signature. With a pen she corrected a slight clerical error and then, taking the card with her, left

the suite and went to the lounge.

The lounge, with its rococo touches of grandeur, was empty and quiet. It was the doldrum hour between midnight and one o'clock.

Madame crossed to the reception desk, where the night clerk was amusing himself with the book of the month.

"Arturo, here is the registration card of Mr. Henri Pazz."

Arturo, a man of Sicilian extraction and every fascinating bit as good-looking as the day clerk Enrico, put the card in its proper place on the rack.

"Thank you, Madame." He emitted an impatient Sicilian sigh and said, "Will this storm never break? I believe it is a curse deposited upon our heads at long range by the jealous peasants of California."

"Either a curse or a blessing, Arturo. One never knows."

"And, *madre mia,* what imbecile have we now!" Arturo exclaimed as one of the plate-glass terrace doors flew open, letting in both a vicious blast of rain and the oilskin-swathed night watchman.

The watchman, a recent graduate from an Ivy League university, shut out the elements and then bore down on the desk.

"A man is lying outside on the terrace, Madame Dufour. He is dead. Very dead."

Madame Dufour retained her imperturbable air of calm. . . .

"Accident over to the Chateau Plage," Police Sergeant Day said to his wife Ethel as he accepted a cup of the coffee she had crawled out of bed to make for him. "Young guy from Montreal. Fell out of a window. Could have been suicide, of course, but that bald red-wigged dame who owns the joint knew all about him and his folks." He sipped noisily at his coffee.

Ethel, who was a devotee of mystery novels, suggested succinctly, "Or he might have been pushed. Those fall-out-of-a-window jobs are always open to doubt." She looked triumphant.

"Not this one, Ethel. Brass safety chain fastened on the room door. Had to file it to get in, after what was left of the body had been identified. Absolutely impossible for a second person to have been in the room with him. Only one funny thing."

Ethel perked up. "What, Charles?"

"I noticed it while we were fiddling with the door, getting the chain cut. There was a damp spot on the white paint, and traces of cleaning powder dried around the spot's edges—sort of like a thickish white paste made out of something like, say, Bon Ami. The damp spot covered the first numeral of the room's number. A numeral figure 1."

"What was the room number, Charles?"

"1101."

one of her last stories

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CRAIG RICE**

TITLE: ***Wry Highball***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: John J. Malone

LOCALE: Chicago

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *If Malone had to investigate a murder, this was the best kind—for him. The two suspects were a beautiful blonde and a beautiful brunette—and whichever one was innocent was definitely Malone's dish.*

"YOU'VE GOT TO BELIEVE ME," the beautiful girl said. "I had nothing to do with it. I was just as surprised as Arthur—"

She produced a handkerchief from her purse and cried into it, softly. John J. Malone sat behind his desk feeling uncomfortable. "Now, now," he said. The girl went on sobbing. Malone said, "There, there."

"But it's terrible," the girl said at last. "Arthur is dead, and—" She went back to the handkerchief.

Malone sighed. "I'd like to help you," he said untruthfully, "but you'll have to tell me all about it. Now, let's start from the beginning. Your name is Sheila Manson."

The girl stopped sobbing as if someone had thrown a switch. She brushed hair the color of cornsilk away from her tear-stained face, looked up at Malone, and said, "But how did you know?"

Malone didn't think it was worthwhile telling Sheila Manson that a good description of her had been in every Chicago newspaper for the past forty-eight hours. "I have my methods," he said airily, trying to look mysterious.

"Then you must know about Arthur, too," Sheila Manson said.

"Suppose you tell me," Malone suggested diplomatically.

Sheila nodded. She put the handkerchief away in her purse and said, "He was my fiancé. Arthur Bent. We were going to be married next week."

"And now he's dead," Malone encouraged her sympathetically.

She nodded again. "And the police think I did it, but I didn't. You believe me, don't you, Mr. Malone?"

"Why do the police think you killed your fiancé?" Malone said, side-stepping neatly.

Sheila Manson shook her head. "I don't know why," she said. "But I can tell you who really did kill him."

There was a little silence. At last Malone prodded, "Who?"

"Mae Ammon," Sheila said. "After all, she was right there, too. And if I didn't do it, she must have."

"Mae Ammon?"

"She's just no good," Sheila said. "She would murder anybody if she thought she could get something out of it."

"And what could she get out of murdering Arthur Bent?" Malone asked.

Sheila shrugged. She was beautiful even when she shrugged, Malone thought.

He decided he had to take the case—even if there wasn't any money in it. Even if he owed the telephone company, his landlord, the electric company, and three restaurants. They could wait, but Sheila Manson was the kind of vision that dropped into a man's office once in a lifetime.

"She was just jealous," Sheila said. "I was Arthur's fiancé, and she was jealous."

To Malone it sounded as if Mae Ammon had a better motive for murdering Sheila than for doing away with Arthur. However, this was no time for fine distinctions. "I'll do what I can for you," he said decisively.

"I can't pay you very much—"

"Don't you worry your pretty head about that," Malone said. "Just give me your address, so that I can get in touch with you—and then go home and try to relax."

"Mr. Malone." Sheila stood up. Her figure was slim and breath-taking. The last shreds of monetary regret disappeared from the little lawyer's thoughts. "If the police come—what shall I do?"

"Shoot it out," Malone said. Then he caught himself. "Sorry—I must have been thinking of something else. If they come, just call me. I'll be right here, or else my secretary will find me. Now, you just relax and stop worrying."

"All right, Mr. Malone." She started for the door, under the lawyer's breathless scrutiny. At the door she turned. "Malone," she said, and her voice dropped an octave, "I'm—very grateful to you."

The door banged and she was gone.

After a minute Malone wiped the smile guiltily off his face, put on a businesslike frown, and told himself that precious time was passing.

He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and tried hard to think about Arthur Bent.

Of course, he had read about it in the newspapers. Bent had been a rich man—and just recently rich, Malone reminded himself. On his twenty-fifth birthday he had become heir to the Bent fortune, as provided in his father's will. Two weeks later Arthur Bent was dead. He'd been poisoned with arsenic, placed in a rye-and-ginger-ale highball. He had taken this fatal drink in his own home, and no one else had been present except Sheila Manson and Mae Ammon.

But neither the bottle of ginger ale nor the bottle of expensive rye had been tampered with. The poison had been only in Bent's highball.

It certainly looked as if there were only two possible suspects: Sheila Manson and Mae Ammon. Well, he was working for Sheila Manson, Malone told himself; that meant he had to see Mae Ammon at once.

It was perfectly obvious, when you thought about it, that Mae Ammon had committed the murder. After all, Sheila was a beautiful young girl, and beautiful young girls just didn't do things like that. Or, at any rate, Malone was convinced this one hadn't done it.

Unfortunately for Malone's first theory, Mae Ammon was beautiful too.

Her address was, conveniently, in the Chicago telephone directory. Malone took a cab to the quiet brownstone, walked up the steps, and rang the bell.

The girl who answered the door had short black hair and a figure that made Malone almost stop breathing. She was not slim, like Sheila Manson, but Malone decided that he preferred curvaceous and cuddly brunettes. She wore a dark-green dress that clung to her figure like adhesive tape.

"I'm looking for Mae Ammon," Malone said. "But I'd rather be looking for you."

The girl smiled. "In that case," she said, "you're lucky. I'm Mae Ammon. Come in."

Malone followed her, in a daze, through a hallway and up one flight of dim stairs. "Most of the people who live here work during the day," she said as she pushed open the door of a large bright room. "I'm the only one here, so I answer the bell."

Malone said, "Ah," in an intelligent fashion, and followed her inside. The room was high-ceilinged and sunny. Magazines were scattered everywhere—on the blonde-wood coffee table, over the light-green couch and chairs, piled on the hi-fi and the television set. There was even a large bundle of

them stacked on the yellow spread of the single daybed.

"So you're Mae Ammon," Malone said, for lack of anything else to say.

"That's right." She smiled again. "Just put some of the magazines on the floor and sit down. Who are you, by the way?"

Malone took a stack of *Lifes* and *Looks* from the couch and sat down. "I'm John J. Malone," he said.

"*The* John J. Malone?" Mae Ammon's face showed surprise.

Malone nodded. "The lawyer, anyway," he said with what he hoped was modesty.

"And you're here about poor Arthur," Mae said. Her smile disappeared. "I hope that woman gets the chair," she burst out. "Killing Arthur—and out of sheer jealousy, that's all it was—just because he was my fiancé—"

Malone said, "Stop."

Mae looked down at him. "Stop?"

"Did you say Arthur Bent was your fiancé?"

"That's right," the girl said.

Malone sighed. Things were getting a little complicated, he realized. "I'd heard that he was Sheila Manson's fiancé," he said cautiously.

"Sheila Manson!" Mae looked around the room suddenly, and saw a china dog lying on the floor. She picked it up and threw it against the wall. Malone ducked. The dog landed over his head with a sharp crash, and little pieces of china drifted down the back of his collar.

"*That's* what I think of Sheila Manson!" Mae said. "I hope she gets the chair! Arthur Bent was my fiancé, and I don't intend to forget it!"

Malone rose slowly. "I was only asking," he said mildly.

Mae came over to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "Oh, I wouldn't hurt you," she said. "I don't have anything against you. After all, you know I didn't kill Arthur. Why should I—we were going to be married week after next."

"Sure," Malone said. This didn't seem like the proper time to tell Mae Ammon that he was working for Sheila Manson. But Sheila had said she was going to marry Arthur Bent next week. That gave her a week's priority on Mae Ammon. Malone decided, in a hurry, that he'd better not mention that either.

"I just want to find out the truth," he said.

"Well, you know the truth," Mae said. "It was that hussy Sheila Manson, that's who it was. She slipped poison into his drink and he died. And now she's going to be caught and tried and convicted, and I hope she gets the chair—" She bent down and Malone ducked again. But she was only picking up a magazine. "They sometimes give women the chair," Mae said. "This magazine has some stories—but that's not im-

portant. I *want* Sheila Manson to get the chair."

Malone took a deep breath. "Suppose," he said gently, "that she didn't do it."

"But she did," Mae said. "I was there. I know."

"Did you see her actually put poison into his drink?"

"Well," Mae said, "not exactly. But I saw him mix the drink—take out the bottles and everything—take his own little stirrer out of the glass, and then drink it. And if *I* didn't kill him, then *she* must have! We were the only ones there."

Malone nodded. There was, he felt sure, another question he should ask, but he couldn't come up with it. "Was there ice in the drink?" he said at random.

"Of course there was," Mae said. "But the police checked the ice tray. There was no poison in it."

That, Malone thought, eliminated another possibility. But it had been a good idea. "Suppose Sheila Manson didn't murder your—suppose she didn't murder Arthur Bent," he said. "Who else might have had a motive?"

"Everybody loved Arthur," Mae said. "He was a wonderful man."

"Sure," Malone said. "But he was rich. Who's going to inherit his money?"

"I was his fiancée," Mae said. "I'm going to inherit."

"Did he make a will?"

Mae shrugged. She too was beautiful when she shrugged. "I don't know," she said with insouciance.

"How about any close relatives?" Malone said.

"He only had two cousins," Mae said. "Charlie Bent and J. O. Hanlon. They both live in Chicago. But they weren't even at Arthur's place. I tell you, I saw everything. He put in the ice, then the rye, then the ginger ale, then he stirred it all up and drank it—"

"I'll do what I can," Malone said diplomatically.

"I'm sure you will," Mae said. "By the way, why are you asking questions? Are you working with the police? Because I told them all of this—"

"I'm just a friend," Malone lied smoothly. "I'm interested in justice."

"So am I," Mae said. "And justice means giving that hussy the chair."

Well, Malone thought when he arrived at his own office again, there's still J. O. Hanlon and Charlie Bent.

He didn't feel much like seeing them, but somebody had to be the murderer. As things stood, the only suspects were a beautiful blonde and a beautiful brunette. Both, it seemed, had been fiancées of the dead man. And each was convinced the other had committed the murder—unless, Malone thought, they were both awfully good actresses.

But if neither girl had murdered Arthur Bent, Malone thought slowly, then how did he die? The arsenic was in his drink. It wasn't

in the bottle of rye or in the bottle of ginger ale. It wasn't, according to Mae Ammon, in the ice cubes. So somebody had put it in the particular glass Arthur had used.

Unless he only used one particular glass—and somebody had painted the inside with arsenic beforehand. You could do that, Malone knew, if you used an arsenic-in-water solution. The poison would dry as a thin film, and dissolve again in any liquid.

Of course, it would make the glass look a little filmy . . .

Malone sighed and reached for the telephone.

Five minutes later he put it down. Von Flanagan had been exceptionally polite and courteous—for von Flanagan, that is. He'd actually told Malone what he wanted to know, and hadn't threatened even once to arrest the little criminal lawyer.

There was no arsenic residue in the glass above the level of the drink.

So the glass hadn't been painted with arsenic.

And that meant that either Mae or Sheila had murdered Arthur Bent.

The only trouble was that Malone was sure neither had.

Of course, the glass might have been painted only at the bottom. Malone wondered if von Flanagan had thought of that, and started to call him back before he realized it wouldn't have made any difference.

"It's a funny thing," von Flanagan had said. "Here's a guy who monograms everything he owns—got his own special monogrammed coasters, for instance. Nobody else uses his coaster. But he didn't monogram the glasses. So there'd be no way for anyone to tell in advance which glass he'd use."

And that, Malone thought, made the cheese even more binding.

He reached for the telephone again.

J. O. Hanlon, it developed, would be right over. He sounded on the telephone like the gruff and overbearing type, and Malone wondered if he were in for more trouble. Charlie Bent, unfortunately, couldn't be reached. His housekeeper said he'd been in Central Africa for the last six months on a safari.

And that's where I should be, Malone told himself sadly.

J. O. Hanlon charged into the office like a bull. Behind him the door slammed shut and rattled. "You wanted to see me?" he asked Malone in a voice that sounded as if it had come from the quarterdeck of the *Bounty*.

"Sit down," Malone said nervously. "And relax."

Hanlon dropped into a chair and stared belligerently across the desk. "What can I do for you?" he roared.

Malone winced. "I'm investigat-

ing the death of Arthur Bent–"

"I spoke to the police," Hanlon said. "Told 'em everything. You ask the police about it." He started to rise.

"I'd like to ask just a few questions," Malone said. "This won't take much of your time."

"All right," Hanlon said, and dropped back into the chair with a thud. "Ask away. I'm a fair and reasonable man. Willing to help if I can."

Malone cleared his throat, then said, "I understand you were Arthur's cousin."

"That's correct–mother's side of the family. My mother was Arthur's mother's sister."

Malone tried to work it out in his head and gave up. "Cousin" would have to do. "Do you know if Arthur Bent made a will?" Malone said.

"Told that to the police, too," Hanlon bellowed. "Charlie gets it all–good old Charlie."

"Charlie Bent?"

"Right," Hanlon shouted. "Charlie's in Africa now–hunting or some such foolishness. He'll find out when he gets back."

"Ah," Malone said. Hanlon, then, was motiveless. And that still left only two suspects – neither of whom, Malone assured himself dismally, was guilty. But maybe he could clear up a few of the cloudy points.

"I understand your cousin was engaged," he probed cautiously.

"Engaged?" Hanlon broke into gusts of laughter. Malone sat patiently, waiting for the outbursts to stop. At last Hanlon said, "Those two girls, right? Good game of Arthur's, poor man. Engaged to nobody–but he let the girls *think* he was engaged to them. That's why the three of them met up at his apartment that night–to compare notes."

"They had found out about each other?" Malone said.

"Oversight of Arthur's," Hanlon explained. "They both went to his apartment that night to talk things out with him."

Malone suddenly thought of another question. "How do you know about all this?"

"Me?" Hanlon said. "Been going with one of 'em myself–Arthur took her away. She told me all about it before she went to his apartment." "Which one?" Malone leaned forward.

"Sheila," Hanlon said. "Good old Sheila. I'm sure she didn't do it. Must have been the other one–what's her name — Mae. Sheila wouldn't do a thing like that."

Malone closed his eyes for a long time. At last they opened. "My advice to you," he said, "is to hire a good lawyer. Me."

"Lawyer?"

"To defend you on a charge of murder," Malone said. "You see, I knew there was something – I knew I'd heard *something* that explained the whole killing. But I had

to wait until now, when I saw a motive, to remember it and put all the pieces together."

"You're not making any sense," Hanlon said.

"Wait,' Malone promised, "and I will. Hanlon, you murdered your cousin–so you could get your girl back."

"What?" Hanlon bounced up.

Malone said, "Relax. I'm going to defend you. Never lost a client yet."

"But I wasn't even there!" Hanlon exclaimed.

"You didn't have to be. Arthur Bent made the perfect victim–for a clever killer. Each of you had some kind of a motive–both girls, and you, and Charlie. But the girls didn't do it—they'd have killed each other first. And Charlie's in Africa. Arthur Bent monogrammed everything except–for some reason–his drinking glasses."

"They were new–he hadn't got around to having his special monogram put on them," Hanlon said.

"And Mae kept talking about Arthur's own individual little stirrer."

Hanlon began to wilt.

"All right," he said, at last, like a balloon gasping out its final breath. "I painted the arsenic on his stirrer . . . I had to get rid of him–so Sheila would come back to me."

"Don't worry about a thing," Malone said. "And admit nothing to the police. You were overwrought. You didn't know what you were doing."

"What?"

"Of course, my services come high," Malone went on persuasively.

"I'll take care of you, Malone," Hanlon said. "I've got some money of my own . . ."

Malone leaned back with satisfaction. Maybe, he thought, he'd get paid by everybody—each in his, or her, own fashion . . .

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**JOHN STEINBECK**
TITLE:	***How Mr. Hogan Robbed a Bank***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	United States.
TIME:	Saturday before Labor Day, 1955
COMMENTS:	*A surprisingly full study of an American small town—much of it by implication—by the famous author of* THE GRAPES OF WRATH *and* TORTILLA FLAT...

ON THE SATURDAY BEFORE LABOR Day, 1955, at 9:04½ A.M., Mr. Hogan robbed a bank. He was forty-two years old, married, and the father of a boy and a girl, named John and Joan, twelve and thirteen respectively. Mrs. Hogan's name was Joan and Mr. Hogan's was John, but since they called themselves Papa and Mama, that left their names free for the children, who were considered very smart for their ages, each having jumped a grade in school. The Hogans lived at 215 East Maple Street, in a brown-shingle house with white trim—there are two. 215 is the one across from the street light and it is the one with the big tree in the yard, either oak or elm—the biggest tree in the whole street, maybe in the whole town. That's pretty big.

John and Joan were in bed at the time of the robbery, for it was Saturday. At 9:10 A.M., Mrs. Hogan was making the cup of tea she always had. Mr. Hogan went to work early. Mrs. Hogan drank her tea slowly, scalding hot, and read her fortune in the tea leaves. There was a cloud and a five-pointed star with two short points in the bottom of the cup, but that was at 9:12 and the robbery was all over by then.

The way Mr. Hogan went about robbing the bank was very interesting. He gave it a great deal of thought and had for a long time, but he did not discuss it with anyone. He just read his newspaper and kept his own counsel. But he worked it out to his own satisfac-

tion that people went to too much trouble robbing banks and that got them in a mess. The simpler the better, he always thought. People went in for too much hullabaloo and hanky-panky. If you didn't do that, if you left hanky-panky out, robbing a bank would be a relatively sound venture—barring accidents, of course, of an improbable kind, but then they could happen to a man crossing the street or anything. Since Mr. Hogan's method worked fine, it proved that his thinking was sound. He often considered writing a little booklet on his technique when the how-to rage was running so high. He figured out the first sentence, which went: "To successfully rob a bank, forget all about hanky-panky."

Mr. Hogan was not just a clerk at Fettucci's grocery store. He was more like the manager. Mr. Hogan was in charge, even hired and fired the boy who delivered groceries after school. He even put in orders with the salesmen, sometimes when Mr. Fettucci was right in the store too, maybe talking to a customer. "You do it, John," he would say and he would nod at the customer, "John knows the ropes. Been with me—how long you been with me, John?"

"Sixteen years."

"Sixteen years. Knows the business as good as me. John, why he even banks the money."

And so he did. Whenever he had a moment, Mr. Hogan went into the storeroom on the alley, took off his apron, put on his necktie and coat, and went back through the store to the cash register. The checks and bills would be ready for him inside the bankbook with a rubber band around it. Then he went next door and stood at the teller's window and handed the checks and bankbook through to Mr. Cup and passed the time of day with him too. Then, when the bankbook was handed back, he checked the entry, put the rubber band around it, and walked next door to Fettucci's grocery and put the bankbook in the cash register, continued on to the storeroom, removed his coat and tie, put on his apron, and went back into the store ready for business. If there was no line at the teller's window, the whole thing didn't take more than five minutes, even passing the time of day.

Mr. Hogan was a man who noticed things, and when it came to robbing the bank, this trait stood him in good stead. He had noticed, for instance, where the big bills were kept right in the drawer under the counter and he had noticed also what days there were likely to be more than on other days. Thursday was payday at the American Can Company's local plant, for instance, so there would be more then. Some Fridays people drew more money to tide them over the weekend. But it was even Steven, maybe not a thousand dollars dif-

ference, between Thursdays and Fridays and Saturday mornings. Saturdays were not terribly good because people didn't come to get money that early in the morning, and the bank closed at noon. But he thought it over and came to the conclusion that the Saturday before a long weekend in the summer would be the best of all. People going on trips, vacations, people with relatives visiting, and the bank closed Monday. He thought it out and looked, and sure enough the Saturday morning before Labor Day the cash drawer had twice as much money in it—he saw it when Mr. Cup pulled out the drawer.

Mr. Hogan thought about it during all that year, not all the time, of course, but when he had some moments. It was a busy year too. That was the year John and Joan had the mumps and Mrs. Hogan got her teeth pulled and was fitted for a denture. That was the year when Mr. Hogan was Master of the Lodge, with all the time that takes. Larry Shield died that year—he was Mrs. Hogan's brother and was buried from the Hogan house at 215 East Maple. Larry was a bachelor and had a room in the Pine Tree House and he played pool nearly every night. He worked at the Silver Diner but that closed at nine and so Larry would go to Louie's and play pool for an hour. Therefore, it was a surprise when he left enough so that after funeral expenses there were twelve hundred dollars left. And even more surprising that he left a will in Mrs. Hogan's favor, but his double-barreled twelve-gauge shotgun he left to John Hogan, Jr. Mr. Hogan was pleased, although he never hunted. He put the shotgun away in the back of the closet in the bathroom, where he kept his things, to keep it for young John. He didn't want children handling guns and he never bought any shells. It was some of that twelve hundred that got Mrs. Hogan her dentures. Also, she bought a bicycle for John and a doll buggy and walking-talking doll for Joan—a doll with three changes of dresses and a little suitcase, complete with play make-up. Mr. Hogan thought it might spoil the children, but it didn't seem to. They made just as good marks in school and John even got a job delivering papers. It was a very busy year. Both John and Joan wanted to enter the W. R. Hearst National *I Love America* Contest and Mr. Hogan thought it was almost too much, but they promised to do the work during their summer vacation, so he finally agreed.

During that year no one noticed any difference in Mr. Hogan. It was true, he was thinking about robbing the bank, but he only thought about it in the evening when there was neither a Lodge meeting nor a movie they wanted to go to, so it did not become an obsession and people noticed no change in him.

He had studied everything so carefully that the approach of Labor Day did not catch him unprepared or nervous. It was hot that summer and the hot spells were longer than usual. Saturday was the end of two weeks heat without a break and people were irritated with it and anxious to get out of town, although the country was just as hot. They didn't think of that. The children were excited because the *I Love America* Essay Contest was due to be concluded and the winners announced, and the first prize was an all-expense-paid two days trip to Washington, D.C., with every fixing — hotel room, three meals a day, and side trips in a limousine—not only for the winner, but for an accompanying chaperone; visit to the White House—shake hands with the President—everything. Mr. Hogan thought they were getting their hopes too high and he said so.

"You've got to be prepared to lose," he told his children. "There're probably thousands and thousands entered. You get your hopes up and it might spoil the whole autumn. Now I don't want any long faces in this house after the contest is over."

"I was against it from the start," he told Mrs. Hogan. That was the morning she saw the Washington Monument in her teacup, but she didn't tell anybody about that except Ruth Tyler, Bob Tyler's wife. Ruthie brought over her cards and read them in the Hogan kitchen, but she didn't find a journey. She did tell Mrs. Hogan that the cards were often wrong. The cards had said Mrs. Winkle was going on a trip to Europe and the next week Mrs. Winkle got a fishbone in her throat and choked to death. Ruthie, just thinking out loud, wondered if there was any connection between the fishbone and the ocean voyage to Europe. "You've got to interpret them right." Ruthie did say she saw money coming to the Hogans.

"Oh, I got that already from poor Larry," Mrs. Hogan explained.

"I must have got the past and future cards mixed," said Ruthie. "You've got to interpret them right."

Saturday dawned a blaster. The early morning weather report on the radio said: "Continued hot and humid, light scattered rain Sunday night and Monday."

Mrs. Hogan said, "Wouldn't you know? Labor Day."

Mr. Hogan said, "I'm sure glad we didn't plan anything." He finished his egg and mopped the plate with his toast.

Mrs. Hogan said, "Did I put coffee on the list?"

He took the paper from his handkerchief pocket and consulted it. "Yes, coffee, it's here."

"I had a crazy idea I forgot to write it down," said Mrs. Hogan. "Ruth and I are going to Altar Guild this afternoon. It's at Mrs. Alfred Drake's. You know, they

just came to town. I can't wait to see their furniture."

"They trade with us," said Mr. Hogan. "Opened an account last week. Are the milk bottles ready?"

"On the porch."

Mr. Hogan looked at his watch just before he picked up the bottles and it was five minutes to eight. He was about to go down the stairs, when he turned and looked back through the opened door at Mrs. Hogan.

She said, "Want something, Papa?"

"No," he said. "No," and he walked down the steps.

He went down to the corner and turned right on Spooner, and Spooner runs into Main Street in two blocks, and right across from where it runs in, there is Fettucci's and the bank around the corner and the alley beside the bank. Mr. Hogan picked up a handbill in front of Fettucci's and unlocked the door. He went through to the storeroom, opened the door to the alley, and looked out. A cat tried to force its way in, but Mr. Hogan blocked it with his foot and leg and closed the door. He took off his coat and put on his long apron, tied the strings in a bowknot behind his back. Then he got the broom from behind the counter and swept out behind the counters and scooped the sweepings into a dustpan; and going through the storeroom he opened the door to the alley. The cat had gone away. He emptied the dustpan into the garbage can and tapped it smartly to dislodge a piece of lettuce leaf. Then he went back to the store and worked for a while on the order sheet. Mrs. Clooney came in for a half a pound of bacon. She said it was hot and Mr. Hogan agreed.

"Summers are getting hotter," he said.

"I think so myself," said Mrs. Clooney. "How's Mrs. standing up?"

"Just fine," said Mr. Hogan. "She's going to Altar Guild."

"So am I. I just can't wait to see their furniture," said Mrs. Clooney, and she went out.

Mr. Hogan put a five-pound hunk of bacon on the slicer and stripped off the pieces and laid them on wax paper and then he put the wax-paper-covered squares in the cooler cabinet. At ten minutes to nine Mr. Hogan went to a shelf. He pushed a spaghetti box aside and took down a cereal box, which he emptied in the little closet toilet. Then, with a banana knife, he cut out the Mickey Mouse mask that was on the back. The rest of the box he took to the toilet and tore up the cardboard and flushed it down. He went into the store and yanked a piece of string loose and tied the ends through the side holes of the mask and then he looked at his watch—a large silver Hamilton with black hands. It was two minutes to nine.

Perhaps the next four minutes

were his only time of nervousness at all. At one minute to nine he took the broom and went out to sweep the sidewalk and he swept it very rapidly—was sweeping it, in fact, when Mr. Warner unlocked the bank door. He said good morning to Mr. Warner and a few seconds later the bank staff of four emerged from the coffee shop. Mr. Hogan saw them cross the street and he waved at them and they waved back. He finished the sidewalk and went back in the store. He laid his watch on the little step of the cash register. He sighed very deeply, more like a deep breath than a sigh. He knew that Mr. Warner would have the safe open now and he would be carrying the cash trays to the teller's window. Mr. Hogan looked at the watch on the cash register step. Mr. Kentworthy paused in the store entrance, then shook his head vaguely and walked on and Mr. Hogan let out his breath gradually. His left hand went behind his back and pulled the bowknot on his apron, and then the black hand on his watch crept up on the four-minute mark and covered it.

Mr. Hogan opened the charge account drawer and took out the store pistol, a silver-colored Iver Johnson .38. He moved quickly to the storeroom, slipped off his apron, put on his coat, and stuck the revolver in his side pocket. The Mickey Mouse mask he shoved up under his coat where it didn't show. He opened the alley door and looked up and down and stepped quickly out, leaving the door slightly ajar. It is sixty feet to where the alley enters Main Street, and there he paused and looked up and down and then he turned his head toward the center of the street as he passed the bank window. At the bank's swinging door he took out the mask from under his coat and put it on. Mr. Warner was just entering his office and his back was to the door. The top of Will Cup's head was visible through the teller's grill.

Mr. Hogan moved quickly and quietly around the end of the counter and into the teller's cage. He had the revolver in his right hand now. When Will Cup turned his head and saw the revolver, he froze. Mr. Hogan slipped his toe under the trigger of the floor alarm and he motioned Will Cup to the floor with the revolver and Will went down quick. Then Mr. Hogan opened the cash drawer and with two quick movements he piled the large bills from the tray together. He made a whipping motion to Will on the floor, to indicate that he should turn over and face the wall, and Will did. Then Mr. Hogan stepped back around the counter. At the door of the bank he took off the mask, and as he passed the window he turned his head toward the middle of the street. He moved into the alley, walked quickly to the storeroom,

and entered. The cat had got in. It watched him from a pile of canned goods cartons. Mr. Hogan went to the toilet closet and tore up the mask and flushed it. He took off his coat and put on his apron. He looked out into the store and then moved to the cash register. The revolver went back into the charge account drawer. He punched *No Sale* and, lifting the top drawer, distributed the stolen money underneath the top tray and then pulled the tray forward and closed the register. Only then did he look at his watch and it was 9:07½.

He was trying to get the cat out of the storeroom when the commotion boiled out of the bank. He took his broom and went out on the sidewalk. He heard all about it and offered his opinion when it was asked for. He said he didn't think the fellow could get away—where could he get to? Still, with the holiday coming up—

It was an exciting day. Mr. Fettucci was as proud as though it were his bank. The sirens sounded around town for hours. Hundreds of holiday travelers had to stop at the roadblocks set up all around the edge of town and several sneaky-looking men had their cars searched.

Mrs. Hogan heard about it over the phone and she dressed earlier than she would have ordinarily and came to the store on her way to Altar Guild. She hoped Mr. Hogan would have seen or heard something new, but he hadn't. "I don't see how the fellow can get away," he said.

Mrs. Hogan was so excited, she forgot her own news. She only remembered when she got to Mrs. Drake's house, but she asked permission and phoned the store the first moment she could. "I forgot to tell you. John's won honorable mention."

"What?"

"In the *I Love America* Contest."

"What did he win?"

"Honorable mention."

"Fine. Fine—Anything come with it?"

"Why, he'll get his picture and his name all over the country. Radio too. Maybe even television. They've already asked for a photograph of him."

"Fine," said Mr. Hogan. "I hope it don't spoil him." He put up the receiver and said to Mr. Fettucci, "I guess we've got a celebrity in the family."

Fettucci stayed open until nine on Saturdays. Mr. Hogan ate a few snacks from cold cuts, but not much, because Mrs. Hogan always kept his supper warming.

It was 9:05, or :06, or :07, when he got back to the brown-shingle house at 215 East Maple. He went in through the front door and out to the kitchen where the family was waiting for him.

"Got to wash up," he said, and went up to the bathroom. He turned the key in the bathroom

door and then he flushed the toilet and turned on the water in the basin and tub while he counted the money. $8320. From the top shelf of the storage closet in the bathroom he took down the big leather case that held his Knight Templar's uniform. The plumed hat lay there on its form. The white ostrich feather was a little yellow and needed changing. Mr. Hogan lifted out the hat and pried the form up from the bottom of the case. He put the money in the form and then he thought again and removed two bills and shoved them in his side pocket. Then he put the form back over the money and laid the hat on top and closed the case and shoved it back on the top shelf. Finally he washed his hands and turned off the water in the tub and the basin.

In the kitchen Mrs. Hogan and the children faced him, beaming. "Guess what some young man's going on?"

"What?" asked Mr. Hogan.

"Radio," said John. "Monday night. Eight o'clock."

"I guess we got a celebrity in the family," said Mr. Hogan.

Mrs. Hogan said, "I just hope some young lady hasn't got her nose out of joint."

Mr. Hogan pulled up to the table and stretched his legs. "Mama, I guess I got a fine family," he said. He reached in his pocket and took out two five-dollar bills. He handed one to John. "That's for winning," he said. He poked the other bill at Joan. "And that's for being a good sport. One celebrity and one good sport. What a fine family!" He rubbed his hands together and lifted the lid of the covered dish. "Kidneys," he said. "Fine."

And that's how Mr. Hogan did it.

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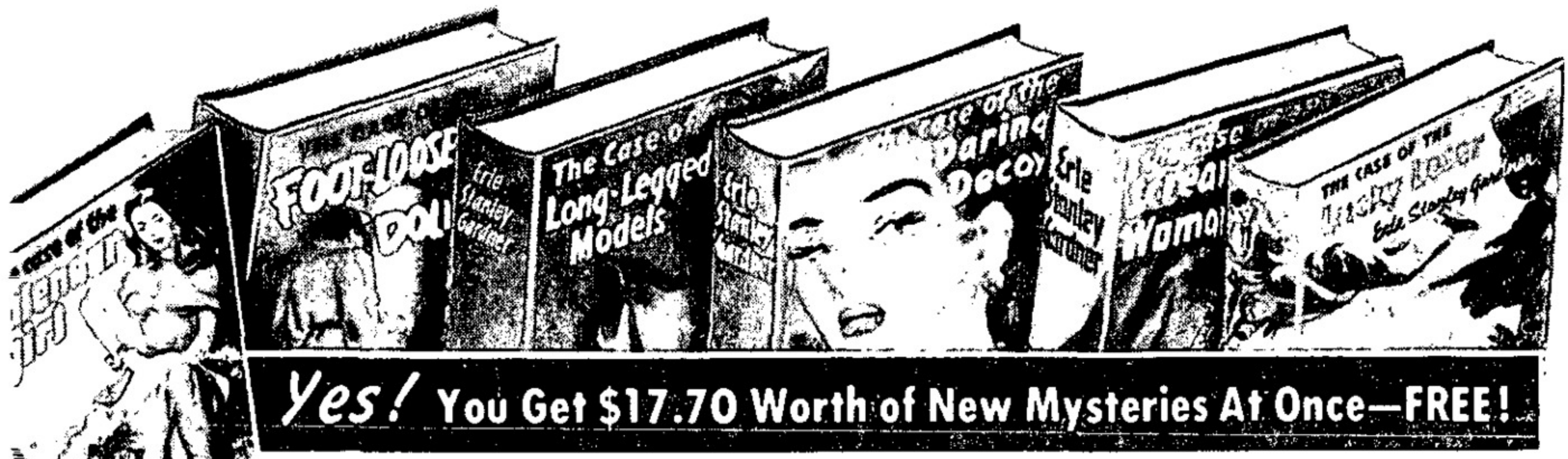

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