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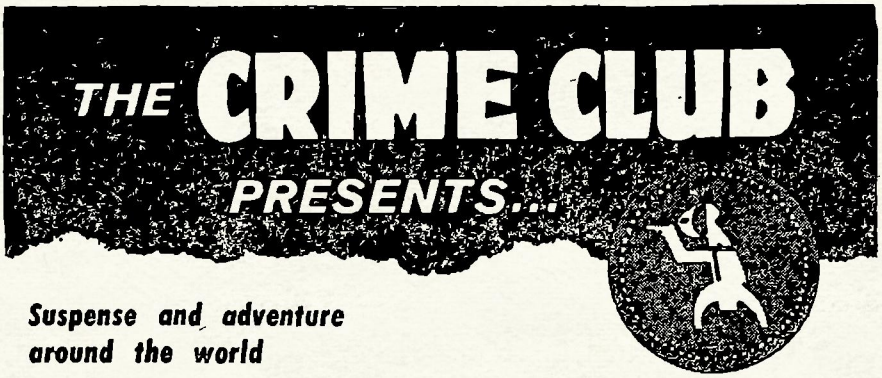

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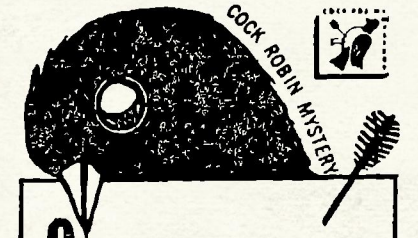

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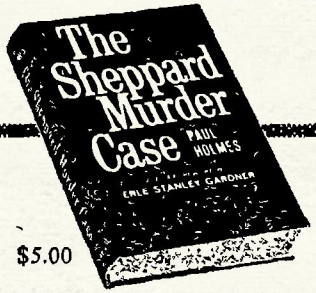

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AUTHOR: **VICTOR CANNING**

TITLE: ***The Yellow-Green Tassel***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Inspector Cardew

LOCALE: England

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Meet Colonel Thornton—an English colonel to end all (literary) English colonels. This one's chief occupation was to shoot finches in the early morning*

THE OLD LADY LAY ON THE FOUR-poster bed very still, very fragile, her hands folded across her breast. A black morning dress was buttoned close up to her throat and held by a large cameo brooch. She still had her shoes on, black, elastic-sided affairs with a brilliant polish on the patent-leather toes. On the pillow to one side of her was a round, hand-knitted cap, topped by a large greeny-yellow tassel. She has iron-gray hair, very neat and tidy.

The police doctor straightened up from beside the bed and said precisely, "Not more than four hours ago. Death was instantaneous. Probably a .22 slug. Not close range—no burns on the skin. Not close enough for suicide, anyway. Entered just in front of the left ear and upwards to the brain."

He moved away from the bed and began to tidy things into his bag.

Inspector Cardew could see the small black mark at the side of Miss Thornton's temple. "Accident, do you think?"

The doctor shrugged. "Probably. But that's not my department. I'll send up for her. We'll get the slug for you."

Cardew went to the door with

him and asked, "You knew her, didn't you?"

"Yes, for the last twenty years. She and her brother, the Colonel. Both of them mad as bats, Inspector . . . Well, perhaps not as bad as that. But surely eccentric. She used to play a violin in the garden to get her flowers to grow. He played too —a flute. Flowers grew, too—best in the district. By the way, that's not her own hair. It's a wig. Never knew it myself until now."

Cardew said to the constable outside the bedroom door, "No one in without my permission."

He went down the dark, gloomy stairs with the doctor and saw him out. Back in the hall he met the housemaid coming through from the kitchen quarters with a coffee tray—two cups and two saucers.

She said, "The Colonel's back, sir. Came in while you were upstairs with the doctor. Would you go into him in the study, sir, he asks? He knows, sir. He saw your cars outside and asked and I had to tell him."

"How did he take it?"

"I couldn't say, sir. Well, I mean, he just nodded and then told me to bring coffee for you and him."

She led the way into the study, announced the Inspector, deposited her tray, and left.

Colonel Thornton was standing by the window looking out at the garden which was bright in the early June sunlight. He was well over six feet, thinnish, and slightly stoop-shouldered. He wore corduroy trousers, a tweed jacket, leather-patched at the elbows, and his feet were bare in leather sandals. He turned to show a sunburned face, lean and worn, with bright, fierce blue eyes set just a little too closely together. His hair was white and needed cutting.

He said, "Morning, Inspector. Help yourself to some coffee. Damn bad business, what?" His voice was resonant, warm, but full of authority.

"It is indeed, Colonel."

"Ha, well—happens to us all. Had a good run for her money. That's the thing. Put up a good show while you're going and then go without whining." He came over and began to help himself to coffee.

For a moment Inspector Cardew felt embarrassed. This was not what he had expected. The Colonel showed not the slightest sign of distress. And he had lived with his sister for over twenty years. Cardew had a swift picture of the gray-haired old lady lying on her bed.

Ignoring the coffee, Cardew said, "She was found about two hours ago by the gardener. Lying on the path at the back of your shrubbery. The doctor thinks a .22 bullet, or something like that, killed her. It penetrated just in front of the left ear. Death was instantaneous."

The Colonel nodded, took a noisy suck at his coffee cup, and then said, "Doctor, you say?"

"Yes, Colonel."

"Have to speak up a bit. Shade deaf. Yes, he's right—.22 bullet. Did it myself. No right to be on the path behind the shrubbery. Out of bounds from dawn until ten o'clock. Everyone knows that in this house. Big notice there, too."

"Yes, Colonel. I saw it on my way down."

"Who's sawn it down?" The bright blue eyes fixed themselves on Cardew.

"Not sawn, Colonel. Seen. I've seen it." He raised his voice sharply.

"Oh, no need to shout quite so loud. It's only my left ear."

Speaking very distinctly Cardew said, "Would you please explain, Colonel, how you came to shoot your sister?"

"Certainly. Unfortunate, but there it is. Come up with me."

He went out of the room and up the central staircase to a bedroom on the second floor. It had one large window which overlooked the garden. From the lawn outside a bank ran steeply up to a distant woodland. On the bank just above the lawn and a little higher than the bedroom window was a long hedge of shrubbery. On a table by the window lay a .22 sporting rifle.

The Colonel went to the window and without looking at the Inspector said, "Know anything about ecology?"

"Ecology?"

"Yes—the relationship of birds and animals to plants. Too many rabbits, for instance, and Australia becomes a desert. Not as bad here, but too many damned greenfinches and bullfinches and my shrubbery becomes an abomination and a desolation. Eat the blossoms, eat the berries and drupes. Had all me *Daphne mezereum* ruined last year. Greenfinches. Pest. Have to keep them down."

"You mean, Colonel, you sit up here and shoot at the birds?"

"That's right. From dawn until I go to shave and bath. Have me breakfast here. Strict standing order. No one in shrubbery before ten. Only way, Inspector. Wearing that damn silly hat, the maid told me. No wonder. Yellow-green tassel looks just like a greenfinch. Standing on the path behind the shrubbery she'd just show the tassel. Nothing else. Hellish thing to happen, hellish—but there you are. *Mors omnibus communis.* Pure accident. Only shot I fired this morning, round about seven."

"But, Colonel, why would your sister be in the shrubbery against your orders? She knew your habits."

"Rabbits? None in this garden. Not since myxomatosis."

"Why," said Cardew, for once in his life feeling singularly incapable of handling a situation, "should your sister be in the shrubbery? She knew the rules."

"Course she did. But she took me too literally. Always have breakfast

together here in the morning. About six. Both early risers. Up at five sometimes she was. Pottering around doing odd jobs. She was a first-class do-it-yourself nabob. Distemper, paint, paper, anything. Always brought our breakfast here before maid arrived. Told her this morning I was going into Battersham to get some more .22 shots. That's why she felt it was all right to go into the shrubbery."

"If you had no ammunition, how could she have been shot?"

"Told you. Took me too literally. I still had one shot up the spout. Always leave the rifle with one up the spout ready to take a quick pot. Damn bad luck for Milly. Just happened to be the one. Fluke in a million. Be an inquest, I suppose? Lot of gawking people, and the coroner, young Feathershaw, sounding off about firearms. But what do you do?" He looked out of the window at the shubbery. "I've tried everything—bird scares, spraying, black cotton, plastic bags, muslin. No damn good. Place looks like a Chinese laundry. Kill 'em. The word spreads. Kill 'em while you have breakfast." He turned and gave the Inspector a steady look. "If there's nothing else, Inspector, I've got work to do. The world can't stop, you know."

Cardew let him go. He just didn't know what to make of the Colonel. Although the whole thing seemed clearly an accident, he was beginning to have a familiar nagging of doubt. But for the life of him he couldn't think why.

He went down to the bedroom where Miss Thornton lay and was met by the constable talking to the housemaid outside.

"Says she'd like a word with you, sir."

"Please, if I may, sir. Could we go —go inside. It's not something I want anyone else to hear."

Cardew opened the door and they went in. The maid stood with her back to the bed.

"Well, what is it?"

"Well, Inspector, you know Miss Thornton was a little—well, odd. Well, sir, she gave me strict instructions years ago where to look for her will if she died. I wasn't to tell the master where because he didn't know about her wig. Anyone but the master, she said. And then it was to be kept quiet. She was touchy about the wig."

"Where is the will then?"

"Under the best wig, sir—the one she's wearing. Sewn up in the lining."

"Thank you," said Cardew.

He opened the door and she went out. He moved to the bed and eased the old lady's wig off. Part of the center seam of the underside of the wig had been unpicked at some time and carefully resewn. Cardew slit the stitches.

He pulled out a folded and crumpled envelope which was sealed and addressed to a local solicitor. He put it in his pocket and

then bent to put the wig back. The curtains of the room had been drawn badly and a shaft of sunlight fell across the woman's head. The top of her head was bald, the skin a yellow-gray color.

In the strong light Cardew noticed four or five white marks on the top of the old lady's skull. He lifted the head gently and examined them. They were made by white paint and from their size he guessed were the finger-marks of a man.

He left the room and went slowly down the stairs. He wasn't feeling so helpless now. Almost at the bottom, at a turn of the stairs, he found what he wanted: a length of the bannister had been freshly repainted white. It was at a corner where, if a man had been carrying a woman down in a fireman's lift, he would have put his free hand for support. And if the women's wig had fallen off, a man would have lowered her to the stairs and held her head up with his hand while he put the wig back on—a man who could have shot his sister in his bedroom while they took breakfast and who then had time to carry her out into the shrubbery before maid or gardener appeared for work.

He found the Colonel in his workshop above the garage.

Cardew said, "Colonel, how long have you known that your sister wore a wig?"

The Colonel straightened up from his bench and said calmly, "For years, Inspector. Never let on, though. Woman's vanity, what? Shall have her buried in it, of course. She'd like that. Mary Queen of Scots wore one, you know. Great secret. But when her head rolled it fell off."

"Just as your sister's did this morning when you carried her downstairs after shooting her. Didn't you notice that your hand had white paint on it from the bannister she had painted before bringing your breakfast up? You made a nice set of white paint marks on her head."

The Colonel stared at him impassively for a long time. Then slowly he began to chuckle. "Well, I'm damned," he said. "That was when I got it. I thought it was afterwards when I came back and went upstairs. Saw it then on my hands and washed it off." He frowned suddenly. "Bit of a bad show, isn't it, your taking wigs off the dead?"

"I had to, Colonel, to get her will —a will, I imagine, which leaves everything to you but which I'm afraid won't ever benefit you now."

The Colonel shrugged. "*Rem acu tetigisti*," he said.

"My Latin is non-existent, I'm afraid, Colonel. But I must ask you to come with me."

"Certainly, Inspector. And a rough translation would be—very rough, mind you—you have hit the matter exactly on the head."

Only the precocious Bernie Halper of Greenwich Village, New York, could get enmeshed in so remarkable a case—but he needed, in a curious way, the help of a certain tall, spare, stooped old gentleman.

Dear Reader: here's an opportunity for you to practice "suspension of disbelief." We promise you'll have a good time doing it!

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TWELVE TOUCANS

by CHARLES GREEN

I MAY BE LOSING MY MIND. BUT LET the facts speak for themselves as I relate this extraordinary series of events.

It began in Washington Square. I was lolling on a bench there, a peaceful character in benign communion with his environment. A fine sunny afternoon. Pigeons free-loading from an old lady wearing a scarlet Robin Hood hat. A Good Humor man peddling his wares. A mechanized cowboy on a tricycle wheeling in to pump some lead into me. In short, the usual mildly hectic park activity that I always found so relaxing.

Part of my mind was also having a bit of a fling as an inventor, implementing an idea suggested by the cane between the knees of an old, old gentleman dozing at the other end of the bench.

Grandpa's cane had a bulbous silver top, and it somehow made me think of a sword cane—a weapon no longer in vogue because few people carried canes nowadays. But, of course, people still carry umbrellas. Women, especially. And there shouldn't be any great technical difficulty in designing a sword umbrella with, perhaps, a police whistle built into the handle.

Hence the next logical thought: thousands of women are forced, for one reason or another, to traverse dark streets. Helpless prey to depraved creatures lurking in doorways. A scream, some futile swipes with a handbag, and another vicious crime is on record.

Ah, but suppose the would-be victim has the protection of the Patented Bernie Halper Sword-Whistle Umbrella? A twist of the handle, and the astonished attacker backs away from thin lethal steel. Next, shrill toot-toot of the police whistle and demoralized attacker takes to his heels.

There was an exhilarated period when I saw my maiden effort as an inventor, at the age of sixteen, make history as the crime-deterrent of the century. Then I remembered there happen to be laws against carrying concealed weapons. And how could

anyone reliably predict that some babe, supposedly toting my sword-umbrella for her own protection, wasn't actually en route to skewer a two-timing husband?

So I was trying to figure out how I might get over this legal hurdle when someone yelped, "Boo!" I jerked up, and who should be facing me but Joanie—Joanie Webster, a cute chick with whom I was involved in a moderately active romance.

A chance meeting, this. I made an affable gesture. Joanie settled down between me and dozing Grandpa, and said in her blithe manner, "What dark unhappy thoughts are troubling the genius?"

Evidently my beloved had mistaken creative concentration for mental anguish. "No, it's just that I had this terrific idea for an invention," I explained. "Fame and fortune practically in the palm of my hand. But then a legal point came along to louse it up."

"Dear *me,*" said Joanie. "Fame and fortune, eh? Bernie, if you had a magic lamp that could make you any famous person who ever lived, who would be your first choice?"

Irrelevance typical of Joanie. But just for the heck of it I complied by giving the old gray cells a nudge. In the next moment the answer sort of roared into me. And I said, somewhat shaken by the spectacular concept of it all, "Dr. Watson, co-occupant of a flat at 221B Baker Street, London, England."

"Oh, *that* Dr. Watson," Joanie said. "No, you can't include fictional characters."

Ping! a sour note. My Uncle Simon is a Baker Street Irregular. One of my most burning ambitions is to have the honor some day of being a member of that fabulous Holmesian society. And Joanie had unwittingly struck at the heart of what B.S.I. stood for. Perhaps an ill portent for our future compatibility.

"Look, I don't want to get into a hassle with you about this," I told Joanie. "But just as a point of information it happens to be a *fact* that some pretty famous and distinguished people take the position that Dr. Watson and Holmes are *not* mere fictional characters."

Joanie smirked and said, "All right, so my genius believes in the Easter Bunny, the Good Fairy, and Santa Claus. No harm in it."

I found myself stating with icy calm, "Only a real dumb cluck could make such an idiotic analogy."

That did it, of course. Joanie flushed, jumped up off the bench, clipped, "Goodbye, Mr. Halper. Don't call us, we'll call you." And she stalked off.

I watched Joanie's bobbing ponytail retreat along the path. A once-flourishing romance possibly dealt a fatal blow. Oh, well, I thought, *c'est la vie.* But now that Washington Square had melancholy associations for me, a change of scenery seemed in order. As I was about to

take off, a low deep voice said, "Why not Holmes?"

Its source, I realized, was Grandpa at the other end of the bench, now peering at me with deep-sunken eyes in a yellowish, mummylike face. I sort of blinked at him and he added, "I couldn't help overhearing your conversation with the young lady. May I ask why, given a choice, you wouldn't rather be Holmes?"

The query, despite its busybody aspects, had certain validity. I mean, why *not* Holmes? So I gave it a bit of thought and said, "Well, even in make-believe, I can't imagine myself—or anyone else—stepping into Holmes's shoes. There was—and could be—only one Sherlock Holmes."

Grandpa gave *that* a bit of thought. "A very good answer, my boy," he said, "and one that would have amused Holmes. Even as I feel sure Holmes would have been intrigued by the gentleman brooding over a paint brush on the bench facing us."

I checked. Yep, there was a man alone on the bench across the path. A middle-aged, skinny little guy with glasses, wearing a straw hat and seersucker suit.

"I see a citizen examining a brush," I said to Grandpa. "What's extraordinary about that?"

Grandpa sighed, put big gnarled hands on the head of his cane, and said, as he laboriously hoisted himself up to his feet, "Yes, dear Watson also was rather obtuse that way. No offense meant, my boy."

Off he went, following his cane in a stiff-legged, old-man shuffle. Well! I confess to some pretty wild thoughts as my eyes trailed that tall, spare, stooped figure. Until reason intervened. Obviously, I'd had an amusing encounter with senility of an off-beat nature. Nothing to throw the Baker Street Irregulars into a hysterical tizzy.

Then I glanced again at the little guy across the path and was startled to see him now on his feet, headed straight smack toward me, brush in one hand, a paper bag in the other. Next thing I knew, he was sharing my bench and blurting out in a kind of stuttery squeak, "Excuse me, but would you be interested in earning ten dollars?"

"Doing what?" I asked warily.

"Help me get rid," he said, "of those twelve hideous birds in my apartment."

Oh, brother! Yet I detected no boozy breath, saw no mad glitter in the eyes blinking behind the glasses. Just a frail, gray, neatly respectable wisp of a man who looked as if he'd had the pants scared off him. Maybe by something as simple as a couple of pet crows, belonging to a neighbor, making an entry through an open window to indulge in minor thievery.

"If I understood you correctly, sir," I said, "you need my assistance to remove some unattractive birds loose in your apartment?"

He winced and said, "No, God forbid, the creatures aren't *loose*. They're *painted* on one of the living-room walls."

"Oh," I said. "Painted by a former tenant, I presume?"

"I don't know who painted them," he replied in a sudden burst of squeaky virulence. "They're just *there*." He paused, gave me a sickly smile, and continued, "Sorry. Had an upsetting day, and my nerves are a bit on edge. May I introduce myself? I am Horace Plotkin and I live on Thompson Street."

I said, "I'm Halper, Bernard W., and I live on Waverly Place. What's the story on those birds?"

"Please forget the birds, Halper," he said. "I'm sorry I mentioned them. No need *to* have mentioned them. My problem is simply this: for certain personal reasons I want to paint over a wall in my living room. Purchased, as you can see, a brush and a can of paint in this paper bag. Then I realized it's quite a high-ceilinged room, and I happen to be afflicted with acrophobia. Am prone to dizziness even when standing on a chair. Hence I must engage someone to paint the upper section of the wall. And, well that's about it."

Another sickly smile as he drew a handkerchief and proceeded to mop the sweat on his face. Brother, there were all kinds of warning knells in my mind about Horace Plotkin, Esquire. Only I couldn't pin down just what in heck could be his motive. He didn't seem like a character who'd want to lure me to his apartment for some grisly purpose. If a criminal, his appearance suggested the nonviolent embezzler-forger-bigamist type.

The birds! Therein, I felt sure, lay the key to the mystery. I also found myself remembering Holmes's case that Watson had titled *The Five Orange Pips,* where pips were used as a death-threat warning. Maybe this was another bizarre version of it. Stool-pigeons are sometimes called canaries. Horrified Plotkin sees a dozen canaries painted on his wall? Realizes its ominous significance? Has some reason why he must smear over them but is stymied by his acrophobia?

It called for a direct challenge, so I said, "Mr. Plotkin, do you want me to believe there's something sinister in your proposition?"

He practically vibrated as he answered, "Good Lord, no!"

"Then please explain," I went on, "precisely what there was—is—about those birds that threw you into such an acute state of agitation."

"You insist on a full explanation?" he asked unhappily.

"Under the circumstances," I said, "I feel I must."

"All right," he said. "Hear this, Halper. I am Horace Plotkin, forty-three years old. Live alone and like it. Employed as bookkeeper in a plumbing supply firm. Currently on

my vacation. I spend three days in a resort hotel in Asbury Park. Weather inclement, fellow guests obnoxious. So I return to New York. At this point I must digress to get something on record.

"I want to make it perfectly clear," Mr. Plotkin continued, "that my curtailed stay in Asbury Park, while ill-advised and ill-fated, was *not* nerve shattering. Actually, I was in excellent spirits as I climbed the stairs to my apartment. Pleasant anticipation of watering my African violets and a personal soak in a nice warm bath. Then I unlock the door, enter the apartment, deposit my suitcase in a closet, turn —and there they *are*. The birds! Painted on the wall above the couch."

"Canaries?" I interjected.

He shook his head and asked, "Now what on earth made you think they were canaries?"

"Canaries are birds," I offered in rather weak rebuttal.

"So they are," he said. "Please, Halper, I've enough on my mind without brooding on what might be on *your* mind. Anyway, the birds *I'm* talking about are tropical birds called toucans. Monstrous beaks, violent coloring. Twelve of them, Halper—I counted. Staring back at me with hostile, mean, beady little eyes. Most unnerving experience of my entire life. And *don't* ask me how or why the creatures appeared on the wall—I simply don't—*know*. Have spent the past hour racking my brains and I still can't even hazard a wild *guess*."

"Steady, sir," I admonished. "Have you conferred with your landlord or the janitor?"

"Landlord and janitor live off the premises, unavailable for immediate conference," he said. "Besides, I've known both many years, and neither of them could be responsible for those crude, vulgar, evil-eyed birds. So I've decided on an out-of-sight and out-of-mind counterattack, and if you'll just help me paint the wall—"

"Just one more question, please," I interrupted. "I presume you saw the birds, screeched, and bolted out of your apartment?"

"I didn't *screech*," Mr. Plotkin retorted. "But I did make a rather hasty exit. Partly because I had heart palpitations and felt the need of fresh air. Furthermore, I don't see why you should address me in such an unkind manner."

"I was only trying to point out," I explained patiently, "the possibility of the Phantom Painter leaving an explanatory note somewhere in your apartment."

He stared at me, glassy-eyed behind his glasses. "Good Lord, Halper, I haven't thought of that. An explanatory note, hey? Yes, of course. Yet how could anyone *explain* such a mad act of vandalism?"

"That, sir," I told him, "is what we're going to try to ferret out. Forthwith."

And forthwith it was, old Plotkin and I taking off from the bench. On the double. As we hurried along, Mr. Plotkin babbling breathless inanities, I retrieved from the back of my mind something I sure as heck hadn't forgotten: to wit, the extraordinary interchange with Grandpa.

It seemed apparent now that the old gentleman must be a Mentalist like Dunninger. Retired professionally, but still in possession of his mind-reading faculties. He observes a man staring at a paint brush. Idly concentrates on what said brush-starer might be thinking about. And is astonished to get the return message of twelve painted toucans terrifying old Plotkin. Possibly a Holmesian scholar, Grandpa then concludes, quite correctly, that it was, indeed, *precisely* the sort of problem that would have intrigued Holmes. Any other explanation, despite my loyalty to the Baker Street Irregulars, bordered on madness.

Thus I felt a mounting excitement as Mr. Plotkin led me through the ground-floor entrance of a small, neat brick apartment building. I trailed him up a flight of stairs, where he paused before a door marked 2B. He unlocked the door, pushed it inward, and said in a dramatic whisper as he waved me inside, "Brace yourself for a bit of a shock, Halper. You'll see the creatures on your left as you enter, above the sofa."

I walked on in. Yes, a bit of a shock, all right. There was the overstuffed old-timer of a sofa. Above it, on an otherwise pristine wall, were three Courier & Ives prints. *No* birds. And my promising Case of the Phantom Painter abruptly degenerated into the Case of the Batty Bookkeeper.

I whirled as I heard a thud behind me. Mr. Plotkin had dropped the paper bag containing the brush and can of paint.

"Don't say it, Halper," he moaned. "I *know!* Had a cousin on my mother's side who died in an insane asylum. Now the tainted blood has come out in me."

He staggered to a chair, collapsed in it. I was alone with a self-confessed lunatic—poor old Plotkin, cowering in the chair there, destined for incarceration in some Snake Pit.

"Is there anything I can do for you, sir?" I asked.

He removed his hat, exposing a balding, dampish dome. "Well, your mother might be pleased by my African violets. Take as many as you can carry. I like to think they'll have a good home when I'm gone. I also want you, personally, to have another cherished possession of mine—a Samurai sword an office colleague brought back from the South Pacific. I'll get it for you."

I said quickly, "No, thank you, I already have a Samurai sword. No point having two of them, is there? And please try to compose yourself,

Mr. Plotkin. While I'm no qualified expert, it surely seems to me that a single hallucination cannot be conclusive of madness."

"Hah, but I'm *already* having another," he announced miserably. "Please note the three prints above the sofa. In the eighteen peaceful years that I have enjoyed this apartment, those prints have always—*always,* Halper—hung in the following order: the Clipper Ship 'Dreadnaught,' the Sleigh Scene, and the View of New York Harbor From Brooklyn Heights in 1849. Now I'm imagining that the Dreadnaught and the Sleigh Scene have reversed positions on the wall."

I did a sudden double-take and said, "But it *isn't* a hallucination, Mr. Plotkin. I also see the prints in the order—or out of order—you just described. The two people in the sleigh, then the sailing ship, then the harbor scene."

"Halper, you're not merely trying to humor a maniac?"

"Absolutely not," I affirmed. "If the first two prints are in reversed positions, then human error must be responsible for it. Do you happen to employ a cleaning woman?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Yurka was due here this morning," he replied. "But I mailed her a post card yesterday, saying I had decided to return to New York today, and would rather she came in next Thursday, when I'd be back at the office."

"Evidently," I pointed out, "she didn't receive your post card. Came in this morning. Noted that the glass protecting the prints needed cleaning. Took the prints off the wall. And later accidentally replaced them in the wrong order. So if you were wrong about *that* supposed hallucination, there's probably also some simple explanation for the birds."

Mr. Plotkin sat stone-still a little while, then leaned forward and squeaked, "Halper, you can earn my undying gratitude—*and* a fast ten-dollar bill—if you could suggest just one even remotely possible explanation why a sane human being could enter his apartment and *imagine* seeing hideous birds painted on the wall."

I accepted the challenge—my first opportunity to utilize professionally, so to speak, the science of analytical deduction which Holmes had so often propounded in the Sacred Writings.

Don't be misled, I thought, by the bizarre aspects of it. Holmes never was. Weigh and consider, with cool detachment, only the evidence on hand. Mrs. Yurka, the cleaning woman, accidentally reverses the positions of the prints above the sofa. *That's* what distracts old Plotkin when he enters the apartment. But at the time he's aware only that something's wrong.

All right, he keeps staring at the wall. Still can't figure out what's wrong. Progressively gets more

and more uneasy. Then his staring eyes proceed to tire, blur, water. Possibly he'd been terrified, when a little kid, by a screeching toucan in the Bird House of some zoo. Memory of it emerges from burial in his subconscious. Zing! the tired, blurred, watery eyes conjure up twelve painted toucans on the wall.

"Mr. Plotkin," I asked, "when have you last had your eyes examined? It's common knowledge that eye strain can induce weird optical illusions."

I was about to expound on my theory when Plotkin practically exploded in the chair as he yelped, "By God, that must be it! Yes, of course!" He squirmed around to produce a wallet, extracted some folding money therefrom, slapped same down on an end table near his chair. "*Twenty* dollars, Halper. Yours with my blessings *and* a tribute to a remarkable intellect."

Somewhat dazed, I said, "Thank you, sir. You have been having trouble with your eyes?"

"No, but I broke my glasses a couple weeks ago," Mr. Plotkin jabbered on. "Found Dr. Boardman, my oculist, away on vacation. So I dug up an old pair lying around here and like an idiot thought I could make do with glasses prescribed twenty-odd years ago! Result: severe eyestrain and the optical illusion of seeing the birds. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must call Dr. Boardman. Phone's in the bedroom."

Off to the bedroom scurried Mr. Plotkin. I made a more moderate scurry to take possession of the twenty-dollar bill. Replacing the nothingness in my wallet with the respectable sum of twenty smackers, a distinction said wallet seldom enjoyed, I thought I might as well eager-beaver a final small chore for old Plotkin. In deference to his acrophobia.

So I crossed the room, got up on the soda, reached for the prints above it. Some quick hocus-pocus and the Dreadnaught now proudly sailed nowhere in the Number One position, with the sleigh scene back in Number Two. There, everybody happy!

I brushed dust off my hands, turned to step down from the couch, and did another double-take. Dust? From handling framed prints cleaned by Mrs. Yurka just this morning? I swung back to the wall. Yes, each print bore a clearly visible film of dust. A new, dramatic development, and one that completely negated my original theory.

Suspicion of skulduggery now suggested another theory. The prints couldn't have changed positions if someone hadn't fiddled with them. But *not* for cleaning purposes. Why else, then? Obviously, there was need for a barren wall—to *concoct* the spectacle of painted birds above the sofa.

Which, of course, next focused my attention on the wall itself. Almost immediately I saw a series

of tiny holes, spaced an inch apart, running completely around the edge of the wall. Thumbtacks must have made those holes. And then I spotted a lone ivory-colored thumbtack near the lower-right corner. A small fragment of something seemed to be trapped beneath it. On closer examination I was able to identify it as a bit of transparent plastic.

Well! I released the breath I was holding, got down off the couch. Bernie, old boy, I thought, this *is* a sinister business. Put it through the good old analytical deducer. There's Mr. Plotkin. A bit of a nut, to begin with. Also a timid, easily scared little guy with a bum ticker. Phantom Painter knows that. So P.P. sneaks in here, removes the prints, tacks on a sheet of plastic bearing caricatures of venomous-looking birds. Then he hides somewhere, and waits. Hoping Mr. Plotkin will walk in, recoil in horror at the sight of the birds, and collapse with a fatal heart attack.

However, old Plotkin's bum ticker survives the initial shock. Only palpitations, which quiet down when he escapes into the fresh air. Disappointed but undaunted, Phantom Painter plays his more subtle ace in the hole. Removes the plastic sheets, hangs the prints back on the wall, and skiddoodles out of the apartment. When Mr. Plotkin returns, *no* birds above the sofa! Naturally, he decides he's gone mad. Rather than face a life in a padded cell, he cuts his throat. With his Samurai sword.

Yes, sir, a truly diabolical scheme, and one that would have succeeded if it hadn't been for me, plus the fact that the Phantom Painter had made the error of replacing the prints in the wrong order.

With Mr. Plotkin still yakking on the phone, I looked around for a likely place where the Phantom Painter might have lurked in waiting. In case he left some clue there. One possibility suggested itself when I saw, beyond the open door of the bathroom, the circular hood of an old-fashioned shower curtain draping into the tub. Anyone hiding inside the shower curtain, peering through the entry slit, would have clear vision of the entrance door and much of the living room.

I went into the bathroom, separated the slit in the curtain, looked down. Jackpot! There were scuff marks and at least one clearly visible imprint of a heel on the otherwise immaculate bottom of the tub. The Phantom Painter's hiding place. And, of course, the final, conclusive evidence I needed.

Brother, there was lots of frenzied activity up in the cerebral region as I returned to the living room. I mean, I was going round and *round*. Especially when I realized that I now had still another terrific problem challenging me. Dared I risk alerting a man with a bad heart—who'd already suffered a severe shock—that evil forces

were conspiring to drive him to madness and suicide?

If I threw *that* at him, old Plotkin might well give up the ghost. And there I'd be, standing over a corpse, eligible for an effusive thank-you note from the *would-be* killer. Possibly, even criminally liable somehow. A situation of utmost delicacy.

As I brooded how I might cope with it, Mr. Plotkin emerged from the bedroom. He looked almost chipper now, the zombie-grayness gone, a pinkish glow even in his oversized ears. Living example, I thought that ignorance *can* be bliss.

"Dr. Boardman will see me right away," he reported. "Thanks again, Halper. And now I must run along."

I mumbled, "Yes, of course," and trailed him to the door. With an inner voice pounding, You just can't let him *go* that way, Bernie—a man's life and sanity are in jeopardy. The Phantom Painter will strike again. Old Plotkin must be warned. In a subtle manner. *Think*, Bernie.

An idea came along as we were descending the stairs and I said, "Mr. Plotkin, are you fond of detective stories?"

"I enjoy one now and then," he answered. "Why?"

"Oh, it has occurred to me," I went on casually, "that your experience might have the makings of a mystery story. Suppose—just as a literary exercise, mind you—suppose someone who knows you've a heart condition dreams up a gimmick that tricks you into thinking you see painted birds above the sofa. An enemy of yours?"

Mr. Plotkin smiled and said, "An amusing idea, Halper. But I'm afraid I can't qualify as your potential victim. One, there's nothing wrong with my heart. Two, I've no enemies." He lifted his arm and yelled, "Taxi!"

The cruising cab swung to the curb. Mr. Plotkin got in, waved a cheery farewell. And off he went, leaving a baffled, frustrated character on the sidewalk. Yours truly. I knock my brains out to unearth a fiendish plot and, seemingly, there's no *reason* for it. Total absence of motive.

It called for agonizing reappraisal. Which I tried as I walked on. Nearing Sheridan Square I paused in front of an art supplies shop, my attention attracted by a few paintings in the window. And then it occurred to me: could the Phantom Painter be a Greenwich Village artist? A local product? So I went on in, to face a frowsy old babe knitting a canary-colored scarf.

"Good afternoon, Ma'm," I said. "Would you, perchance, be doing business with—or know socially—an artist who paints on plastic tropical birds called toucans?"

"Perchance I do," she answered without even interrupting the click of her needles. "Emil Yurka. Base-

ment studio on Cornelia Street. What about him?"

I pretended a coughing spell to conceal the fact that this double-barreled jackpot had almost sent me sailing out my shoes. A *Mrs.* Yurka was Plotkin's cleaning woman! Presently, regaining control, I explained, "Oh, a fellow student in my art class claimed he saw a wall thus decorated in a private home. Intrigued, I thought I'd check."

"Yes, it might have been one of Yurka's poor man's murals," she said. "Stretched plastic. No need to prepare the wall. Transparency supposed to give you choice of background colors. If you want my frank opinion, I think it's damn foolishness."

"I value your frank opinion, Ma'am," I said. "Incidentally, I've an uncle who employs a part-time maid called Mrs. Yurka. Would she be related to Emil Yurka?"

The old gal lowered her knitting and said, "His wife, Lena. Sunny boy, just what *is* there about you that gives me a very peculiar feeling?"

I blinked at this apparent symptom of paranoia. Fortunately, the phone rang just then. She rose to answer it and I seized the opportunity to make an exit.

Out in the street again, and, brother, I was no longer a bewildered, desolate wanderer. Triumphant juices coursing through me. For I felt I'd cracked the case. Lena Yurka, *not* Horace Plotkin, was the key figure. Once I realized *that,* everything came into focus.

I gave it a quick rundown. Lena has some reason why she must lure Emil out of his studio. She knows my client is out of town, has the key to his apartment. So she tells Emil that Mr. Plotkin ordered a poor man's mural. Out happily trots Emil, leaving her free to pursue whatever she planned to do during his absence. Later, of course, she sneaks back to the apartment and removes the poor man's mural. Does that while old Plotkin is on the park bench morosely contemplating his paint brush.

The scuff marks and heel print in the bathtub? Heck, Mr. Plotkin probably bought a new shower curtain before he'd left on his vacation. *His* shoes messed up the tub when he stood in it replacing the old curtain. And, well, that was it—elementary, as Holmes would say.

Yes, sir, a load off my mind as I walked on. Technically, Lena's furtive maneuvering was no concern of mine. Another case, altogether. But I saw no harm in at least probing the possibility of casing Yurka's studio. Simply for my own records, so to speak.

So I passed the bank at Sheridan Square, went a bit farther, turned into the relatively short dead-end Cornelia Street, and spotted the sign almost immediately: *Emil Yurka—Studio—Original Paintings For Sale—Inspection Invited.*

Which, of course, charted my

next move. After all, inspection *invited*. There was a narrowish alley between the building I was now passing and the one where Yurka had his studio. For no reason at all, I just *happened* to glance into the alley. And I halted in my tracks. The rear of Emil Yurka's studio abutted, across an intervening backyard, the rear of the bank on Sheridan Square!

I felt myself breaking out into a sweat. Why, this was like Holmes's great case titled *The Red-Headed League*. There, in London, a gullible pawnbroker is lured, through a bizarre scheme, away from his shop, thus granting his phoney assistant the opportunity to tunnel to a bank vault containing a fortune in French gold. Here, in New York, a creator of poor man's murals is provided with phoney commissions so that human moles might burrow undetected in his subcellar to a fortune in good old American loot,

Simmer down, Bernie, I thought. Use the old noodle. Sure, this *could* be a potential Crime of the Century. It could also be mere literary and geographical coincidences. No sinister schemes. Maybe old Lena sent Emil rushing out the front door, eager-beavering on his phoney commission, so that *she* could rush to the back door to admit a boy friend champing at the bit.

I was tempted to let it go at that, but I looked again at the *Inspection Invited*. A few moments later descended the short flight of steps to a door bearing the message, *Open. Walk In*. Which I did.

Well, nothing jumped at me from dark corners. I was alone in a big musty-smelling basement studio. Couches and chairs and things of normal variety. Paintings on most of the available wall space. And no sign of life anywhere.

Venturing further into the studio, I began casing the paintings. There were toucans all right, and old Plotkin hadn't exaggerated. Crudely hideous creatures. There were also unbelievable fish blowing bubbles, winged beasties vaguely suggesting cherubs, other things that defied identification. All painted on stretched plastic, and mine was not to reason why.

In fact, my ears, not my eyes, were on the prowl here, trying to detect subterranean activity with picks and shovels. And then I did hear a faint crash-rumbling beneath me. The building shaken by the passage of a heavily laden truck? Or by actual tunneling somewhere below?

I flopped on the floor, placed my ear to it, and listened. Nothing. Just the smell of dust in my kisser, and sudden realization that my behavior bordered on lunacy.

Facing the wall as I lay on the floor, I rolled over and came up to my hands and knees. And froze in that position. A man stood watching me just inside an open door diagonally across the studio. A

monstrous hulk of a man, with a brutal, slablike face.

The creepy overtones revved up to a howl. Maybe that was Yurka, but I sure had no intention of hanging around long enough to find out. He was at the far end of the studio. The exit door was maybe six feet behind me. And instinct urged instantaneous departure of jet-propelled nature.

So I scrambled to my feet, and froze again as the giant clipped, "Hold it, Buster!"

So help me, now there was a gun in his hand. He didn't point it at me. Just kind of *showed* me the thing. Then he put the gun away and made a come-hither motion with his forefinger.

Honest to God, if my hair didn't turn pure snow-white then, it should have. Why, he must be the upstairs lookout. Who *saw* me put my ear to the floor. And thus knew I was wise to their scheme. Meaning that a certain buttinski named Bernie Halper was about to learn to mind his own business the hard way.

The forefinger continued that horrible beckoning motion and my legs moved along the Last Mile toward the hulking brute. As I approached, a confederate joined him in the doorway. Another depraved criminal face, but one that belonged to a medium-sized fat hoodlum.

The two thugs stepped back and separated as my poor wobbly legs carried on their grim chore. Through the doorway, into the other room. They stopped when a woman's voice said, *"Now* what?"

I had a glimpse of an angry-looking battleaxe seated in a chair and of a bearded man in a chair next to her. Then I was spun about, and there was the giant looking down at me with flat, pale killer-eyes.

"All right," he said, "why were you lying on the floor?"

"Oh, *that?"* I stalled.

His hand tightened on my shoulder. "Yeah, that."

Rattling off the first thing that popped up to my mind, I said, "Well, sir, I was merely getting the vertical viewpoint. As opposed to the horizontal. To attain a full perspective of Mr. Yurka's work. A theory I read somewhere. On account I'm an art student."

Gibberish *no one* could believe. Sure enough, the giant shook his head, glanced at Fatso, who shook *his* head. Here we go, Bernie—mayhem coming up.

The big heavy hand spun me about again as the giant asked, "The kid's mumbo-jumbo make any sense to you, Yurka?"

The man seated next to the battleaxe was a weird-looking character sporting a beret, dark glasses, and a flowing red beard. He wore a long, filthy butcher-type linen coat and webbed sandals showing dirt-blackened toes. At the moment he was leaning forward, scratching his left ankle.

"Sure, could be, Lieutenant," he replied in a thin lisping voice. "Lots of crazy theories floating around. Like, for instance, you thinking Frankie Millard might walk into a police trap here."

"Lieutenant?" I gasped. "Are you police officers?"

The giant released my shoulder and said, "Yes, I'm Lieutenant Nelson. That's Detective Brady there. Who're you?"

Me? I was someone released from a chamber filling with lethal gas into crystal-pure Alpine air. Boy, I even loved that Emil Yurka for clearing the atmosphere. "My name's Halper," I said, "Bernard W., and I live on Waverly Place. I've some identification cards in my wallet—"

"No, just tell me what you're doing here. And I want the truth. You turned green when you saw me watching you lying on the floor. If I hadn't shown a gun, you'd have lit out like a scared rabbit. Why?"

Well, I was only too happy to oblige. Until it suddenly hit me that it might mean a plunge from the frying pan right smack into the fire. It would be sheer madness to tell those hard-eyed detectives that I was checking on crooks tunneling toward the bank on Sheridan Square. Why, even if I *convinced* them, I'd be off on a fast trip in a straight jacket.

"Well?" the Lieutenant prompted.

Desperate, I said, "I saw Mr. Yurka's sign and came in merely to inspect his work. If my subsequent behavior seemed peculiar, it's because I have this unfortunate nervous condition I can't help."

The Lieutenant regarded me with an expression I can only describe as one of pure loathing. "I'll get back to you later," he promised grimly. "Now, damn it, I want to think this through."

He lit a cigarette. Brady did likewise. A breather as I envisioned blinding lights, rubber hose. I vowed right there and then that if I ever got out of this mess alive, I'd spend the rest of my life as a dedicated isolationist. Absolutely. I come home and see a chimp smoking a cigar in Pop's chair, *and* I peacefully go right on to my own room. Let Mom cope with it. None of *my* business.

A muttering sound made me glance at Yurka. He had shifted the scratching operation to his other ankle. And I felt my own ankles begin to itch. The basement must be infested with fleas. Yet they didn't seem to bother old Lena, though I could see bite marks all over her suety legs.

"Let's play this back, Brady," the Lieutenant said. "From the beginning. Slow and easy. And work over the cuties as they come along."

"Okay," said Brady. "Slow and easy. Frankie Millard. Lena's brother. Held for armed robbery while convalescing from a gun

wound at Bellevue. And Frankie makes a break for it. Slugs a male nurse called Weimar. Puts on Weimar's clothes. Gets out of the hospital okay. But has only a few minutes start before we hustle down here for a stakeout."

"Yeah, smart police work," Lena boomed in a foghorn voice. "I'm only Frankie's loving sister and Emil is his best pal. And Frankie is too damn stupid to realize this is the first place where cops would come looking for him."

"Knock it off," the Lieutenant rasped. "Frankie could telephone for delivery of clothes, money, a gun. He can't get far in Weimar's hospital uniform and the few bucks in Weimar's wallet. Also there's a bullet hole in his chest that still needs care. He's got to get under wraps, quick, and stay put. You used to be a nurse before you were sent up on a narcotics rap. And Frankie is still supposed to have seventy grand stashed away from the Wentworth heist. It all could figure—if there's a gimmick. What are *you* nodding your head for?"

I jumped as I realized he'd snapped the question at me. "Why, it's just that I'm impressed by your reasoning, Lieutenant," I said.

The truth, stated in a respectful manner, yet it only evoked from him a Dracula-like glare. I mean, that big cop *hated* me. Then he said, "Where the hell were we, Brady? Oh, at our first cutie. We no sooner get here and park across the street when Emil pops out carrying a small suitcase. Scoots up the street and you tag after him. Now could he have pulled a fast one on you somewhere along the line?"

Brady shrugged. "Well, let's trace it through. I tail Emil to Plotkin's apartment. Nail him as he's about to unlock the door. Open the suitcase. Surprise, surprise! A folded plastic sheet, scissors, hammer, thumbtacks. That's all. Emil explains the apartment belongs to a guy called Plotkin, somebody Lena works for, and he's using Lena's key to deliver a mural that Plotkin ordered. Where is Plotkin? Out of town on his vacation, says Emil, and he can prove it's all on the level if I just give him the few minutes it'd take to put the thing up on the wall."

"You checked what Emil might be carrying under that butcher coat?"

"I sure did. Nothing Frankie could use. We go in. He pulls a sofa away from the wall, takes down some pictures above it, fetches a metal stool from the bathroom. Gets up on the stool. Proceeds to tack on those crazy birds. Plastic sheet precut to fit the section of wall there. Then back to the wall goes the sofa. Back to the bathroom goes the stool. And out *we* go. So, Lieutenant, where and how could he have pulled some gimmick on me?"

Another pause as the Lieutenant

and Brady brooded. And I held one of my own. A documented explanation, at last, of how the toucans appeared on Plotkin's wall. But how account for their *disappearance?*

Maybe, I thought, Lena feels sorry for Emil because he isn't selling his paintings. Knows Plotkin is out of town. Tells Emil that Plotkin ordered a mural—to give old depressed Emil a shot in the arm. Later she gets rid of the mural—before Plotkin could make a how-come stink about it. Yes, that's it, and I get myself in this awful mess because of something as dopey simple as all that. Honestly!

"All right, let's move on to cutie Number Two," the Lieutenant said. "You march Emil back here. We move into the studio. Search the joint. No Lena. No Frankie. A half hour passes, then the phone rings. I sit on the extension as Emil answers. A woman's voice that sounds like Lena's says, 'Sam's Delicatessen?' 'Wrong number,' says Emil and hangs up. Maybe a minute later, Lena comes ambling in. I play a hunch and look for the nearest place from where she might have phoned. Drug store around the corner. Sure enough, man there says Lena was just in to use a pay booth. It figures that she made a prearranged check-up call. But checking—what?"

Brady looked unhappy. Ditto the Lieutenant. Ditto Bernie Halper, now anticipating his turn as cutie Number Three. Emil muttering again attracted another glance from me. And then it happened!

Emil was back at his ankle-scratching routine, only now his fingernails crawled farther up his leg, lifting for a moment his trouser cuff. And I caught a glimpse of the hairy growth on his leg. My heart began to pound. *Black* hair on his leg. A *red* beard on his kisser. Fleas don't bother Lena because she's used to them. But they bother *him*.

"Lieutenant," I said, "I may be able to help you see through this smoke screen of obfuscation. Would Emil Yurka and Frankie Millard both answer to the same general physical description of being tall skinny guys?"

"Yes," he replied, "and stop talking like you're reading from a book. So?"

"So," I said, "one tall skinny guy wearing a beret, dark glasses, and a red beard would look pretty much like another tall skinny guy wearing a beret, dark glasses, and a red beard. If Frankie disguised himself to trick you into thinking he's *Emil*—"

"He'd have to get rid of the bandaged wound in his chest," Brady cut in. "The very first thing I looked for when I frisked Emil. Lieutenant, every time this kid opens his mouth I want to shake him until his teeth rattle."

"Me, too," the Lieutenant said.

And my teeth already were prac-

tically rattling without any assistance from them. Bernie, stop antagonizing these guys. You're digging your own grave.

"Oh, I know," I told Brady, "a trained police officer like yourself would instantly suspect some such deception. But I thought it might have happened later elsewhere."

The Lieutenant said, "Like what happened later elsewhere?"

Yeah, what? In that last desperate moment I remembered the scuff marks and heel imprint in Plotkin's bathtub. *Someone* had stood there.

"Suppose the Yurkas know Frankie plans to break out of Bellevue," I said, ad-libbing like mad. "And Mr. Plotkin's apartment is empty on account he's out of town. So they tell Frankie to go *there*. Where Lena's waiting with a false red beard, dark glasses, beret, and clothes identical to Emil's. And Emil is all set here to pop out with the suitcase when he spots what might be cops watching the place. He knows he'll be tailed, but he's got that phoney explanation—"

"The kid's nuts," Lena foghorned. "Can't you *tell* he's nuts?"

"Shut up!" the Lieutenant clipped. He added to me, "Carry on, Bernard W. You're doing fine."

"I am?" I said. "It's just a theory, Lieutenant. In the Plotkin apartment Lena helps Frankie get into those clothes and beard and all. She leaves. Frankie hides in the bathroom. When Emil brings back to the bathroom the metal stool he'd used to tack on the mural—and *if* in those few moments the interior of the bathroom is out of Officer Brady's angle of vision—what's to stop Frankie from emerging as Emil? Frankie able to mimic Emil's lisping voice. Officer Brady had already checked the real Emil's chest for a bandaged gun wound, so no further danger of switch being discovered."

Everything sort of stood stark-still for a little while, excluding the twitching in my legs. Then the Lieutenant said softly, "Yeah, that's it, all right. The gimmick."

"It isn't a kid," Lena said. "It's a Thing. Sorry, Frankie. I thought we had it made."

The man next to her pulled off the false beard, removed the dark glasses. Yellowish eyes looked at me with murderous intent. "Halper, Bernard W.," he said softly. "A name to remember."

"That's for sure," the Lieutenant said.

And I had this sudden horrible feeling I was going to be sick. Right in front of all those people. I mean, it was some kind of reaction. "Lieutenant," I managed to gasp out, "I don't feel so good. May I walk around the block?"

"You may," he answered.

Brother, I took off. But jet-propelled. Out and through the studio and up the steps into the sanity of the sunlit street. Here my stomach decided it wasn't going to pose

nessy problems, after all. Just an ›ver-all wobbliness as I walked on, ecalling those awful moments vhen I fully expected to be clob›ered. Moments that must have ıged me, and maybe etched inter›sting lines in my face.

This self-revelation made me feel ›etter. The murder threat in Frankie's yellowish eyes? Heck, ıe's probably a three-time loser. Gets a life sentence. If he ever *does* ;et out of prison, he'll be a dodder›ng old man.

Which reminded me of Grandpa vith the silver-knobbed cane. Actu›lly, it was he who had unleashed he forces which subsequently wept me along. Directed my atten›ion to old Plotkin. Brought up Holmes. And maybe, as a Mental›st, was able to project to Mr. Plot›in the idea of contacting *me* to ıelp paint over the birds. I mean, t was something to think about.

At this point, somewhat to my ıstonishment, I realized that my ımbling along evidently had pur›ose and direction. For I found nyself back in Washington Square, ıearing the bench where it had all ›egun.

I settled down on the bench, still narveling about Grandpa as an nstrument of Fate. It rated, I hought, a write-up in *The Baker Street Journal*. So I began sort of ›laying around with it in my mind vhen Joanie suddenly bobbed up.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're still here, Bernie," she blurted out. "Look, I want to apologize. I know I said something that hurt your feelings. Please forgive me. Because I'm very, very fond of you, Bernie."

Well, that left me pretty breathless, too. Such humility from Joanie was a major victory. A tender moment, one that opened new vistas.

"Forget it," I said. "Now sit down and I'll tell you about a most extraordinary experience I've just had. You remember the old gentleman sharing the bench with me?"

"No, I don't," she answered. "If you mean when I last saw you here, you were alone on the bench."

I stared at her. No guile in my beloved's candid blue eyes. "The old man with a silver-knobbed cane," I said. "Why, he was sitting right *there*. You *must* have seen him."

Joanie said unhappily, "I'm sorry, Bernie. Maybe I just didn't happen to notice him. Is it important?"

I checked my wallet. Yep, old Plotkin's token of appreciation still there. "No, it isn't important," I told Joanie. "I simply thought he might have dropped this twenty-dollar bill. That's my extraordinary experience. I look down and there it *is*. Twenty smackers waiting to be picked up. Now let's go live it up a little."

Which we did, glam details of same irrelevant to this chronicle. So Joanie just didn't *happen* to notice Grandpa sharing my bench. I mean, there couldn't be any other explanation, could there?

EDITOR'S FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **CORNELL WOOLRICH**

TITLE: ***The Singing Hat***

TYPE: Detective Novelette

DETECTIVES: Cleary and Davis

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Another Woolrich whizbang, this one showing the procedural method of police investigation as it was usually depicted in the "pulp" magazines of the 1930s . . . action all the way!*

MARTY DILLON WAS JUST A POOR guy plodding along year in and year out. He bought a new suit maybe once in five years, and a new hat not much oftener than that. But on the day this story opens the five years for a hat must have recently elapsed, for he was starting on the first lap of a new one. And, like most owners of new hats, he wasn't very familiar with it yet.

He didn't have the feel of it, couldn't have picked it blindfolded out of a dozen others, like his old one. It hadn't yet mellowed itself to his personality, had none of those dents, creases, and grease spots that marked it as his own. That would come in time; it still had four years and eleven months to go.

Dillon and his new hat went into a one-arm joint. A one-arm joint is a white-tiled place that suggests a clinic. Two long rows of armchairs line the walls. The right arm of each chair is expanded into a china-topped slab. You park your food on it. Hooks on the wall above the chairs. That's all.

Dillon collected a trayful, sat down in the handiest chair, and got to work. The motions of cutting, spading, and hoisting caused his improperly broken-in hat to slip forward a little on his brow, so he took it off and slung it on the hook behind him to rid himself of the annoyance. Nobody could get at it

without reaching up over his shoulder, and his neighbor in the next seat was much better dressed than he in every way, so Dillon felt that it was safe enough.

He was a quick eater; he was tired and wanted to get home, anyway. When he finished and stood up, his neighbor was still there, but was hidden behind an outspread newspaper. Dillon reached behind him without looking, and put a hat back on. Maybe the hooks were closer together than he thought; it's easy to aim wrong when you don't watch what you're doing.

At any rate, a blurred glance at the article as it went up past his face showed the right shape, the right color, and he went on out under it. Outside the door he set it a trifle more firmly in place with one hand, and thought it felt softer, finer-textured, then he remembered it, but didn't stop to wonder why.

He was halfway back to his room when he happened to glance sidewise into a strip of mirror in a show window as he went by. It was to the left of him, and he thought he caught a fleck of color up by his hatband as his reflection skimmed past.

He stopped in his tracks, backed up a step, took a good look, and there was a jaunty green feather nestled in the bow, where it had no right to be. He hadn't bought a hat with any green feather-sprig.

Dismayed, he took it off, turned it over, and looked into it. It was the same brand as his, but instead of the gilt-paper initials *M D* cheaply pasted on the sweatband, it had *R S* perforated through it, which was a classier way of ticketing it. It was a ten-dollar hat—and he'd only paid five for his.

He had a brief temptation to hang onto it, creditably overcame it, growled, slung it back on his head, and started hurriedly back where he'd just come from.

The seat next to his own was vacant now. He went back to the counter and called the manager. "Hey, I walked out with somebody else's hat, and he got mine. What'll I do?"

"Leave it here with me if you want," said the manager. "If he asks for it I'll give it to him, and keep yours for you."

"Naw," said Dillon firmly. "It's windy out, I'm susceptible to colds, and I ain't going home without a hat. He may never come back with mine, and then I'm stuck without one."

"Suit yourself," said the manager indifferently. Anything that didn't directly concern his hashery didn't interest him much. "Leave your name and address with me, and if he comes around asking, I'll tell him where he can find you." He produced a greasy scrap of paper and a pencil stub.

"Yeah, that's a better idea," Dillon agreed, and wrote out the identification. The manager stuck it carelessly in the cash drawer.

Dillon left a second time, a little put out at having come all the way back for nothing, when he'd been tired to begin with. "Any other guy," he grumbled, "would have kept it and shut up. It's a better one than the one he got off me!"

But if he went to all the trouble of picking out a hat for himself, he wanted to wear that one, and not some other guy's. He was funny that way. He ambled home, hands in pockets, all pride in his expensive headgear lacking because it wasn't rightfully his.

When he got back to his room and climbed up the three flights, vague warnings he had heard somewhere or other about the dangers of wearing a hat that had been on someone else's scalp assailed him belatedly. Dandruff and things like that. He took it off and shook it out vigorously—without being sure himself just what hygienic good that would do. He hit it a couple of good stiff clouts with the back of his hand, by way of helping the cause of sanitation along.

Something rustled momentarily in it, dropped out. He reached down and picked up a twenty-dollar bill from the floor at his feet. Brand-new, spotless, it looked as if it had just come off the Government press, except that it was folded the long way to conform to the width of the sweatband that had encased it.

Also, its hiding place had made it a little rumpled, from the warmth of the wearer's head, without otherwise detracting from its spick-and-span newness. That is to say, had it stayed up there long enough it would have ended up looking quite wrinkled and as though it had been in circulation some time; which may have been the whole idea, but Dillon didn't stop to think of that.

The sight of this unexpected windfall held him spellbound for a minute. "Holy cat!" he breathed reverently. He just stood there holding it stretched out between his two hands as if he were going to kiss it in another minute.

"Funny place for a guy to carry his money," he thought. "Maybe he was afraid of having his pockets picked." That reminded him, cruelly, that it wasn't his. Temptation overcame him momentarily. "I wonder if he knew he had it up there?" he thought wistfully. He conquered it almost immediately. Sure, he must have. People didn't walk around the streets with twenty-dollar bills stuck in their hatbands without knowing it.

He sighed regretfully. "Guess I'll have to give it back to him. I left my name there. He'll know where to come looking for his hat." He shook his head, however, as virtue finally triumphed. "Boy, I could sure use that, though!"

He turned the hat over once more, fingered the sweatband with a new sort of respect. To his consternation a second bill dropped out!

He didn't waste any more time and turned the entire band inside out. A whole interlocked chain of bills, with a gap where the first two "links" had been, separated and fell down. And they were all twenties, and they were all immaculately new, with just that preliminary warping and dampening.

He unfolded them, counted them over. Twenty of them. Four hundred bucks! (Which is as much as a "passer" can safely unload during the course of a single evening's workout, even if he buys cigarettes at every corner cigar store he comes to and a beer at every bar.)

Dillon, aghast, was thinking: "That guy musta been carrying his whole bankroll around on his dome!" But it started to smell fishy to him. One was all right, but there were too many now to be accounted for plausibly in that way. All one denomination, and they all looked too new—there wasn't a shaggy one among them; and—he held the hatful up toward his nose and inhaled—why you could almost smell the sickly sweet odor of fresh printer's ink coming from them.

He muttered aloud, "Where was it I seen *that?* Last night's paper or tonight's?" He started to ransack the room thoroughly, the treasure hat temporarily laid aside. He found the item in night before last's paper, fortunately not yet thrown out because he hadn't finished doing a crossword puzzle it contained. He was not a very scholarly soul and it took him a week to do a puzzle.

New Flood of Counterfeits Deluges City, was the heading.

He hadn't paid much attention to the item at the time, because he was in little danger of getting "stung" with one himself. He didn't often get a look at a twenty-dollar bill, and these, the article said, were all twenties.

By the time he finished reading it he was not only thoroughly enlightened about the meaning of what he had just found, but frightened in the bargain. He thought, "I gotta get them out of here! If they're found here in *my* room, I'll be pinched and locked up!"

He had a dismayed feeling the police would refuse to believe his explanation of how he had come into possession of the money. It did sound sort of fantastic at that; picking up somebody else's hat by mistake, with four hundred dollars of counterfeit currency tucked into it. They'd arrest him for being an accomplice of those guys, whoever they were.

He went into a panic about it, kept walking all around the hat, which now rested upside down on the seat of a chair. He looked at it in terror as though he expected it to jump up and bite him. He was afraid even to go out on the street with it now, to carry it back to the one-arm joint. He might be stopped on the way, or the manager there might even call the cops.

He couldn't just throw it out the window or burn it here in the room; there was just a slim chance that the bills were not counterfeit, and then he'd get into another kind of trouble; the guy would come around after it, and think he'd stolen it, and then *he'd* have him arrested.

The more he thought about it, the only safe thing to do seemed to be to take the hat and the $400 to the police and turn it over without delay. Even if they found it hard to credit his story, at least it would be in his favor that he'd gone to them of his own accord, not waited to be picked up.

Meanwhile he was agitatedly refolding each of the bills, interlocking them together again into a circular "necklace" or paperchain, the way they had been. He reinserted this under the sweatband. He tucked the band down just the way he'd found it, eased the hat back on his head as painfully as if it had been a crown of thorns. Yes, he would go to the nearest precinct house right now; the sooner he got it over with the better.

His forehead was liberally bedewed with sweat as he started toward the door on his way out. He reached for the knob with one hand, the light switch with the other. He opened the door first. Then he stood there paralyzed and forgot about the light switch.

There were two men standing perfectly still outside the door, looking at him. They must have just come up the stairs; they must have been very quiet about it. They just gazed at him stonily. He could tell they weren't just passing by because they were standing there blocking the doorway.

They both had half faces; that is to say, their hat brims cut off the upper parts of their faces as effectively in the dim light coming out of his room, as masks.

Finally one said, "Hello." There was a touch of cat-and-mouse play to the greeting.

"H-hello," Dillon quavered.

"Ain't you gonna ask us in?" the second one said. "After we come all the way over to give you your hat back?"

The first one pointed. He didn't stick his arm out, or even his hand. He just shot one finger out of his hand, like a trick knife-blade working on a spring. There was something menacing about the gesture. He said, "That's my hat you got on."

But why did two of them have to call for it, when it only belonged to one? "I mustn't let them know I found the money under the sweatband," Dillon told himself. "That's my only chance."

The air was perfectly still in that hallway, yet something seemed to be fanning it, stirring it ominously over his head.

They stepped forward, so he had to give ground, step back deeper into the room. They were in now.

One of them closed the door. Why did he have to do that, just to exchange one hat for another?

He hoped his face wasn't as white as it felt. He mustn't *seem* afraid; because if he hadn't found the money he wouldn't have been. He wouldn't have known there was anything to be afraid about. He was thanking his lucky stars he'd had the blind good fortune to put the money back under the band just the way he'd found it, instead of starting out for the station house with it in his pocket, for instance, or wrapped up in a piece of newspaper.

But the door had a very large keyhole. How long had they been standing out there unheard?

"You were going out?" one of them purred.

"J-just to a show," Dillon said, and tried to smile. The smile smashed to pieces against their flinty expressions.

"You were going out to a show in my hat." More menacing than ever. Did they guess where he'd really been bound for? The speaker turned to his companion. "Whaddye think of that?"

Dillon's heart was going like a triphammer. It wasn't that he was a physical coward, afraid of exchanging blows with another man. But these two were breathing violent death. He could sense it all around them, like cold vapor.

He took the hat off, careful not to jar it, and held it out toward them on an even keel. The one closest to him took it from him. Then he turned it over and looked down into it. Then he turned his back and did something to it, holding it so Dillon couldn't see him. Dillon could figure what it was.

Dillon had got his second wind by now. The hat had been transferred without an accidental betrayal of what it held. He said, "I went back there right away as soon as I found out I had the wrong one, and left my name."

"Why didn't you leave the hat, if you knew it wasn't yours?"

"I—I thought maybe that hash-house guy wouldn't turn it in, and then I'd be stuck without one." That sounded plausible enough.

The one who had had his back turned faced forward again. He was still holding the hat in his hand. He exchanged a hard, beady look with the other one.

Dillon could read that look perfectly. It meant: "D'ye think he got wise? Should we take a chance, let him get away with it?" He knew his life was hanging on that one look. He put off breathing while it was going on, and it seemed to go on forever.

The second one hitched his head a little. Dillon read that too. It meant: "Sure, take a chance. I guess it's okay."

The first one took off Dillon's own hat, tossed it contemptuously over on the bed, brushed his hands insultingly. "There's yours,"

he said. "Next time be careful what y're doing. C'mon, Jupe, let's get out of this hencoop."

They turned away, started moving toward the door. Relief gushed hot and sweet over poor Dillon. It was over; another minute and—

Suddenly the one the hat had belonged to whirled around on him, as unexpectedly and treacherously as a snake. Again that finger shot out close to his body. "I'm shy a—" he began sharply.

The reaction was too sudden for Dillon—he was caught off guard. "No, you're not, it's all there," he blurted out. "I didn't touch any of—" His jaws locked, too late. He moaned a little and just stood looking at them.

They came back slower than they'd started away—as slow as looming figures in a bad dream. "I was going to say, I'm shy another hat right now or I wouldn't put this one on after you been wearing it. So it's all there, is it? Wha-at's all there?"

"Nothing," panted Dillon desperately.

"So you were going out to a show, were you? Well, you're going to see a show right here, without going out." His hand came out from under his coat, heavier than it had gone in. Dillon was so far gone already that the sight of the gun couldn't do much more to him. "Go on outside and see if the hall's all right, Jupe."

The door opened, closed. There was a terrifying wait of thirty seconds. Then it opened again. The lookout's head peered in. "Hall's all right," he reported.

There was something horrible about the sinister meaning they both gave the casual, matter-of-fact remark.

"Go down and wait for me by the street door, Jupe. I'll be right with you. Go down *loud*."

"Yeah, I know. Don't take too long." The door closed again after him. They may have come up soundlessly; the one going down now seemed to be jumping with his whole weight from one landing to the next. The stairwell boomed with his descent.

Dillon pleaded in a low voice. "What're you taking that to me for? I haven't done anything." It wasn't any good yelling for help and he knew it; help couldn't get here in time.

The man standing up to him answered in an equally low voice. "You mean, you won't do anything after I'm finished in here."

The report of the gun didn't sound so different from those clodhopper broad-jumps going down the staircase; at least, in other parts of the house it must have blended in with and been blurred by them.

A door opened somewhere up above and a woman's voice called down warningly, "Sh! Quiet down there. My baby's asleep!"

"So is mine," murmured the departing caller appreciatively, as he

closed the door on Dillon's still-twitching body.

Cleary came walking up the stairs as if he had all night; or as if he lived in the place and was just getting home all tired out from work. Matter of fact, he was getting *to* work and not *from* it. He always took stairs slow, not because he was hefty or sluggish—it was just his way. He always trudged, landed on every single step, never more.

The other dick looked out of the open door to Dillon's room and commented, "Is that how you'd come up if there was a guy firing down at you from above?"

"Pretty much," said Cleary drily. "Only a little more to one side." He stepped into the lighted room, looked down at the floor and asked, "Who's the unlucky one?"

"Martin Dillon's the tag. Twenty-six, unmarried, runs an elevator in an office building, been living here five years. How's that for a quarter-of-an-hour head-start?"

Cleary didn't say how it was. He got down on the backs of his heels beside the prostrate Dillon, but looked peculiarly at a loss, possibly because he let his arms hang down full length at his sides, like a squatting ape. "So," he sighed regretfully. "Right in the middle of the tum-tum. Nasty but effective."

"Effective is right. Permanent. Never mind the calisthenics, we been all through that," the other dick said with friendly derision.

"One more never hurt yet." But Cleary straightened up again. A chair scraped up above, and he glanced up at the ceiling. "Funny that in a house full of roomers nobody heard the shot. You been around among them?"

"Yeah, I gave that angle a workout. The room next door happens to be vacant; the one two doors down, they were out; the one three doors down, the guy was taking a bath, and he claims that when the water hits these old tin tubs they got in this house, you can't hear anything for miles around."

A cop stuck his head in from the hall and said, "Here's a lady from the floor above says she heard someone go racketing down the stairs about nine o'clock."

Clary stepped outside, so she wouldn't have to come in and face the remains. "I even called down and asked him to go easy on account of my baby. He was jumping full-weight from stair to stair. I never heard anything like it in my life! And he started down from this floor."

"Did you hear anything like a shot?"

"No, nothing like that!"

Cleary turned to the other dick and they went back inside the room again. "That shows two of them came here and did it."

"How so? She only heard one on the stairs, from what she says."

"Don't you get what that was for? If she didn't hear any shot, the

shot went off *while* this guy was trooping down in high. That means one of them stayed up here in the room and gave Dillon the business, while the other one drowned him out, on the stairs. That has the earmarks of a professional job. Now why should professionals bother to go after an elevator-pusher-upper?"

"He found out something he shouldn't have about their 'profession.'"

"Sure, that's the only answer," Cleary nodded. He snapped a kitchen match against his thumbnail, held the flame to a cigarette. "Now let's go on from there. Close the door. What would a guy like him possibly find out about what profession, that would be important enough to get him in Dutch? Did you quiz the rooming house keeper on his habits?"

"Yeah, I covered that and it don't add up to a row of pins. He was up at seven every morning to go on the job and he came back from work too tired and hardly ever went out. No one ever came to see him here, and he didn't even have a girl. His light was always out by eleven at the latest; she could tell by the crack under the door, and she liked that about him because she's a light-saving dame."

"That makes it tough. Let's look around, see if we can turn up anything here."

They rifled bureau drawers and the shabby contents of the clothes closet in silence, Cleary's cigarette left burning on the edge of a chair seat. The sight of Dillon still on the floor didn't affect either one of them. Cleary had purposely refrained from giving permission to have the body taken out yet. He had found by experience that he worked better in the presence of the corpse than in its absence, as though the sight of one helped his thinking powers.

But there was a certain amount of not yet completely dried blood on the threadbare carpet. Dillon hadn't died immediately but had threshed about for a few minutes; and to keep the stains off his shoes and keep from tracking it around the room, Cleary reached for a newspaper to spead over the carpet. Then he stood still looking at it, and didn't go ahead.

He said, "Davis."

The other dick pulled his face out of a bureau drawer and turned around.

"Here's what he found out. Something in here."

"Everyone brings papers home with them from work."

"This is the night before last's—two nights old. There's tonight's, shoved under the bureau mirror over there in the corner. This was right out here on the table."

"No, I've got one for that," Davis argued. "He was a crossword puzzle addict. The landlady says he'd often look out when she was passing and ask her help on a certain word that had him stumped. He

was probably two nights behind on his brain-twisters, that's all."

Cleary wouldn't give in "That won't account for this. This ain't open where the puzzle is. The puzzle is"—he thumbed—"exactly twelve pages away from where this was folded over." He turned back again. "Why do I waste time arguing with you? It's right here staring me in the face. An item about queer money flooding the town. This rings the bell."

They read it together, one over the other's shoulder. Cleary snapped his knuckle at it. "He ran into a 'passer.' That could be the only possible contact between an unimportant little nobody like him and a counterfeiting ring. He found out somebody was a 'passer' and this is what it got him." He pointed at the floor.

"I don't know just how solid a foundation you've got, but you're sure building up a case," Davis admitted.

"Now let's see what we've got so far. He ran afoul of a passer. That opens up two possibilities. It was either someone he knew all along and only tumbled to since reading this paper. Or it was someone he didn't know and got wise to. But how? Them guys don't stand still on a street corner passing out phoney money like handbills.

"He found out something so definite and damning, all in a flash, that he was put out of the way. And the killers came and called on him here, you notice. He didn't go out hunting them up."

"So it looks like it was someone he knew."

"And yet he never went out."

"So it won't wash either way," sighed Davis gloomily. "There goes your foundations."

"Naw, just the roof. This item about counterfeit money still holds good as far as I'm concerned. It's what he found out, and what led to his death. Let's break it down into three fields of operation: the building where he worked; here, where he lived; and the streets he traveled each day between the two. He made his discovery in the first or the last place. We already know it was up here in the room he read about it, but it was in one of the other two places that he found out whatever it was he did, and hooked it up with what he read when he got home." Cleary shook his head.

"What's the matter?" asked Davis.

"I was just thinking. My old mother, rest her soul, used to say that's bad luck, to put a hat on the bed like that."

"Well, it sure was this time."

Cleary moved over and studied the hat, but without touching it. "It looks pretty new, compared to the worn-out condition the rest of his things are in."

"A guy's gotta buy a new hat once in a while."

Cleary looked at him. "But when he does, he doesn't throw it on the

bed from all the way across the room, not caring if it hits the floor or lands on its crown or what happens to it. At least not the first week or two. He hangs it up carefully, so it'll keep its shape as long as possible. And it didn't fall off him onto the bed as he was shot, because he's lyng over there by the door."

"Maybe the killer was one of these cold-blooded sons that like to make a guy flinch; lifted it off Dillon's head and threw it across the room, sort of to get it out of the way just before he shot him."

"No, he shot him through the stomach. The sadistic gesture to go with that would be to undo the buttons of Dillon's shirt, one by one. Not the hat." He produced a handkerchief, took hold of the hat brim with it, lifted it up and turned it over. *M.D.* It's got his initials pasted in it. It's his all right." Then he brought it up closer to his face.

Suddenly he'd dropped it back on the bed again and was all the way across the room, crouching down over the top of the dead man's head.

"What're you doing?" asked Davis, as Cleary's face dipped, then rose again.

Cleary straightened and made for the door. "Come on," he said, "let's go! I want to make a phone call to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, ask 'em something about these queer twenties that have been turning up."

"What's the rush all of a sudden?" asked Davis querulously. "One minute you're standing around making speeches, the next you're on the lam."

"I think we've got a musical hat —one that's going to sing," answered Cleary as he went chasing down the stairs.

(*continued on page 100*)

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **DICK ASHBAUGH**

TITLE: ***Target for Tonight***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The author certainly has a "way" with teenagers—bright and crisp! Question facing Marybeth and Karen: is it possible to fight bullets with arrows?*

THE IVORY PHONE ON THE PINK kitchen wall buzzed abruptly and teenager Marybeth Carmichael laid aside the handful of silver she was polishing. She lifted the receiver off the hook, murmured "Gr-r-r," and hung up. Her father coming through the door looked at her curiously. "Either that was a wrong number," he said, "or it's the shortest telephone conversation you've had in ten years."

"It was Karen," said Marybeth, resuming her methodical polishing of the silverware. "She knows how slow I am doing dishes, so she calls every few minutes and yells 'Onward, onward'."

"Well, hurry it up," he said. "As soon as you're through I want to fix that hot water faucet. I promised your mother it would be done before she gets back from her Friday night devastation of the supermarket." He spread his tool kit out on the snack bar. "Otherwise there will be tears and admonitions. You and Karen have a date tonight?"

"Strictly business," said Marybeth. "We're going over to school and mimeograph the programs for the Festival tomorrow. You're coming, aren't you, Daddy? To the Festival, I mean."

"I wanted to play golf," he said hollowly, "but your mother has been holding a pistol at my head."

"You're a true-blue parent and you won't be sorry. It'll be terrific. As a final, our archery team is go-

ing to attack a settler's cabin with flaming arrows. Real neat-o. We'll be dressed as Indians and we're going to burn it to the ground."

"Jolly," said her father. "Just so you don't burn down the rest of the property."

"Don't worry about that. The Fire Department will have a truck parked right there. They're going to demonstrate how to smother flames."

"Seems to me you spend more time on archery than you do on your studies. I sent you to school to learn about the Louisiana Purchase, and what happens to a man-and-a-half who digs a ditch-and-a-half in a day-and-a—"

"Oh, we learn that stuff too," said Marybeth airily. "We have archery so we won't lose our minds. I'm high scorer this year. Miss Kinslow says I should try for the district amateur."

"That's all we need in the family," groaned Mr. Carmichael, "a lady archer."

"Archery is good for a girl," said Marybeth defensively. "It develops certain pectoral muscles that tend to sag in middle age."

Mr. Carmichael coughed abruptly and rattled his tools. "Suppose you use some of your partially developed muscles and finish those dishes."

"Sure, Daddy, just a minute." She watched the soapy water gurgle down the drain and scrubbed the sink until it gleamed. "Isn't Mother taking longer than usual tonight?"

He glanced at the wall clock. "She does seem to be running a bit late. I suppose the twins wanted to ride the merry-go-round. These shopping centers are getting more like Disneyland every day."

He paused with a wrench in his hand. There was a sudden screech of tires and a thumping noise in the side driveway. A car motor raced wildly and then snapped off.

"Hey, something funny here." Mr. Carmichael started toward the rear door. "Your mother is a better driver than that." He dashed out with Marybeth on his heels.

Apprehension surged through him as he saw the car standing at an odd angle on the driveway, one wheel over the low concrete curbing. The rear door burst open and one of the twins hurtled toward him. They collided and Donny grasped him wildly around the waist. He could see the other twin, Davey, struggling out of the front seat. "Hey, what happened?"

Donny sobbed dry-eyed, his face against his father's chest. "It was awful, Dad. This guy with a gun hit Mom. Then he shoved Davey into a whole bunch of canned beans—and Davey's got a big bump where this can hit him on the head."

He pulled Donny away from his grasp. "Quick, Marybeth, take the kids in the house." In one motion he pulled open the door and slid

into the driver's seat. Mrs. Carmichael collapsed slowly into his arms, then shook her head and looked up. He held her tightly. "Pam, for Pete's sake, what happened?"

"It's all right, Steve. I—I mean, don't worry. We're okay. Just reaction, I guess." She buried her head against his shoulder and shuddered.

"Take it easy," he said soothingly. "When you feel like talking, tell me about it."

She spoke against his shoulder, her words partly muffled. "It was pretty frightening. They held up the supermarket while we were there—a gang of toughs in black leather jackets. We had just gotten to the check-out counter when they came in waving guns. One of them shoved Donny and I—I took a swing at him. He slapped me. My ears are still ringing."

He held her away, examining her face in the light of the dash. There was an ugly red welt on her left cheek. "The punks," he said, biting off the words. "I hope they nail them. I'd like to get a crack at the one who did this."

He helped her from the car and supported her as they walked toward the kitchen door. "We were lucky," she said. "They shot a man standing right behind me. Davey has a bump on his head. I don't think it's serious. They wanted to take us to the hospital, but all I could think about was getting home."

Marybeth had Davey perched on a high stool and was applying ice cubes to the bump on his forehead. "The poor baby," she said. She looked around wide-eyed. "Mother, are you all right?"

"I'm all right, darling. Just a little bruise. I'd like a glass of water." She sank down on a chair in the breakfast alcove.

"I'd better run Davey down to the doctor," said Mr. Carmichael. "It could be a concussion. Although the guy has an awfully hard head." He grinned at Davey, who grinned back.

"Aw, I'm all right, Dad. When this guy hit Mom I got mad and belted him on the shins. He gave me a big shove and I went right into this pile of canned stuff. Spinach, I think. I hate spinach."

Donny chortled. "It was baked beans. You should have seen Davey—he really messed up that pile of cans."

Mr. Carmichael heaved a great sigh. "The next time you go shopping it'll be with an armed escort. That's the third holdup in the neighborhood in the past two weeks. Sounds like the same gang."

"I just wish," said Marybeth grimly, "I'd been there with my bow and some nice steel-tipped arrows."

"Oh, come now, honey," said her father. "You can't fight bullets with arrows."

The wall phone buzzed and Marybeth reached for it. "Right in the

middle of everything. That's Karen, for you." She picked up the receiver and said, "Yes, Karen. Well, there's been some excitement here. My mother was held up at the supermarket. A man shot at her and hit Davey on the head with a can of beans. Oh, you've heard it on the radio! Of course, kid, I'll see you at school in twenty minutes."

"Marybeth!" Her mother spoke up sharply. "You're not leaving this house, young lady. That horrible gang is probably running around somewhere in the neighborhood."

"But Mother," wailed Marybeth. "We've got our programs to do for the Festival tomorrow! It'll only take an hour or so and Mr. Knowland has given us special permission. What can possibly happen at school?"

"No use pushing the panic button," said her father, and Marybeth looked at him gratefully. "That gang is far away by now, you can bet on that. I'll drop Marybeth off at school when I take Davey to the doctor."

Mr. Carmichael swung the car into the parking lot alongside the great sprawling glass-and-brick facade of Eastmoor High school. "Not a light in the place," he said to Marybeth. "Are you sure you're supposed to work here tonight?"

"Oh, yes, Daddy. We've got the mimeograph set up in the archery room. It's off the gym and you can't see it from here. I'll bet Karen is there all ready. Old eager beaver. Now, please don't worry. Her father will pick us up later." She kissed Davey on top of his head. "You're a brave little brother," she said, "and I'm very proud of you."

"I'm all right," said Davey. "Just so Doc don't stab me with no old needle."

After the car drove away and the friendly light died out, Marybeth looked at the great blank row of darkened windows and shivered slightly. There was a dim light in the lobby of the gym entrance and she headed that way. Just as she reached the door it clanged open and she stepped back in momentary fright; then she recognized the tall gaunt figure of Mr. Bleecker, the custodian.

"Oh," he said with a grunt, "you must be the other one. Mr. Knowland said there'd be two of you." He opened a panel in the wall and switched on a single exit light. "I got enough trouble during the day without worrying about you kids at night." He walked along ahead of her down the dim corridor, jingling his great ring of keys. "Man needs a little peace now and then."

To the right of the corridor lay the great vaulted expanse of the gymnasium visible through the arched passages leading under the seats above. A faint glow from the skylight far overhead filtered down, slashed by a single bar of light from the outside cast by a vertical row of glass blocks set in the opposite wall.

Marybeth shivered slightly at the ghostly cavern so different at night from the noisy, brightly lighted expanse of gleaming hardwood in the daytime. The entire building took on a different character. Instinctively she stepped up her pace to be closer to Mr. Bleecker's tall plodding figure.

As they turned into the side corridor leading to the archery room, she took one last look into the shadowed expanse of the gym. Suddenly she stopped and peered hard through the darkness. The narrow band of light across the glistening floor had blinked momentarily, as if an elongated shadow had just passed across it. Something, or somebody, had passed over the gym floor, quickly and silently.

"Mr. Bleecker!" she called toward the custodian, now out of sight around the corner. "Please, Mr. Bleecker, I think there's someone in the gym!" She ran toward him as he turned and muttered something crossly. A door opened just ahead and light flooded the corridor as Karen's face appeared. "Hi, kid," she sang out cheerily. "About time. Gee, that was awful about your mother. I can't wait to hear." She stood aside for Marybeth to enter.

"But I wanted to tell Mr. Bleecker something," said Marybeth hastily. "Wait a minute."

"He can't hear you anyhow," said Karen. "Probably has his hearing aid turned down."

Mr. Bleecker stopped in the doorway, jingling his huge key ring. "Now, listen, you kids," he said, "you're responsible for turning off lights and not leaving anything electrical hooked up. Understand? I go home to supper in a few minutes and I won't be back until midnight. I left a door unlocked in the gym entrance. Pull it tight when you leave." He glowered at them. "I want everything shipshape or I report you to Mr. Knowland." He turned abruptly and stalked off down the corridor.

"What a grouch," said Karen. "C'mon in, kid. I've got a stencil ready to run. Gee, I want to hear about your mother. I brought my transistor along and there was a news flash just a minute ago. The police have this whole end of town blocked off. Kind of exciting." She stopped suddenly and looked at Marybeth. "Creepers, what's the matter, Marybeth. You look pale."

"It's—oh, nothing really." Marybeth shut the heavy metal door and snapped the lock. "It was probably my imagination, but I thought I saw someone sneaking through the gym."

"Must have been a shadow. We're the only ones in the building. Maybe what happened to your mother made you a little jumpy. I can't blame you. But, gee, kid, it'll get awfully stuffy in here with that door closed. No windows or anything."

Marybeth smiled a little weakly

"I guess I'm just being silly." She opened the door a few inches and peered out cautiously. "I don't see why Mr. Bleecker couldn't have left a light in the corridor."

"He claims he's protecting school board funds," said Karen. "The old pinchpenny. He should hear my father groaning about taxes. C'mon, open the door and let's get going. I've got to go down to the typing room and get more paper. This won't be enough."

"Hey, neat-o," said Marybeth walking toward the archery rack at the end of the room. "Everything ready for tomorrow."

"It should be," said Karen. "Miss Kinsloe and I worked all afternoon. Restrung the bows and got all the arrows ready."

"Lucky you," said Marybeth. "You got out of English Lit. and Home Ec. We baked apple dumplings and mine tasted like glue. These are certainly funny looking arrows."

"Oh, those are the flaming arrows for the finale. They're simply fantastic. You don't have to light them or anything. This little whoozis on the end throws out sparks from air friction and ignites the chemical in this tube. I think Miss Kinsloe said it's magnesium. We fired some on the range and they're fabulous. It takes a little more pull. That's why we restrung the bows."

Marybeth picked out a bow and pulled at it experimentally. "I see what you mean. This is—" She stopped suddenly and put the bow down.

From somewhere toward the front of the building came the unmistakable rattle of a heavy door being opened and closed. Karen's brow furrowed. "That's funny. Mr. Bleecker went out the back way. I heard him leave. Maybe that's one of the teachers."

She walked to the door and stepped out into the corridor, peering toward the main aisle. Suddenly she whirled back into the room, slammed the door, and leaned against it, her face pale.

"There's someone out there, Marybeth," she said, her voice choking slightly. "It's a man. He lit a match and I saw him plainly. He—he's wearing a black leather jacket." Her voice dropped to a whisper and they stood listening in silence for several moments.

Suddenly Marybeth gave a short, sharp scream of warning. "Karen! The doorknob is turning. You forgot to lock—"

Karen twisted around desperately and fumbled for the catch. It clicked into place just as the knob turned hard and a weight thumped against the door. They both stood transfixed as the knob turned futilely and then stopped. There was no sound from the outer corridor.

"Who is it?" Marybeth called out, her voice quavering. "Who's out there?"

The only answer was the faint click of metal against metal, and

then dead silence. As an ironic counterpoint to the scene they could hear a police siren rising and falling in the distance. They looked hopefully at each other, and then the hope died as the siren faded away.

"I'm scared," said Karen, sinking weakly into a chair. "All of a sudden I'm scared. I thought you were just seeing things."

"We're all right," said Marybeth, her teeth chattering slightly, "as long as we keep the door locked. They can't possibly get in. Maybe if we just stay quiet they'll go away."

For what seemed like an eternity they stood in frozen silence. Then suddenly a man's voice came floating into the room, muffled but distinct as though he was standing at the end of a tunnel. "Al's hurt bad," said the disembodied voice. "That cop got him in the leg. Pete's trying to fix it up with some first aid stuff he found in the locker room. We got to get out of here."

Another voice answered in a high whine. "Oh, sure, with cops swarming all over the place. Who's in this next room?"

"A couple of high school kids. I saw them come in. They locked the door before I could get to them."

As the voices floated through the room, Karen and Marybeth looked at each other curiously. Then Karen leaped up and pulled her chair toward the end wall. "It's the ventilating grille," she whispered, pointing high on the wall. "It opens into Miss Kinsloe's office. That's where they are."

Marybeth pulled up a chair and they stood on tiptoe with their ears pressed against the metal wall grille. The high-pitched voice whined again. "Here's some keys in this desk. Maybe I can open that door. We could shove the kids in the car and make a break for it. The cops wouldn't dare shoot. I could blow the lock off but it'd sound like a cannon."

Karen wobbled on her chair. "Oh, creepers, I hope they don't find the right key. It's in that bunch someplace."

"Okay," said a voice. "You try the keys and I'll go down to the locker room and see how Pete's doing with Al. You sure the janitor is out of action?"

"Are you kidding? He's wrapped up nice and tight in a broom closet. I got his keys so I'll get that door open one way or the other. Tell Pete to get ready with Al. Once we get those kids we can crash out of here." The voices faded away as they moved into the corridor.

Karen hopped to the floor and Marybeth landed beside her. "We're in a mess," moaned Karen. "He's bound to find the key. They've even got poor old Mr. Bleecker. Tied up in a broom closet." She half giggled. "I'll bet he's plenty mad."

Karen turned suddenly and

snatched up a bow. "A chance? We've got these. Twenty bows and about two hundred arrows. Do you realize what a steel-tipped arrow can do at close range?"

"But they've got guns. Bullets are a lot faster than arrows. Besides, I couldn't shoot anybody."

"I could," said Karen tensely. "Just remember what they did to your mother and your little brother." She pushed papers from the heavy table and pulled the table over. "Look, I'll stay here where I can get a good shot at the door. You get on the other side behind the desk. They won't be expecting anything like this."

Suddenly Marybeth felt coldly furious. She tried several bows and picked up a handful of arrows. She remembered the ugly red welt on her mother's face and the bump on Davey's head. "These arrows, though," she said." "They might set the place on fire."

"No time to worry about that," whispered Karen. There was a sudden clicking at the door. "He's trying the keys now. Get over there, Marybeth. It's our only chance."

They crouched in silence and listened to the whining voice alternately mumbling and cursing as the keys were tried in quick succession. For several weirdly silent minutes the clicking went on, and then they heard a triumphant snort as the lock slid open.

The door creaked slightly and opened an inch or so. The whiny voice came through from the corridor.

"Now listen, you kids, come on out real nice and you won't get hurt. If I have to come in there after you it's going to be trouble."

The door swung wider as he pushed it with his foot. Karen fell for the trick and shot too soon. The arrow screeched against the metal door panel and ricocheted into the corridor. There was a sudden blinding burst of flame and a startled cry from outside the door —then a thunderous roar as a bullet smashed into the door panel, slamming it wide open.

Sighting carefully across the desk top, Marybeth sent an arrow sizzling through the open doorway. It exploded in the outer corridor and they could hear the thud of feet running down the passage.

They both sprang from cover and almost collided at the doorway. "Cut across the gym," gasped Karen. "I'll try to make it for the entrance. They can't get both of us."

Still clutching her bow and a handful of arrows, Marybeth sprinted into the corridor thankful she had worn her flats with rubber soles. At the turn into the main aisle she saw two figures plunging toward them from the rear. It was too late to warn Karen. As she made the turn into the gym passageway she heard a startled grunt as Karen collided with one of the plunging figures.

"Poor Karen, poor Karen," ran

through her mind as she raced through the gym entrance. Back of her she heard the whiny voice echoing in the corridor. "I got one of them, Duke. The other one's heading for the gym. Grab her!"

Marybeth burst into the gymnasium, turned to race up the steps leading to the seats, then changed her mind, and headed directly across the wide expanse of polished floor. Back of her she heard the insistent thud of feet pounding down the passageway. In a brief remembered flash she saw the tumbling team practicing at one end of the gym as she left school that afternoon. She remembered their mats and the wooden stands they used for acrobatics.

With the bow and clutch of arrows banging against her knees, she headed for the far corner. In the faint, luminescent glow from the skylight she saw the mats and cleared them in one bounding leap. Back of her the pounding feet grew closer, and then her pursuer, running blindly at full speed, struck the mats. There was a startled yip and he flipped almost completely over before he struck the floor with a sickening thump.

Marybeth was far up in the first tier of seats before she stopped to look back. All was now silent in the gymnasium. Moving numbly and holding the bow tightly, she moved upward into the highest tier of seats against the rafters. There she pushed open a window.

Across the wide expanse of the parking lot on the other side of the street there were houses, peaceful and brightly lighted in the darkness. Cars ran up and down the street, their brakes squealing as they stopped for the traffic light at the corner. There was help down there—but it was far away.

To her left out the window was the great silent expanse of the football field there the Pageant would be held tomorrow. The Pageant and the street below and the happy lighted houses seemed far off . . . She trembled and tears came to her eyes as she leaned her head against the cool wall. "Poor Karen," she murmured.

Then lights flickered against her closed eyelids and she opened them suddenly and started down into the parking lot below. A long open convertible slid across the blacktop and stopped a few feet from the building. Two men came out of the rear door and they were supporting a third man between them. The car's motor raced impatiently. The light from the convertible's dash gleamed on the driver's black leather jacket.

For a moment Marybeth watched in fascination. Then, acting as if in a dream, she raised the bow and fitted an arrow. She sighted over the window ledge and pulled back on the bow, allowing a little extra. There as a soft, deadly twang as she released the arrow.

"That," she murmured, "is for

what you did to my mother."

A split second later the magnesium-tipped arrow exploded in the front seat of the convertible. Two seconds later another exploded in the rear seat. The three figures approaching the car reeled backward as the flaming figure of the driver hurtled from the front seat and rolled over and over, screaming on the ground.

"And this," said Marybeth softly from her high perch, "is for my little brother."

An arrow exploded in front of the reeling trio as she reached for another arrow, dimly conscious now of footsteps pounding up the aisle between the seats.

"And this," she said, shaking tears from her eyes, "is for—"

She felt her arm pulled back suddenly and the bowstring hummed harmlessly in her hand.

"Onward, onward!" shouted the figure at her side. "I deserve one shot at least."

"Karen!"

Marybeth released her grip on the bow and stepped aside as Karen pulled it from her hand and inserted an arrow. Karen stepped to the window, pulled the bow back, and then relaxed. "Wouldn't you know—too late! That darn Fire Department didn't have to come so soon." The parking lot below had filled suddenly with a bedlam of roaring motors and sirens, and a blinding glare of floodlights was sweeping over the building. Karen leaned against the wall panting for breath. "I got away from that goon," she said, "and pulled the fire alarm at the end of the hall. I'll probably get expelled."

"Sure you will," said Marybeth unsympathetically. "We both will. But maybe we can save ourselves."

"How?" asked Karen anxiously.

"Let's go let Mr. Bleecker out of that broom closet. He'll be our friend for life."

"The way I see it, Miss Kinsloe," said Marybeth's father, "something like archery can be a definite aid in an educational program. Naturally I want my daughter to understand the Treaty of Ghent and how to estimate the yardage of wall-to-wall carpet, but there are other considerations."

"Of course, Mr. Carmichael," said Miss Kinsloe smoothly. "I hope you understand that the academic education of our students is uppermost. However, we feel that physical development is of equal importance. Marybeth is a highly competent student, but archery will help her develop coordination."

"Hm'm," said Mr. Carmichael. "I understand it will also help her develop certain pectoral muscles that tend to sag in middle age."

"*MIS*-ter Carmichael!" Miss Kinsloe turned abruptly and fled.

Do you like puzzles? Then this unusual murder story should delight you—and make you put on your Thinking Cap. And if, after you have read the story and mulled it over, you still have any doubts (large or small), why we'll be happy to forward your query to the author. One thing we insist on: we won't try to explain it!

TIME IS A LIAR

by STEPHEN BARR

JENKS WAS STANDING AT THE WINdows in the smoking room of the Regent's, looking out at the rain, smugly. Jenks is a young man who will bet on anything. The Regent's is one of London's older clubs, though very small, and it is perhaps the most disputatious.

By and large its members are not betting men, but Jenks never had any trouble in getting a wager. Any assertion made in the Regent's is certain to be challenged, if not contradicted outright, and since Jenks was always making positive assertions he was frequently able to promote a bet. On this occasion he had made and won a bet *in absentia,* so to speak.

During the previous two days he and another member had been in Birmingham, and on the Monday—today was Wednesday—they had spent the evening in a pub there. At nine o'clock the B.B.C. weather report had come on, and the weather man predicted rain for the next afternoon. He was talking about London, of course, and said that a band of wet weather was approaching the British Isles from the northwest. Birmingham is a hundred miles northwest of London, and consequently Birmingham would get it first. It was due in London, the weather man said, at approximately mid-afternoon—around three P.M. Jenks's friend pricked up his ears at this.

"I think we'd better shove off a bit earlier than we planned tomorrow," he said. "Say about eleven—I hate driving in the rain. These cold fronts, or whatever they are, seem to travel about thirty miles an hour, so that ought to put us just ahead of it."

"Yes, but not *always,*" Jenks said. "Sometimes they move faster."

"Oh, I think that's very unusual—" the friend began.

"I'll bet you a quid the rain gets here at least an hour earlier than you expect," Jenks interrupted, and after a short debate the other agreed to the bet. Jenks won, because when they got up the next morning at nine, it was already pouring.

Since Jenks enjoys argument—I think that's why he joined the Regent's—he had just brought up the subject of the bet. "You see," he said, "it *did* start raining here at about three yesterday, didn't it?" A couple of members nodded grudgingly. "Well then," Jenks continued, "Bill, here (Bill was his companion in Birmingham) just underrated the speed of arrival of the cold front."

"Low-pressure area," one of the members hastened to correct him.

"Well, whatever it was, it was going a lot faster than Bill estimated, and the result was—"

"I'm afraid you're entirely mistaken," a gentle voice broke in. It was Dr. Sylvan Moore, our oldest member.

"How can you say that?" Jenks demanded indignantly. "I won the bet, didn't I?"

"Yes, but not for the reasons you suppose," Dr. Moore said, "It wasn't going faster—it was going *slower*."

There was silence in the smoking room at this. The members of the Regent's may challenge most assertions, but not if they are palpably fantastic—they suspect a catch. However, it was too much for Jenks. "Are you trying to tell me that something gets there sooner because it's *slower?*" he said weakly.

"Certainly," Dr. Moore replied.

I know (Dr. Moore went on) that it's hard to credit, but if you will bear with me a few minutes I can make it clear to you.

I don't suppose you would remember the arrest and subsequent trial of the murderer of Aloysius Glendale? No, that would be before your time. Prewar—the first World War . . . The affair was a nine-day wonder because it was absolutely certain the murderer was one of two suspects—but no one could prove which. Both suspects were employees of Glendale's—one was named Tony Brill, a young bounder who lived beyond his means, and the other was Glendale's assistant, named J. J. Amadon. Amadon was also an unpleasant man—he was miserly to a point of absurdity.

Their difference is best illustrated by the way the two men got to and from work. Glendale's office was in Brighton, and the two suspects lived in Littlehurst, which is a village about eighteen miles north of Brighton, on the London Road. There is, of course, a railway that they could have commuted on, but owing to their respective characters neither of them used it except in very bad weather.

In Amadon's case it was the money: to save the fare he rode a bike which took him a good hour and a half. Tony Brill, on the other hand, had a car—a two-seater Gardiner, which he could ill afford—and he drove it as fast as he could, so his trip was a matter of a bit over

half an hour. In those days and on those roads thirty miles an hour was considered a pretty fair clip, and anyway it had the added advantage of allowing him to sleep later. Time, you understand, was the all-important element in this case, and while it was conceivably possible that for once Brill had driven very, very slowly, it was extremely unlikely and out of character.

But the point at issue, as it came out during the preliminary hearings, was not that Brill *wouldn't* have driven slowly, but that Amadon *couldn't* have peddled his bike any faster. On the morning of the murder there had been a breakdown on the railway line, so there was no train, and in fact it was for this reason that Mr. Glendale decided not to go to the office. He lived in a modern Tudor house in a group of similar atrocities that the builders called May Hill, and it was on the London Road, too—about halfway between Littlehurst and Brighton. He always took the 8:35, which got him to his office at 8:55. He was a stickler for punctuality, and his staff was never late, and this included the morning of the murder.

You must keep in mind that this was in 1911 when motor cars were comparatively rare. There were no buses that you could hop on from village to village in those days, and if Amadon had secretly hired or borrowed a car for that one morning, it would not have remained a secret for long once the case became a *cause célèbre*.

The motives for murdering Aloysius Glendale have no particular bearing on the outcome. With Amadon it was the case of the last straw. For years he had worked hard and conscientiously, but Glendale had never advanced him higher than Assistant Manager, and any increases in salary had been rare—and grudgingly bestowed. Glendale, you see, was somewhat unlovable, too, and he took advantage of the fact that avaricious men hate to give up the security of their jobs. "Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't want to leave us after all *this* time, J. J.," he'd say, with an infuriating smile, and poor Amadon's fellow-workers would wonder if he might not at last have reached the breaking point.

Then finally, to cap it all, Glendale sacked Amadon for some trifling error. It was incredibly malicious, because Amadon was almost at retirement age, and it meant that he would lose his pension. Amadon knew that with Glendale out of the way, the firm would not take any action against him during the period of reorganization.

Brill's case was simpler: he had been systematically looting the firm's cash account, and Glendale had just found out. Glendale would certainly have prosecuted, but if he were dead the loss could perhaps be concealed for long enough to

make it good. Like most spendthrifts, Brill was the eternal optimist.

Anyway, on the evening of the crime, Glendale's body was discovered by his housekeeper; he had been stabbed to death. She had taken her day off, and had not even known that he had not gone to the office. The police surgeon couldn't place the exact time of the murder —merely that it had been some time that morning between 6:30 and 9:30 A.M. But there was a witness—and everything depended on him. He was the local vicar, who had been pruning his grape arbor. His house was directly behind Glendale's, and he saw *both* suspects come up—separately—by the back lane.

He said that it seemed surreptitious, because the natural thing would have been to approach from the front—the London Road was in that direction. The Vicar was aware that they both used the London Road going to and from work.

The trouble though, was that while the Vicar was a reliable witness and quite positive on one point, he was unfortunately completely unsure on another. He was certain of the identities of the two callers, and that they came more than half an hour apart. But he couldn't remember which came first!

A preliminary hearing is not conducted with quite the same formalities as a trial, and there is a greater leaway in cross-examination; but the Vicar couldn't be shaken. He was as sure Amadon and Brill were there at different times as he was positive he could not remember which came first. It was an impasse.

Both suspects claimed they rang Glendale's bell and got no answer. Both admitted hanging around for a few minutes, but both insisted they had never set foot inside Glendale's house. Then the motives came out, and each had to admit the fact that Glendale's death was to his advantage—or would have been. But which one was the murderer?

If only the police surgeon had been able to pinpoint the time of death more exactly, things would have been clearer, but then an unexpected witness turned up. It was Glendale's brother, John, and he had left England the day of the crime and had gone to France, where he had not seen any English papers. He got back a week or so later, heard the news, and immediately got in touch with the police.

Aloysius Glendale, the brother stated, must have been killed before 8:20 in the morning. The day before the crime, the two brothers had had luncheon together in Brighton, and Aloysius had asked John to phone him early the next morning at home, before he left for the office. I forget now what the phone call was all about, but the point is it was important to Aloysius, and he was waiting for the call.

John phoned at 8:20 and got no answer. He tried again five minutes later on the chance that his brother had been out of earshot of the phone, but no one picked up the receiver. He remembered that it was the housekeeper's day off, and assumed his brother had forgotten the call and had taken an earlier train. He himself had to catch a train to Dover to take a steamer across the Channel, so he didn't have time to wait and call Aloysius's office, which he might otherwise have done.

The indictment was procured at once on the basis of this new evidence—against Brill, who had the fast car. The early bird had been caught this time, and newspaper editorials pontificated about one crime leading to a more heinous crime. Some of them even went so far as to suggest that crime was a by product of driving a fast car, in which they were perhaps more prophetic than we realized at the time.

Brill passionately denied his guilt —but it did no good. Fast cars get to places sooner than push-bikes, and while a car *can* be driven slowly, a bicycle can only be peddled at a certain maximum speed. Amadon was released, and I took the Flying Scotsman from Edinburgh, where I happened to be, the moment I read the news about Glendale's brother, and his evidence.

I went straight to the Brighton police and told them they had the wrong man. They referred me to the Prosecutor—and you, Jenks, can close your mouth again. You're looking just like the Prosecutor—indignant and completely sure of yourself. I might add that I had to explain it to him three times before it sank in. "But, my dear sir," he kept saying, "you're asking me to believe that because something goes *slower* it gets there *sooner!*"

I told him that under the particular set of circumstances that pertained, this was indeed true. "How long," I asked him, "does it take to ride a bicycle nine miles? Even though the London Road is somewhat downhill toward the sea, it would be well over forty minutes, wouldn't it?"

"But that's precisely the point!" he said. "Brill could do it in fifteen minutes in that car of his—from his place in Littlehurst to Glendale's house in May Hill!"

"I'm not talking about that nine miles," I said. "I refer to *the nine miles between May Hill and Brighton*—where both suspects arrived at approximately 9 A.M. at the office. This means that for Amadon to get to Brighton at 9:00, he must have left May Hill *at least as early as 8:20.*

"Brill, on the other hand, could have left May Hill as late as a quarter to, and since the Vicar is positive they were there at least half an hour apart, that is precisely what happened. All it means is that Amadon left his own house first—not

that Brill got to Glendale's house first. You're all timing it *from the wrong end.*"

Well, the Prosecutor finally got the idea, and for the rest of the day he was explaining it to various people involved, who in turn explained it to others. It eventually became the subject of a national debate, with the British public divided into those who understood and those who remained to be convinced. In time practically everyone was.

In the interim the police collared Amadon—who might have got away except that he was waiting for an especially cheap boat to take him to Argentina. Brill got off—only to be rearrested and arraigned for grand larceny. He knew he was innocent of the murder, of course, but he kept telling everybody at the prison who would listen to him that it didn't make sense. His car *must* have got to Glendale's house before that stupid push-bike—and since your mouth is open again, Jenks, I'll return to your bet about the weather.

Like the Prosecutor and the police, you timed it from the wrong end. All that the B.B.C. weather man predicted was *when the rain would arrive in London:* he said at 3 P.M. and that's when it did get here. Now, if it was traveling at about thirty miles an hour, it would have to be over Birmingham a little before noon to get to London in three hours. But if, on the other hand, it was traveling *slower*—say fifteen miles an hour—it would have taken over six hours to go the hundred miles to London, and consequently must have been at Birmingham six hours beforehand. Nine in the morning, in fact.

That's three hours *sooner than expected,* and it's the result of moving *slower.* It merely means you didn't know where it was at the broadcast time—you only knew when it would get to London.

The thing appears to be confusing you, so as it's nearly time for luncheon I think I shall have a glass of port—while you all think it over.

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **O. HENRY**

TITLE: ***The Man Higher Up***

TYPE: The Compleat Criminal

LOCALE: United States

TIME: Early 20th Century

COMMENTS: *Meet Messrs. Labor, Trade, and Capital—in the form of Messrs. Burglar, Swindler, and High Financier—in one of O. Henry's breeziest, slangiest Gests of the Gentle Grafter.*

ACROSS OUR TWO DISHES OF SPAghetti, in a corner of Provenzano's restaurant, Jeff Peters was explaining to me the three kinds of graft.

Every winter Jeff comes to New York to eat spaghetti, to watch the shipping in East River from the depths of his chinchilla overcoat, and to lay in a supply of Chicago-made clothing at one of the Fulton Street stores. During the other three seasons he may be found farther west—his range is from Spokane to Tampa. In his profession he takes a pride which he supports and defends with a serious and unique philosophy of ethics. His profession is no new one. He is an incorporated, uncapitalized, unlimited asylum for the reception of the restless and unwise dollars of his fellow men.

In the wilderness of stone in which Jeff seeks his annual lonely holiday he is glad to palaver of his many adventures, as a boy will whistle after sundown in a wood. Wherefore, I mark on my calendar the time of his coming, and open a question of privilege at Provenzano's concerning the little wine-stained table in the corner between the rakish rubber plant and the framed palazzio della-something on the wall.

"There are two kinds of grafts," said Jeff, "that ought to be wiped out by law. I mean Wall Street speculation and burglary."

"Nearly everybody will agree with you as to one of them," said I, with a laugh.

"Well, burglary ought to be wiped out, too," said Jeff; and I wondered whether the laugh had been redundant.

"About three months ago," said Jeff, "it was my privilege to become familiar with a sample of each of the aforesaid branches of illegitimate art. I was *sine qua grata* with a member of the housebreakers' union and one of the John D. Napoleons of finance at the same time."

"Interesting combination," said I, with a yawn. "Did I tell you I bagged a duck and a ground squirrel at one shot last week over in the Ramapos?" I knew well how to draw Jeff's stories.

"Let me tell you first about these barnacles that clog the wheels of society by poisoning the springs of rectitude with their upas-like eye," said Jeff, with the pure gleam of the muckraker in his own. "As I said, three months ago I got into bad company. There are two times in a man's life when he does this—when he's dead broke, and when he's rich.

"Now and then the most legitimate business runs out of luck. It was out in Arkansas I made the wrong turn at a crossroad and drives into this town of Peavine by mistake. It seems I had already assaulted and disfigured Peavine the spring of the year before. I had sold $600 worth of young fruit trees there—plums, cherries, peaches, and pears. The Peaviners were keeping an eye on the country road and hoping I might pass that way again. I drove down Main Street as far as the Crystal Palace Drug Store before I realized I had committed ambush upon myself and my white horse Bill.

"The Peaviners took me by surprise and Bill by the bridle and began a conversation that wasn't entirely disassociated with the subject of fruit trees. A committee of 'em ran some trace chains through the armholes of my vest and escorted me through their gardens and orchards.

"Their fruit trees hadn't lived up to their labels. Most of 'em had turned out to be persimmons and dogwoods, with a grove or two of blackjacks and poplars. The only one that showed any signs of bearing anything was a fine young cottonwood that had put forth a hornet's nest and an old corset cover.

"The Peaviners protracted our fruitless stroll to the edge of town. They took my watch and money on account; and they kept Bill and the wagon as hostages. They said the first time one of them dogwood trees put forth Amsden's June peach I might come back and get my things. Then they took off the trace chains and jerked their thumbs in the direction of the Rocky Mountains; and I struck a Lewis and Clark lope for the swollen rivers and impenetrable forests.

"When I regained intellectualness I found myself walking into an unidentified town on the A., T. & S. F. railroad. The Peaviners hadn't left anything in my pockets except a plug of chewing—they wasn't after my life. I bit off a chunk and sits down on a pile of ties by the track to recogitate my sensations of thought and perspicacity.

"And then along comes a fast freight which slows up a little at the town; and off of it drops a black bundle that rolls for twenty yards in a cloud of dust and then gets up and begins to spit soft coal and interjections. I see it is a young man broad across the face, dressed more for Pullmans than freights, and with a cheerful kind of smile in spite of it all that made Phoebe Snow's job look like a chimney sweep's.

"'Fall off?' says I.

"'Nunk,' says he. 'Got off. Arrived at my destination. What town is this?'

"'Haven't looked it up on the map yet,' says I. 'I got in about five minutes before you did. How does it strike you?'

"'Hard,' says he, twisting one of his arms around. 'I believe my shoulder—no, it's all right.'

"He stoops over to brush the dust off his clothes when out of his pocket drops a fine, nine-inch burglar's steel jimmy. He picks it up and looks at me sharp, and then grins and holds out his hand.

"'Brother,' says he, 'greetings. Didn't I see you in Southern Missouri last summer selling colored sand at half a dollar a teaspoonful to put into lamps to keep the oil from exploding?'

"'Oil,' says I, 'never explodes. It's the gas that forms that explodes.' But I shakes hands with him, anyway.

"'My name's Bill Bassett,' says he to me, 'and if you'll call it professional pride instead of conceit, I'll inform you that you have the pleasure of meeting the best burglar that ever set a gumshoe on ground drained by the Mississippi River.'

"Well, me and this Bill Bassett sits on the ties and exchanges brags as artists in kindred lines will do. It seems he didn't have a cent, either, and we went into close caucus. He explained why an able burglar sometimes had to travel on freights by telling me that a servant girl had played him false in Fayetteville, and he was making a quick getaway.

"'It's part of my business,' says Bill Bassett, 'to play up to the ruffles when I want to make a riffle as Raffles. 'Tis loves that makes the bit go 'round. Show me a house with the swag in it and a pretty parlormaid, and you might as well call the silver melted down and sold, and me spilling truffles and that Château stuff on the napkin under my chin, while the police are calling it an inside job just because the old

lady's nephew teaches a Bible class. I first make an impression on the girl,' says Bill, 'and when she lets me inside I make an impression on the locks. But this one done me,' says he. 'She saw me taking a trolley ride with another girl, and when I came 'round on the night she was to leave the door open for me it was fast. And I had keys made for the doors upstairs. But, no sir. She had sure cut off my locks. She was a Delilah,' says Bill Bassett.

"It seems that Bill tried to break in anyhow with his jimmy, but the girl emitted a succession of bravura noises like the top riders of a tally-ho, and Bill had to take all the hurdles between there and the depot. As he had no baggage they tried hard to check his departure, but he made a train that was just pulling out.

" 'Well,' says Bill Bassett, when we had exchanged memoirs of our dead lives, 'I could eat. This town don't look like it was kept under a Yale lock. Suppose we commit some mild atrocity that will bring in temporary expense money. I don't suppose you've brought along any hair tonic or rolled gold watch chains, or similar law-defying swindles that you could sell on the plaza to the pikers of the paretic populace, have you?'

" 'No,' says I, 'I left an elegant line of Patagonia diamond earrings and rainy-days sunbursts in my valise at Peavine. But they're to stay there till some of them black-gum trees begin to glut the market with yellow clings and Japanese plums. I reckon we can't count on them unless we take Luther Burbank in for a partner.'

" 'Very well,' says Bassett, 'we'll do the best we can. Maybe after dark I'll borrow a hairpin from some lady and open the Farmers and Drovers Bank with it.'

"While we were talking, up pulls a passenger train to the depot nearby. A person in a high hat gets off on the wrong side of the train and comes tripping down the track towards us. He was a little, fat man with a big nose and rat's eyes, but dressed expensive, and carrying a hand-satchel careful, as if it had egg or railroad bonds in it. He passes by us and keeps on down the track, not appearing to notice the town.

" 'Come on,' says Bill Bassett to me, starting after him.

" 'Where?' I asks.

" 'Lordy!' says Bill, 'had you forgot you was in the desert? Didn't you see Colonel Manna drop down right before your eyes? Don't you hear the rustling of General Raven's wings? I'm surprised at you, Elijah.'

"We overtook the stranger in the edge of some woods, and, as it was after sundown and in a quiet place, nobody saw us stop him. Bill takes the silk hat off the man's head and brushes it with his sleeve and puts it back.

" 'What does this mean, sir?' says the man.

" 'When I wore one of these,' says Bill, 'and felt embarrassed, I always done that. Not having one now I had to use yours. I hardly know how to begin, sir, in explaining our business with you, but I guess we'll try your pockets first.'

"Bill Bassett felt in all of them, and looked disgusted.

" 'Not even a watch,' he says. 'Ain't you ashamed of yourself, you whited sculpture? Going about dressed like a headwaiter, and financed like a Count. You haven't even got carfare."

"The man speaks up and says he has no assets or valuables of any sort. But Bassett takes his handsatchel and opens it. Out comes some collars and socks and quarter page of a newspaper. Bill reads the clipping careful, and holds out his hand to the held-up party.

" 'Brother,' says he, 'greetings! Accept the apologies of friends. I am Bill Bassett, the burglar. Mr. Peters, you must make the acquaintance of Mr. Alfred E. Ricks. Shake hands. Mr. Peters,' says Bill, 'stands about halfway between me and you, Mr. Ricks, in the line of havoc and corruption. He always gives something for the money he gets. I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Ricks—you and Mr. Peters. This is the first time I ever attended a full gathering of the National Synod of Sharks—housebreaking, swindling, and financiering all represented. Please examine Mr. Rick's credentials, Mr. Peters.'

"The piece of newspaper that Bill Bassett handed me had a good picture of this Ricks on it. It was a Chicago paper, and it had obloquies of Ricks in every paragraph. By reading it over I harvested the intelligence that said alleged Ricks had laid off all that portion of the State of Florida that lies under water into town lots and sold 'em to alleged innocent investors from his magnificently furnished offices in Chicago.

"After he had taken in a hundred thousand or so dollars one of these fussy purchasers that are always making trouble (I've had 'em actually try gold watches I've sold 'em with acid) took a cheap excursion down to the land where it is always just before supper to look at his lot and see if it didn't need a new paling or two on the fence, and market a few lemons in time for the Christmas trade.

"He hires a surveyor to find his lot for him. They run the line out and find the flourishing town of Paradise Hollow, so advertised, to be about 40 rods and 16 poles S., 27° E. of the middle of Lake Okeeshobee. This man's lot was under thirty-six feet of water, and, besides, had been preempted so long by the alligators and gars that his title looked fishy.

"Naturally, the man goes back to Chicago and makes it as hot for Alfred E. Ricks as the morning after a prediction of snow by the weather bureau. Ricks defied the

allegation, but he couldn't deny the alligators. One morning the papers came out with a column about it, and Ricks come out by the fire escape. It seems the alleged authorities had beat him to the safe-deposit box where he kept his winnings, and Ricks has to westward ho! with only feetwear and a dozen 15½ English pokes in his shopping bag. He happened to have some mileage left in his book, and that took him as far as the town in the wilderness where he was spilled out on me and Bill Bassett as Elijah III with not a raven in sight for any of us.

"Then this Alfred E. Ricks lets out a squeak that he is hungry, too, and denies the hypothesis that he is good for the value, let alone the price, of a meal. And so, there was the three of us, representing, if we had a mind to draw syllogisms and parabolas, labor and trade and capital. Now, when trade has no capital there isn't a dicker to be made. And when capital has no money there's a stagnation in steak and onions. That put it up to the man with the jimmy.

" 'Brother bushrangers,' says Bill Bassett, 'never yet, in trouble, did I desert a pal. Hard by, in yon wood, I seem to see unfurnished lodgings. Let us go there and wait till dark.'

"There was an old deserted cabin in the grove, and we took possession of it. After dark Bill Bassett tells us to wait and goes out for half an hour. He comes back with a armful of bread and spareribs and pies.

" 'Panhandled 'em at a farmhouse on Washita Avenue,' says he. 'Eat, drink, and be leary.'

"The full moon was coming up bright, so we sat on the floor of the cabin and ate in the light of it. And this Bill Bassett begins to brag.

" 'Sometimes,' says he, with his mouth full of country produce, 'I lose all patience with you people that think you are higher up in the profession than I am. Now, what could either of you have done in the present emergency to set us on our feet again? Could you do it, Ricksy?"

" 'I must confess, Mr. Bassett,' says Ricks, speaking near inaudible out of a slice of pie, 'that at this immediate juncture I could not, perhaps, promote an enterprise to relieve the situation. Large operations, such as I direct, naturally require careful preparation in advance. I—'

" 'I know, Ricksy,' breaks in Bill Bassett. 'You needn't finish. You need $500 to make the first payment on a blonde typist and four roomsful of quartered oak furniture. And you need $500 more for advertising contracts. And you need two weeks' time for the fish to begin to bite. Your line of relief would be about as useful in an emergency as advocating municipal ownership to cure a man suffocated by eighty-cent gas. And your graft ain't much swifter, Brother Peters,' he winds up.

"'Oh,' says I, 'I haven't seen you turn anything into gold with your wand yet, Mr. Good Fairy. Most anybody could rub the magic ring for a little leftover victuals.'

"'That was only getting the pumpkin ready,' says Bassett, braggy and cheerful. 'The coach and six'll drive up to the door before you know it, Miss Cinderella. Maybe you've got some scheme under your sleeve-holders that will give us a start.'

"'Son,' says I, 'I'm fifteen years older than you are, and young enough yet to take out an endowment policy. I've been broke before. We can see the lights of that town not half a mile away. I learned under Montague Silver, the greatest street man that ever spoke from a wagon. There are hundreds of men walking those streets this moment with grease spots on their clothes. Give me a gasoline lamp, a dry goods box, and a two-dollar bar of white castile soap, cut into little—'

"'Where's your two dollars?' snickered Bill Bassett into my discourse. There was no use arguing with that burglar.

"'No,' he goes on, 'you're both babes-in-the-wood. Finance has closed the mahogany desk, and trade has put the shutters up. Both of you look to labor to start the wheels going. All right. You admit it. Tonight I'll show you what Bill Bassett can do.'

"Bassett tells me and Ricks not to leave the cabin till he comes back, even if it's daylight, and then he starts off toward town, whistling gay.

"This Alfred E. Ricks pulls off his shoes and his coat, lays a silk handkerchief over his hat, and lays down on the floor.

"'I think I will endeavor to secure a little slumber,' he squeaks. 'The day has been fatiguing. Good night, my dear Mr. Peters.'

"'My regards to Morpheus,' says I. 'I think I'll sit up a while.'

"About two o'clock, as near as I could guess by my watch in Peavine, home comes our laboring man and kicks up Ricks, and calls us to the streak of bright moonlight shining in the cabin door. Then he spreads out five packages of one thousand dollars each on the floor, and begins to cackle over the nest egg like a hen.

"'I'll tell you a few things about that town,' says he. 'It's named Rocky Springs, and they're building a Masonic temple, and Judge Tucker's wife, who has been down with pleurisy, is some better. I had a talk on these lilliputian thesises before I could get a siphon in the fountain of knowledge that I was after. And there's a bank there called the Lumberman's Fidelity and Plowman's Savings Institution. It closed for business yesterday with $23,000 cash on hand. It will open this morning with $18,000—all silver—that's the reason I didn't bring more. There you are, trade and capital. Now, will you be bad?"

"'My young friend,' says Alfred E. Ricks, holding up his hands, 'have you robbed this bank? Dear me, dear me!'

"'You couldn't call it that,' says Bassett. '"Robbing" sounds harsh. All I had to do was to find out what street it was on. That town is so quiet that I could stand on the corner and hear the tumblers clicking in that safe lock—right to 45, left twice to 80, right once to 60, left to 15—as plain as the Yale captain giving orders in the football dialect. Now, boys,' says Bassett, 'this is an early rising town. They tell me the citizens are all up and stirring before daylight. I asked what for and they said because breakfast was ready at that time. And what of merry Robin Hood? It must be Yoicks! and away with the tinkers' chorus. I'll stake you. How much do you want? Speak up, Capital.'

"'My dear young friend,' says this ground squirrel of a Ricks, standing on his hind legs and juggling nuts in his paws, 'I have friends in Denver who would assist me. If I had a hundred dollars I—'

"Bassett unpins a package of the currency and throws five twenties to Ricks.

"'Trade, how much?' he says to me.

"'Put your money up, Labor,' says I. 'I never yet drew upon honest toil for its hard-earned pittance. The dollars I get are surplus ones that are burning the pockets of fools and greenhorns. When I stand on a street corner and sell a solid gold diamond ring to a yap for $3.00, I make just $2.60. And I know he's going to give it to a girl in return for all the benefits accruing from a $125.00 ring. His profits are $122.00. Which of us is the biggest faker?'

"'And when you sell a poor woman a pinch of sand for fifty cents to keep her lamp from exploding,' says Bassett, 'what do you figure her gross earnings to be, with sand at forty cents a ton?'

"'Listen,' says I. 'I instruct her to keep her lamp clean and well filled. If she does that it can't burst. And with the sand in it she knows it can't and she don't worry. It's a kind of Industrial Christian Science. She pays fifty cents, and gets both Rockefeller and Mrs. Eddy on the job. It ain't everybody that can let the gold-dust twins do their work.'

"Alfred E. Ricks all but licks the dust off of Bill Bassett's shoes.

"'My dear young friend,' says he, 'I will never forget your generosity. Heaven will reward you. But let me implore you to turn from your ways of violence and crime.'

"'Mousie,' says Bill, 'the hole in the wainscoting for you. Your dogmas and inculcations sound to me like the last words of a bicycle pump. What has your high moral, elevator-service system of pillage brought you to? Penuriousness

and want. Even Brother Peters, who insists upon contaminating the art of robbery with theories of commerce and trade, admitted he was on the lift. Both of you live by the gilded rule. Brother Peters,' says Bill, 'you'd better choose a slice of this embalmed currency.'

"I told Bill Bassett once more to put his money in his pocket. I never had the respect for burglary that some people have. I always gave something for the money I took, even if it was only some little trifle of a souvenir to remind 'em not to get caught again.

"And then Alfred E. Ricks grovels at Bill's feet again, and bids us adieu. He says he will hire a team at a farmhouse, drive to the station below, and take the train for Denver. It salubrified the atmosphere when that lamentable bollworm took his departure. He was a disgrace to every non-industrial profession in the country. With all his big schemes and fine offices he had wound up unable even to get an honest meal, except by the kindness of a strange and maybe unscrupulous burglar.

"I was glad to see him go, though I felt a little sorry for him, now that he was ruined forever. What could such a man do without a big capital to work with? Why, Alfed E. Ricks, as we left him, was as helpless as a turtle on its back. He couldn't have worked a scheme to beat a little girl out of a penny slate-pencil.

"When me and Bill Bassett was left alone I did a little sleight-of-mind turn in my head with a trade secret at the end of it. Thinks I, I'll show this Mr. Burglar the difference between business and labor. He had hurt some of my professional self-adulation by casting his Persians upon commerce and trade.

" 'I won't take any of your money as a gift, Mr. Bassett,' says I to him, 'but if you'll pay my expenses as a traveling companion until we get out of the danger zone of the immoral deficit you have caused in this town's finances tonight, I'll be obliged.'

"Bill Bassett agreed to that, and we hiked westward as soon as we could catch a safe train.

"When we got to a town in Arizona called Los Perros I suggested that we once more try our luck on terra cotta. That was the home of Montague Silver, my old instructor, now retired from business. I knew Monty would stake me to web money if I could show him a fly buzzing 'round in the locality. Bill Bassett said all towns looked alike to him as he worked mainly in the dark. So we got off the train in Los Perros, a fine little town in the silver region.

"I had an elegant little sure thing in the way of a commercial slingshot that I intended to hit Bassett behind the ear with. I wasn't going to take his money while he was asleep, but I was going to leave him with a lottery ticket that would rep-

resent in experience to him $4,755 —I think that was the amount he had when we got off the train. But the first time I hinted to him about an investment, he turns on me and disencumbers himself of the following terms and expressions.

"'Brother Peters,' says he, 'it ain't a bad idea to go into an enterprise of some kind, as you suggest. I think I will. But if I do it will be such a cold proposition that nobody but Robert E. Peary and Charlie Fairbanks will be able to sit on the Board of Directors.'

"'I thought you might want to turn your money over,' says I.

"'I do,' says he, 'frequently. I can't sleep on one side all night. I'll tell you, Brother Peters,' says he, 'I'm going to start a poker room. I don't seem to care for the humdrum of swindling, such as peddling egg beaters and working off breakfast food on Barnum and Bailey for sawdust to strew in their circus rings. But the gambling business,' says he, 'from the profitable side of the table is a good compromise between swiping silver spoons and selling penwipers at a Waldorf-Astoria charity bazaar.'

"'Then,' says I, 'Mr. Bassett, you don't care to talk over my little business proposition?'

"'Why,' says he, 'do you know, you can't get a Pasteur institute to start up within fifty miles of where I live. I bite so seldom.'

"So Bassett rents a room over a saloon and looks around for some furniture and chromos. The same night I went to Monty Silver's house, and he let me have $200 on my prospects. Then I went to the only store in Los Perros that sold playing cards and bought every deck in the house. The next morning when the store opened I was there bringing all the cards back with me. I said that my partner that was going to back me in the game had changed his mind, and I wanted to sell the cards back again. The storekeeper took 'em at two bits on the dollar.

"Yes, I was seventy-five dollars loser up to that time. But while I had the cards that night I marked every one in every deck. That was labor. And then trade and commerce had their innings, and the bread I had cast upon the waters began to come back in the form of cottage pudding with wine sauce.

"Of course I was among the first to buy chips at Bill Bassett's game. He had bought the only cards there was to be had in town, and I knew the back of every one of them better than I know the back of my head when the barber shows me my hair cut in the two mirrors.

"When the game closed I had the five thousand and a few odd dollars, and all Bill Bassett had was the wanderlust and a black cat he had bought for a mascot. Bill shook hands with me when I left.

"'Brother Peters,' says he, 'I have no business being in business. I was preordained to labor. When a Num-

ber One burglar tries to make a James out of his jimmy he perpetrates an improfundity. You have a well-oiled and efficacious system of luck at cards,' says he. 'Peace go with you.' And I never afterward sees Bill Bassett again."

"Well, Jeff," said I, when the Autolycan adventurer seemed to have divulged the gist of his tale, "I hope you took care of the money. That would be a respecta—that is a considerable working capital if you should choose some day to settle down to some sort of regular business."

"Me?" said Jeff virtuously. "You can bet I've taken care of that five thousand."

He tapped his coat over the region of his chest exultantly.

"Gold mining stock," he explained, "every cent of it. Shares par value one dollar. Bound to go up 500 per cent. within a year. Non-assessable. The Blue Gopher Mine. Just discovered a month ago. Better get in yourself if you've any spare dollars on hand."

"Sometimes," said I, "these mines are not—"

"Oh, this one's solid as an old goose," said Jeff. "Fifty thousand dollars' worth of ore in sight, and 10 per cent. monthly earnings guaranteed."

He drew a long envelope from his pocket and cast it on the table.

"Always carry it with me," said he. "So the burglar can't corrupt or the capitalist break in and water it."

I looked at the beautifully engraved certificate of stock.

"In Colorado, I see," said I. "And, by the way, Jeff, what was the name of the little man who went to Denver—the one you and Bill met at the station?"

"Alfred E. Ricks," said Jeff, "was the toad's designation."

"I see," said I, "the president of this mining company signs himself A. L. Fredericks. I was wondering—"

"Let me see that stock," says Jeff quickly, almost snatching it from me.

To mitigate, even though slightly, the embarrassment I summoned the waiter and ordered another bottle of the Barbera. I thought it was the least I could do.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **THEODORE MATHIESON**

TITLE: ***Galileo, Detective***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Galileo Galilei

LOCALE: Pisa, Italy

TIME: The year 1590

COMMENTS: *How Galileo experimented with two falling bodies, dropped from the Leaning Tower of Pisa—with spectacular results!*

ON AN EVENING IN THE SPRING of 1590, the young professor Galileo Galilei hurried along the Via S. Maria towards the river Arno, now and then glancing back at the empty moonlit streets. He paused for breath in the centre of the Ponte di Mezzo and listened to the water swirling in full flood beneath the bridge.

The city of Pisa lay peacefully quiet around him, her skyline of belfries, cupolas, and thrust-up loggias black against the luminous night sky. Now the bells of the Duomo began to ring with reassuring sweetness through the still, warm air.

When he had rested a few minutes, Galileo continued across the bridge and into the southern section of the town, turning presently into a side street, where the way, although narrow, was lined with substantial homes. He stopped before a square, brown house, faced with white stone—the home of Jofre Tarrega, professor of philosophy at the university.

Galileo's knock brought to the door a buxom housekeeper who greeted him pleasantly in a broad Calabrian accent, and then showed him into the living room.

"The signorina is not at home, maestro," she said smiling. "She is visiting her aunt in Lucca, but we expect her to return to-morrow."

"I know, Guilia," Galileo said. "I came to see Signor Tarrega this time."

"I will tell him."

Jofre Tarrega appeared almost at once, clad in his riding clothes. He took off his leather gloves and threw them upon a table.

"Ah, Leo," he said opening his arms in greeting to the stocky red-haired young man. "I've just had a fine moonlight ride on the Cascina road. Guilia sounded concerned about you, and indeed, you do not look happy. Is there something I can do for you?"

Galileo looked soberly at the proud, thin-lipped man, who had the lean but powerful body of an expert swordsman.

"I need your counsel, Signor Tarrega," Galileo said. "As my colleague at the university, and the only one who has opened his home to me, perhaps you could tell me what I should do about this."

From his pocket Galileo drew a folded note and handed it to Tarrega. The latter stooped before a lamp and read the message slowly aloud.

"'Your denunciation of the truths established by Aristotle is prompted by the Devil. Beware! He soon will come to claim his own.' Well, now, Leo, where did you get this?"

"I found it upon the lectern after my class left the hall this afternoon."

"And upon what have you lectured of late?"

"I have been investigating Aristotle's statement that bodies of different weights move in one and the same medium with different speeds. To-day, for example, I demonstrated how wooden balls of unequal weight, when rolled down an incline, reach the bottom at the same time."

"Then you have successfully refuted Aristotle!" Tarrega exclaimed.

"Of course. I can prove it to anyone who will take the trouble to look."

Tarrega clicked his tongue. "You know, of course, that the faculty stands united against these demonstrations of yours. Isn't it likely this was written by one of them?"

"Yes. I am the youngest professor, and they resent my questioning their sacred Aristotle. But I suspect an outsider."

"Who, then?"

"Giovanni de Medici."

"Giovanni, the grand duke's brother?"

Taregga appeared startled. A widower of Spanish origin from Catalonia, the professor was distantly related, through marriage, to the Medici family, and although Tarrega's fortunes had not waxed greatly through that connection, he was nonetheless passionately proud of the distinction.

"You see," Galileo continued, "shortly after I came to Pisa, Giovanni de Medici asked me if I would examine a model of a dredging machine which he had designed. I did, and told him it would never work."

"Tact is a quality you should cultivate, Leo."

"Perhaps. But it was the truth. Anyway, Giovanni was so stubborn he had a big dredger built and tried to dig out the harbor at Leghorn. All the machine did was sink so far into the mud that they couldn't get it out. Since then, when Giovanni passes me by, he makes a sign against the Devil."

"You apparently have a way of making dangerous enemies, Leo," Tarrega said. "And I cannot see how I can advise you."

"But what would you do? Confront Giovanni with the note and demand an explanation?"

"Look here, Leo, you must learn to control your impulse to fling down challenges—that is the reason you have more than one enemy on the faculty. My advice to you is to restrain yourself. Especially do not challenge Giovanni de Medici, or you will find yourself in serious trouble with the rector of the university."

Galileo shrugged uneasily. "I know, Signor Tarrega. You're right. I have a hot temper. I only hope that you are not now so angry with me that I cannot come to visit your daughter."

Jofre Tarrega smiled unexpectedly, and then placed his hands gently on Galileo's shoulders.

"You are always welcome in my house, Leo."

Soon after, as Galileo took his leave from Tarrega's house, he became aware that he was being followed. Twice he heard footsteps on the paving stones behind him—footsteps which stopped whenever he did. He quickened his steps, determined that he would lead his follower an exhausting chase. He kept to the broad avenues in a north-easterly direction, and passing the university came at last to a broad piazza where three lofty buildings, built of fair marble, rose like giant ghosts in the moonlight —the Duomo, the Baptistry, and the Leaning Tower.

Galileo, satisfied that his follower was still behind him, crossed a grassy corner of the piazza, passed the Leaning Tower, and entered the Campo Santo, the cemetery adjacent. Once in the concealing darkness he pressed himself against a wall and waited. Footsteps sounded, and as a man passed by him, Galileo spoke up sharply.

"Why are you following me?"

The man spun around, whipped out a dagger from his belt, and pressed the point against the young professor's chest.

"Diavolo!" the man whispered. "I should kill you now, Galileo Galilei. But take heed of my words, or I shall do it later, I swear!"

"What have I done?" Galileo demanded. "Why do you threaten me?"

He could see now in the moonlight that the man was young, tall, and strong, and that he wore a

mask over the upper part of a gaunt face. Then, when his attacker whispered again, Galileo thought the voice sounded familiar.

"You will not visit the house of Livia Tarrega again!" the masked man cried.

"Why not? I respect and admire the signorina.'

"*Do* you? That is why, I suppose, you visit her secretly at night, creeping along the back street, and atop the wall to her window."

"But I have not—ever!" Galileo protested. "I visit the signorina with her father's full permission, and always in the presence of her duenna."

"You lie! My friend has seen you at her window."

"Then your friend it is who lies. He wishes you to make a scandal, perhaps kill me—for something I have not done, nor, I vow, has anyone. The signorina would not permit anyone to visit her thus. Surely you could not love her and think that she would do such a thing!"

The sincerity of Galileo's speech had an effect upon the young man. The pressure of his dagger point upon Galileo's breast lightened, and he spoke only once more.

"Perhaps you are telling the truth. I hope so. *But keep away from Livia Tarrega!*"

And he was gone.

Quite unexpectedly, Galileo recognized his attacker the following day as he stood upon the banks of the Arno amid cheering crowds, watching the Giuoco del Ponte, or the Fight for the Bridge.

Once each year Mezzogiorno (that is, Pisa south of the Arno) challenged Tramontana (Pisa to the north) to fight upon the Ponte di Mezzo, the object being for the "fighters" of each side to penetrate to the opposition's half of the bridge.

Now as Galileo watched, each of the battalions assembled on its side of the river, and at the sound of a horn from the marshal, they rushed forward to meet in combat upon the bridge, armed, and in helmet and breastplate. One young fighter on the Tramontana side caught Galileo's eye at once. In his helmet, which descended low like a mask, he was instantly recognizable as Galileo's pursuer of the night before.

Galileo kept his eye upon him all through the fight, and when the marshal blew the horn which terminated the struggle, he saw him break away from the cheering crowds and set off by himself down the narrow lane of La Cervia. Galileo followed at once, and catching up with him, tapped him upon the shoulder.

"Oh, it is you," the young man said, removing his helmet and turning a sullen face towards the professor.

Galileo blinked with surprise. It was Paolo Salviati, who attended

Galileo's course in mathematics—an outstanding student of law who was in his final year at the university.

"I never met you visiting at Signorina Tarrega's," Galileo said at last.

The other shrugged, as if scorning a denial.

"And now that you know who I am," he said, "What will you do?"

Galileo sat down upon the edge of a small marble fountain and folded his arms.

"I shall say nothing to anyone about the incident—provided you tell me who it was that told you the lie about me, that I visited the signorina secretly."

"I cannot do that."

"Then I shall report the matter to the rector."

"No, no! If it is known I assaulted a professor of the university, I shall be turned out, and all my work shall be for nothing!"

"Then tell me."

The young man clenched his fists and looked for a moment as if he might attack Galileo again. But finally he said, "It was one of the other professors. But do not ask me his name—"

"A colleague! Will one descend that low to stem the flow of truth from my rostrum? You must tell me his name, Salviati!"

But shaking his head, the law student hurried off down the lane.

Two nights later, as Galileo lay sleeping in his small house close by the university, he was awakened by a thump on the wall. He lay listening, but all the sounds he could hear were the distant clop-clop of a mule's hooves on the paving stones and, from the inn next door, the Padrona talking out loud in her sleep again. But the memory of the thump disturbed him, so presently he rose, lit a candle, and opened the street door.

He saw at once it was empty, and smelled the odor of fresh fish that always blew from the river at this hour. Then, as he turned to close his door, he espied the note upon the sill.

You are warned again—do not break idols in the market place!

Galileo crumped the note in his hand. He looked again up the street as he heard the sound of singing which grew louder and louder until he recognized the voices.

"Vincenzio—Pettirosso," Galileo cried. "What are you doing here so late?"

Two of his most trusted and promising students appeared out of the shadows and smiled affectionately at him. One of them carried a jug of wine.

"You look troubled to-day, maestro, and we thought you might need cheering up," said the smaller student, who was called Pettirosso because he was preternaturally fragile-boned and light, like a bird.

"Well, perhaps you are right," Galileo said. "Come in."

And while his visitors sat down at the table, the young professor fetched three pottery cups and poured wine freely all around.

"This was just left at my door," Galileo said at last, throwing the note upon the table. "Did you see anyone upon the street?"

"Not a soul, maestro," Pettirosso said, reading the note and passing it to Vencenzio. "Who do you think wrote it?"

"At first I thought it was an outsider, but now I think it was a member of the faculty."

"And why should anyone write thus?"

"The faculty resents the fact that my statements do not accord with their venerable Aristotle's." Galileo smiled suddenly. "Tell me, Vincenzio, what do you think I should do? You're the bold one!"

Vincenzio Barbierini rubbed his hands and scowled. He was a broad fellow, handsome, with long blond hair that curled over his collar. Although he was often vain and given to preening himself over his accomplishments with the *meretrices,* or loose women of the city, to Galileo he showed only respect and devotion. Indeed, Vincenzio so admired his master that he set himself to copy not only Galileo's forward-thrusting, inquiring air, but his blunt, uncompromising speech as well.

"You should punish this professor," he said at length. "I tell you what, maestro, my good companion Pettirosso, who is like my own brother, and I—we will watch first this professor and then that one, and when we find the guilty one, we will tell you."

"No, no," Galileo said quickly. "It is better the writer remains anonymous, for if I knew his identity I might be rash enough to attack him."

"Then what will you do?" Pettirosso asked.

Galileo drained his wine cup before he answered.

"I think," he said, "I will make a public demonstration. That will teach them they cannot intimidate me with warning notes. Heretofore I have discreetly kept my proofs within the classroom—but now all Pisa shall see the great Aristotle proved wrong in broad daylight!"

"The experiment of the wooden balls!" Vincenzio exclaimed.

"Esattamente! But we shall use iron shot this time—a one-pound shot and a ten-pound shot, and we shall drop them from somewhere high—at least two hundred cubits."

"From the Baptistry?"

"No. From the Leaning Tower."

The word of the projected experiment travelled fast. The very next day the rector of the university called Galileo to his chambers, and fingering his white beard he spoke reprovingly.

"Galileo Galilei, I have heard of the public demonstration you plan for next week. Is this wise?"

"Why, sir, when I came here, did you not encourage me to disperse ignorance with the light of truth?"

"True, my boy. But have you never heard that it is dangerous to break idols in the market place?"

Galileo stared at the rector, scarcely believing his ears. Then he pulled the latest note from his pocket and laid it before his superior.

"Did you write this, sir?"

The rector read it with raised eyebrows, and then murmured, "My words were almost the same, weren't they? But I must have heard someone say them. No, I did not write it, but I would say it is a just warning, against which it would be foolhardy for you to proceed."

"And do you only warn me, too, sir?" Galileo asked. "Or do you forbid me the right to demonstrate my own discoveries?"

The rector sighed. "No, Galileo Galilei, I cannot do that. You may go ahead with your demonstration if you like, but take care you do not see your hopes buried in the holy ground of the cemetery of Campo Santo!"

The rector's words echoed in Galileo's ears on the day of the demonstration, as he stood upon the piazza adjacent to the Campo Santo, waiting for the bells of the Leaning Tower to strike the hour of noon. But he tried to be confident. Hadn't he and his assistants—just before dawn, while all Pisa was sleeping—conducted the experiment from the tower exactly as he planned to do it today? It was true that someone had probably watched them, since Vincenzio claimed he heard footsteps from the cloister of the Duomo, but nothing had come of it.

Now, with the sun almost at its zenith, professors stood lounging about the square talking and laughing, many of them casting derisive or hostile looks in Galileo's direction.

Townspeople who doubtless expected some kind of *spettacolo* were also present—mothers and their small children, idlers, and keen-faced priests whom Galileo hoped were Jesuits, since there were fine scientists among them. In the crowd he espied the gentle old rector and, sitting upon a stone bench close by, in the shade of the Duomo, Giovanni de Medici, his arrogant lips curved in a sneer.

The bells in the tower began to ring twelve o'clock, the laughter and stirring ceased, and all eyes were turned upon Galileo. He waited, however, until the last whisper of the bell tones had faded, and the bell-ringer himself had stepped out through the single, high door at the base of the tower and joined a young man whom Galileo recognized as Paolo Salviati. Then Galileo raised his hands and spoke in a loud clear voice.

"See here, each of my assistants

holds an iron ball." He pointed to Vincenzio and Pettirosso behind him. "One iron ball weighs one pound, the other ten pounds. We shall carry them to the top of the tower and drop them down upon the area below the leaning side, which we have roped off. You who are disciples of Aristotle believe that falling bodies of unequal weight, if dropped from the same height at the same moment, will reach the ground at different times—"

"That's right," de Medici called from the crowd, "and the heavier body travels in proportion to its weight."

"I deny this is true," Galileo said, "and shall demonstrate the fallacy of Aristotle's reasoning. Watch!"

Amid a sullen murmur, Galileo strode into the tower followed by Vincenzio and Pettirosso and the trio climbed the six, successive circular staircases which coiled dizzily around a core of empty space and ropes from the belfry.

Reaching the topmost gallery, above which loomed the bell tower itself, Galileo paused to catch his breath and noticed that Pettirroso alone had followed him.

"Where is Vincenzio?" he demanded.

"He'll be right along, maestro," Pettirosso assured him. "He stopped to look out the lower gallery door. Woman trouble! He thinks she did not come to see him perform to-day!"

"Vincenzio!" Galileo called. "We have no time to waste!"

The next moment his heavy-set assistant panted up the steps, and indeed he did not look well. There were dark rings under his eyes and his handsome face looked pale.

"I told you, Vincenzio, you should not have exerted yourself last night," Pettirosso said with a laugh.

"Silence!" Vincenzio roared, then bowed subserviently to Galileo. "I'm very sorry, maestro. I am ready."

Galileo took from the pocket of his gown two square silk nets, and laying them flat upon the gallery floor, he carefully placed an iron ball in the center of each. Then grasping the corners of the nets, he suspended a ball from each hand, and stepped forward to the marble parapet. Vincenzio seized him firmly by the ankles, and Galileo leaned forward until he could see the crowd far below.

"Now watch!" he called down in the still, noon air.

He held out the balls, and when his hands were on an even plane he released them at the same instant. Down they plummeted, the silk nets floating off almost invisibly while the balls grew smaller as Galileo watched them; then for an instant they too seemed to disappear, and he saw two simultaneous puffs of dust as the balls struck the earth.

"We have done it!" he said, smil-

ing to his assistants, and pointed to another pair of one-pound and ten-pound balls upon the floor of the gallery. "Be ready with them."

Galileo hastened down the steps of the tower, half expecting that some of the spectators would come up to congratulate him; but he met not a soul, and when at last he came out through the tower door the old round-shouldered bell-ringer, who sat upon a bench a little distance away, looked at Galileo incuriously.

"It's impossible!" Galileo murmured. "Don't they understand?"

But already the greater part of the crowd had wandered away from the piazza, clearly disappointed by the exhibition, and as Galileo rounded the tower to the roped-off area, he saw that only a few of the professors and students remained. He looked up and saw Pettirosso and Vincenzio leaning over the balcony—doubtless they, too, were disappointed in the lack of reaction.

"Look, then," he cried to the little group, "did not the bodies strike the ground at the same moment?"

Two of the professors came over and shook Galileo's hand.

"Indeed, my boy," said one, "You have proven your point. You have won our admiration."

Galileo turned to the others.

"Are there any of you who have questions? My assistants are ready to repeat the experiment at once."

Nobody seemed to have any questions. Disappointed, Galileo looked up at his assistants on the tower and started to give the prearranged signal for quitting. Instead he uttered a startled shout.

For at that moment both students seemed to lose their balance —they slipped over the parapet and came diving down headfirst. There was plenty of time to observe the difference in their sizes—Vincenzio, full-fleshed and heavy, Pettirosso, small and bird-like.

And once again two bodies struck the earth at the same instant.

Galileo was sitting at his supper table that evening, unable to eat a morsel, when a messenger from the university brought word that the rector wished to see him.

The young professor found the rector behind his desk, looking grave in the dark robes and fur-trimmed hood of his office. Through the windows opening on the courtyard sounded a chorus of students' voices chanting:

"Grillo, mio Grillo,
Se tu vo' moglie dillo . . ."

"Many in the town believe the Devil hurled your assistants over the parapet," the old man said. "You yourself ran up to the tower directly after their fall, after stationing students at the tower door to see that no one escaped. Your inquiry was most thorough, I recall. The bell-ringer Aproino says that no one passed him all the time he was watching."

"He must have left his post when the accident happened," Galileo said, a desperate note in his voice.

"It could only have been for a moment or two—not long enough for anyone to descend the six flights from the top and escape. To make it worse, Aproino claims he heard the Devil stamp his foot."

"You don't believe that!"

"I am merely reminding you of the forces arrayed against you. There is bound to be an official investigation, and I fear you had better be able to explain what happened on that tower."

"I told you, my dear rector. They merely leaned too far forward and fell. When I was up there, I had Vincenzio hold my ankles because I, too, felt the downward pull."

"Both of them fell together—*accidentally?"*

"Why not? One could have tried to reach out to save the other—"

"Did you see one of them reach out? I stood by your side, and I failed to. The other witnesses say they did not merely fall over the parapet—they were *thrown!"*

"They imagine it—there was no one in the tower except my two assistants!"

"Do you really believe that, Galileo Galilei? *Then what became of the second set of iron shots?"*

Galileo gasped. "How did you know?"

"Do you forget that I followed you up to the gallery? I looked for the second set, because only a few moments before you said your assistants were ready to *repeat* the experiment. That meant they must have had duplicate shots in the tower. Is that not true?"

"It is true," Galileo admitted.

"Then you will have to explain to the authorities what happened to them. Many will say the Devil took them. You will have to prove he did not, and you know that I cannot lie in this matter."

Galileo passed his hand nervously through his red hair. "Perhaps if I knew where the sand came from . . ."

"Sand?"

"Scattered on the floor of the gallery. It wasn't there the first time I went up—I can swear to that!"

"You have only a day or two to think about it—the time it will take authorities to travel from Florence. I warned you that flaunting your discoveries in the faces of your colleagues might end disastrously. Now you must pay for that flagrancy."

"I will find the one who did it," Galileo said, his voice shaking.

"For your own sake, my boy, I hope you do."

Leaving the rector's chambers, Galileo walked the streets for a long time with despair in his heart, coming at last in front of the Duomo. There he watched an old woman come out of the church, stop, then go back and rub the dark-green bronze doors where a

little lizard in bas relief shone like gold. Hundreds rubbed the spot every day, considering it lucky, and Galileo sighed, wishing that he were credulous enough to comfort himself so easily. But talk might help him to see a light. He turned his steps in the direction of Jofre Tarrega's.

A knock on the door brought Guilia, but this time the woman did not welcome him.

"Signor Tarrega has been ill all day," she said sternly, "but he said he would speak to you himself. Wait here."

His heart numb, scarcely believing his ears, Galileo stared at the closed door, until it opened again. Jofre Tarrega stood before him.

"I've been expecting you," Tarrega said, coldly ironical. "The rector has told me the news. What proud triumph you must have felt when you let go those nets and saw the two iron balls hit the ground at the same instant! But such *hubris* calls down its own destruction, and you have brought ruin upon yourself. I wash my hands of you, and so does Livia, who returned from Lucca in time to hear of this fiasco. You are no longer welcome in this house."

Galileo departed without a word and walked back the way he came. As he crossed the market place he came face to face with Giovanni de Medici. The young prince looked at him haughtily and laid his hand negligently upon his sword.

"Look at you now, Galileo Galilei—you are as mired as my machine at Leghorn! How much longer will you strut to your classes, amico?"

The prince's malice was like a dash of cold water. Galileo took a deep breath, and his mind took firm rein over his emotions.

He tried to pass on, but de Medici caught hold of his arm.

"Listen," he whispered, "I want you to know this, and it shall remain just between us. You can thank me for your predicament. *I wrote those notes!*"

"In Heaven's name, why?"

"I trusted to your hotheadedness. I knew that if you thought someone of the faculty wrote them, you would be sure to make yourself even more unpopular with some ill-considered defiance."

Instead of anger, Galileo felt only a curious relief. For now his course lay clearly ahead of him. He pulled himself away from de Medici's grasp.

"Then I have much work to do to mend the results of my own folly," he said softly.

Galileo went at once to the bell-ringer's small stone house, just outside the walls of the Campo Santo, and was admitted by the little man. Inside, at the fireplace, stood the law student, Paolo Salviati.

"Don't look surprised, signore," he said. "Guiseppe Aproino, the bell-ringer, is my uncle."

"I'm in great trouble, Salviati,"

Galileo said. "I wish to ask your uncle some questions, but I'm afraid he resents my presence."

"Uncle!" the young man said sharply. "You help the maestro, understand?"

The bell-ringer turned the palms of his hands upwards, and shrugged.

"Si, maestro?"

"I came to you before dawn this morning to ask for the keys to the tower, and returned them to you after the rehearsal. Has anyone else borrowed them since?"

"No, maestro."

"But the door of the tower is left open during the day?"

"Si. I open it at sunrise, when I ring the first bells, and close it at sunset when I ring the last."

"And are you there all the time?"

"No, no. Between sunrise and noon I work in the gardens."

Galileo nodded with satisfaction. "The rector says you heard the Devil stomp his foot."

"Si—twice I heard him."

"Twice?" Galileo paused, frowning. "Did you see me throw the balls from the tower, Signor Aproino?"

"No. A little girl ran into the tower and I went after her. I was inside when the Devil stomped."

"Now think carefully," Galileo said. "When did you hear the Devil stomp the *second* time?"

The bell-ringer scratched his chest thoughtfully. "Not much later."

"Before I came down from the tower?"

"No, just afterwards. I remember I was sitting on the bench outside."

"Before the students fell from the tower?"

"Si, before that."

"One more thing. The rector said that when the students fell from the tower you did not leave the door untended. But did you not run to see them?"

"The poor *ragazzos?* Si! But always I am in sight of the door. Nobody comes out, I swear! It was the Devil who pushed them—the Devil!"

Galileo bowed formally. "Thank you, Signor Aproino. I would like now to examine the tower again—with your permission."

The bell-keeper frowned.

"I will take him, Uncle," Salviati said.

The old man grumbled and produced a large key, and the student, after lighting a lanthorn, led Galileo out of the house.

Inside the tower, which was far more draughty and dank in the night than in the day, they paused and looked at the maze of ropes that led upwards through the dark floor, but two of them were tied to cleats upon a heavy, solid oaken frame.

"Why are those ropes cleated?" Galileo asked.

"To distinguish them. This one leads to a bell that is rung only on

feast days, the other to a cracked bell my uncle does not ring at all."

Galileo seized the latter rope and gave it a tug. Nothing happened.

"It seems to be fastened," Galileo said.

"To a bar in the belfry—so that my uncle does not ring it by accident."

Galileo took the lanthron from Salviati and led the way to the top of the tower where, his feet gritting on sand, he started a slow circuit of the gallery.

"May I ask, maestro, if you think Vincenzio and Pettirosso were murdered?"

"I know it."

The law student was silent a moment, then he said, "Two others came to-night to ask for admittance to the tower."

"Who?"

"The rector, and Giovanni de Medici. Uncle had to oblige them, and he climbed the tower with them. All they did was to walk round and round the balcony. De Medici seemed certain the Devil had been here."

"Ah," Galileo exclaimed suddenly, and holding his lanthorn close to a narrow gutter that drained the gallery, he plucked from the channel a small piece of thin leather.

"That tells you something, maestro?"

Galileo nodded, then rose quickly and ascended the iron ladder that led up into the belfry, where his lanthorn winked fitfully as he stepped among the dark shapes of the bells. A little later he descended.

"I'm ready to go now," he said.

The professor and the student walked back to the bell-ringer's house in silence, and as they were about to part, Galileo held up the lanthorn.

"I'd like to borrow this, Salviati. I have much yet to look for to-night."

"Of course. But where do you go?"

"To the Campo Santo."

"But what will you do in the cemetery?"

"Search."

"You may be in danger, I think. Let me come with you."

Galileo looked keenly at the gaunt face of his companion.

"Last week you pressed a sword to my chest, Salviati. Why now do you offer to befriend me?"

"You might have told the rector about my attacking you, and yet you held your tongue."

"Very well," Galileo said after a moment. "You may come along."

The moonlight was bright upon the urns and effigies in the cemetery, the grass soft and springy underfoot—grass growing from sanctified soil that had been brought in shiploads from the Holy Land. Galileo threaded his way among the graves and stopped finally in the shadow of the Leaning Tower.

"This would be the area, I think."

"What are you looking for?"

"The second set of iron shot."

Galileo searched until finally he discovered a hole in the turf, and embedded in it, the ten-pound shot. A few feet farther away he discovered the one-pound shot. He lifted the latter gingerly and examined it by the lamplight. Suddenly he pointed to some brownish stains on the surface of the iron ball.

"Blood."

"What does it mean?"

"It demonstrates the truth of my reasoning. Listen. Before dawn this morning, the murderer watched our rehearsal—we heard his footsteps in the Duomo—and he knew exactly what we were going to do. At sunrise, just after your uncle left to do his gardening, the murderer crept into the tower and hid himself in the belfry. At noon he watched me drop the two iron balls. Then after I left Vincenzio and Pettirosso at the top of the tower, he came out of his hiding place and struck the two students from behind with a sandbag he had brought with him. He must have succeeded in stunning little Pettirosso at once, but with Vincenzio, the larger one, he had trouble. His sandbag burst open in the struggle—I found a piece of the bag in the gutter a while ago. He managed to seize the smaller iron ball and struck Vincenzio's head—"

"But we found no blood on the balcony."

"He smugged it out quickly with the spilled sand. Then, with Vincenzio and Pettirosso both unconscious, he propped up their forms against the parapet, keeping himself well concealed. When I reached the ground and looked up to see my two assistants leaning over, they were already unconscious."

"But why did he throw the second set of balls from the tower?"

"To make the crime look supernatural. Look what he does now! He runs to the opposite side of the tower, overlooking this cemetery, where there were no spectators, and tosses the balls down. The impact of their hitting the earth was the *second* sound of Devil's hooves that your uncle heard. The first thump, of course, was the landing of my own shot."

The law student held up his hands in objection.

"Then the murderer *pushed* Vincenzio and Pettirosso over the edge?"

"Yes."

"But how can someone throw away shot and push men from the tower and then totally disappear? My uncle said no one came out, and you searched the tower from top to bottom immediately after."

"He escaped, of course, during the only few crucial seconds when it was possible—*when everybody's attention was drawn to the falling students!*"

"But he wouldn't have *time!*" Salviati cried. "After pushing over

your assistants, he would have to run down six flights of stairs. By the time he reached the ground, the first shock would be over, and my uncle would be watching the door again."

"True, but right after the murderer pushed the two bodies over the edge, *he slid down the rope* that led to the cracked bell, the rope which your uncle had fastened to a stationary bar. Doubtless the murderer had come prepared to tie a rope thus himself, but your uncle had unwittingly provided just what he wanted. It would have taken him only seconds to descend. Everybody, including your uncle, was still absorbed in the spectacle of violent death, and the murderer was able to walk out of the tower unnoticed!"

"But maestro—who *is* he?"

Galileo stiffened as from somewhere in the city a dog howled in the night. Then he quickly replaced the one-pound shot in its recess in the earth and blew out the lanthorn.

"We now have a chance of catching him," Galileo said. "He will not dare leave these shots in the ground. Come, let us hide behind the hedge yonder!"

Galileo and his companion crouched low in the protecting shadow and waited. Time passed slowly; the moon swung lower in the hazy sky, and the shadow of the Leaning Tower crawled imperceptibly across the graveyard.

About midnight, as Galileo judged, they heard the swish of grass and a shuttered lanthorn, with one panel open, glimmered near-by.

The mathematician waited until the searcher had found the smaller iron ball and placed it within a bag. Then Galileo stepped forward.

"You won't get a chance to use it again," he said loudly.

For a moment the man was immobile; then as he tried to escape, Galileo lurched forward and pulled him to the ground. Salviati seized the lanthorn, opened all the shutters, and held it close to the man's face.

It was Jofre Tarrega.

"I knew you murdered my two students when I left your house earlier this evening," Galileo said, while Tarrega sat tight-lipped upon the coping of a grave. "You said then how proud I must have been when I released the nets and heard the iron balls strike the ground at the same time. *But nobody on the ground could have seen those nets at the height at which I used them, especially with the noon sun in his eyes.* That meant that either you, or the one who told you about it, was near me, in the belfry, watching the experiment from there. But the rector, who told you the news, was on the ground the whole time—so it could only have been you in the belfry!"

Tarrega growled. "I came here to investigate—to help you, Leo. I had nothing to do with the two deaths."

"Signor Tarrega," Galileo said quietly. "You can no longer keep your secret."

"What do you mean?"

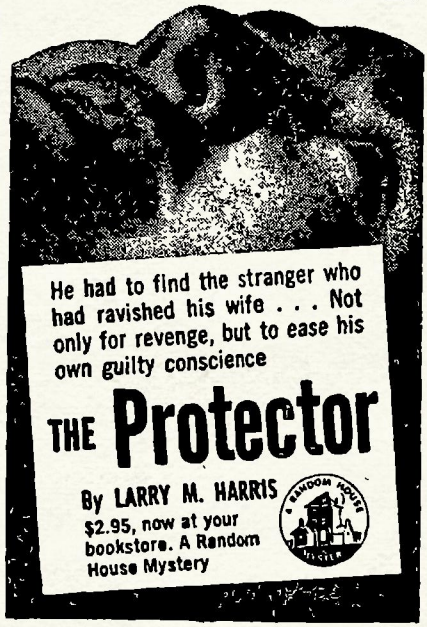
"The professor who told Paolo Salviati that he saw me enter your daughter's room *thought he was telling the truth.* I'm sorry to say this, signore, but my whole life's work is at stake. Livia permitted Vincenzio Barbierini to enter her room at night. Vincenzio's stature is similar to mine, and his fair hair might look red in the moonlight. Also, he often affected many of my gestures and mannerisms, and could well have been mistaken for me by the professor who saw him.

"Last night Vincenzio visited Livia again. Doubtless you found out about it and went looking for Vincenzio. You saw us rehearsing in the tower and the plan of the murder of Vincenzio occurred to you. You knew how Vincenzio boasted of his conquests and you could not bear to let him defame your fine name or your daughter. So you killed him—and Pettirösso, too, because he was present and could have denounced you."

Taregga's shoulders drooped and suddenly his face looked old—very old.

"Shall we go to the rector now, signore?" Galileo asked.

Without a word Taregga rose to accompany them.



EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **J. C. FURNAS**

TITLE: ***Spook Money***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: 25 years ago and more

COMMENTS: *It all started in Lower Two of a Pullman sleeping car named Mt. Minnequamagog ... Don't miss this gay and ghostly caper!*

YOU TALK ABOUT THESE OLD-TIME millionaires lighting cigars with hundred-dollar bills to show off. Well, I'm no show-off and I never been what you could call rich, but I'm way out ahead of that kind of caper. I mean, sixteen years ago I lit a cigarette with a five-hundred-dollar bill and never regretted it. It don't matter if people know about it now. Nobody'll believe it anyway.

I come from Callao, Indiana, which is a tank town on the Vandalia railroad, or was. The Vandalia was swallowed up years ago. For all I know, Callao's gone too, but my hailing from there had a lot to do with this deal.

I went to Chicago when I was seventeen and got a job in a wholesale grocery concern called Blatch & Cummings. They got branches for three hundred miles around, and I moved up the ladder and traveled for them, checking up on local managers. Never married, just worked days and went out nights some, but never hooked up with any girl that got steady ideas same time I did.

Well, November, 1928, I had to go shoot some trouble in the Columbus branch. I disremember what the trouble was, but I never forgot much else about that trip.

I left Chicago in Lower Two in a Pullman named Mt. Minnequamagog, on the men's washroom end, right over the wheels. They

said it was coming on Thanksgiving and travel was heavy and I was lucky to get that.

Half an hour before we pulled out, I was on board and brushing my teeth and crawling into my nightshirt—I never been comfortable in pajamas yet—and bedding down for the night. I reckon I might have got to sleep and missed it all, only when they hooked the engine on, the engineer come back too heavy and gives us a shaking up that fetched me broad awake and sore about it.

I was still wide-awake and sore when we were already fifty miles on our way. I had a bottle in my grip—Canadian rye, stronger than most you got those times—so I had a snort, and then another one, but it just made me wakefuller, like I had something bothering me but couldn't recollect what.

One trouble was the train noises—first a stretch of whacka-whacka-whacka-whacka, and then a string of clicks and rattles that was worse. Usually those ordinary train noises don't trouble me ten cents' worth, but this stuff kind of latched on to my attention and pretty soon I commenced hearing tunes in it, only the tune wouldn't stay put long enough to help you drowse off. It would start *Turkey in the Straw* and switch to *I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles* and then to *Marching Through Georgia,* fit to drive you nuts. And then it seemed like it started sending Morse code.

I know Morse because when I was a kid, me and another kid next door named Myron Brinton, only we always called him Puggy, pooled our junk money and sent away for one of those Learn-to-be-a-telegrapher layouts: two keys and some wire and dry cells and a code book. We rigged her up and sent stuff back and forth from each other's bedrooms. Puggy was smart but in a low-down kind of way and I don't know as I ever liked him exactly, but he was a couple of years older and always up to something and some ways I guess he was kind of a hero to me too. His call letters was MB and mine was TK, for Tom Knox, which is my name. And I reckon once you know Morse you never forget it, like swimming.

Well, these rattles on the train hit a Morse letter now and again—just V and some hash, then P and more hash, and so on. Then over and over again, like these things they shake in rumba orchestras, they started up: Da—daditda . . . Da—daditda . . . Da—daditda . . . And that's Morse for TK.

That's right, I thought it was the whiskey. I hadn't had much, but a little bad booze sometimes goes a long way. But the more I listened, the queerer it got, because the rattle even sent that TK with a little slur, just like Puggy used to. I never got up to a sending speed that would faze him, but he was always a sloppy sender compared to me.

Then I figured I was asleep and dreaming without knowing it, so I shook myself awake for sure, and the rattles kept right on sending. It seemed like the noise was back of the head of the bunk somehow. So I got into my pants and checked up, and what was back of the head of the bunk was the washroom wall and the steel closet where they keep sheets and towels.

I prowled the men's room, and the only soul in it was the porter catching a nap. I was feeling kind of cool round my bare feet, but I stayed with it and woke him up and offered him a dollar to open up the closet, though it didn't seem reasonable there was any room in it for a practical joker.

He did it, but it was pretty plain he thought I was drunk or nuts, and I wasn't arguing the point; I just waved the dollar at him. And, like I expected, there wasn't any little green men in there sending Morse. There was nothing but stacks of linen.

When I got back in the bunk, the TK business had quit. But naturally I sneezed as my cold feet warmed up and here it was again: Dadadit — dit — dididit — diditda — dadit— dadidit—didididit—dit—didit—da. And that's Morse for Gesundheit.

That finished me. I reached over to the window sill and tapped back with my middle fingernail, like handling a key: Dada—dadididit, meaning MB.

Puggy come right back—it was him, all right—with a stream of Morse that swamped me. I had to break in and send how I was rusty as an old gate and he always was a lousy sender and slow down! Then I did one of those double-takes, like in the movies. Here I was, holding conversation with the rattles on a train!

He slowed and begun sending pretty clean code for him. First off, he made it clear he was dead. "But I ain't in the other world," he says. "Seems to be one but I ain't there yet. I can't go there till I get something off my mind."

So I asked him where he was; I had to send it twice before he got it. I guess I was pretty jittery.

"Calm down, Tom," he says. "I ain't going to bite you. I'm too glad to see you. If you stay jumpy, I can't read you and I got no time to waste. Where am I? I'm right here in the bunk with you. You need a shave and you got on an old-fashioned nightshirt, like the hayseed you always was. But you don't feel crowded because I ain't here in the flesh, like they say. And no squawks about its being your bunk because I been first citizen of this Lower Two for seven years, and if anybody's an interloper it's you, see."

He said he'd died in 1921, when he was thirty. Seems he'd left home after I did and gone bad and turned professional gambler and done all right on long-distance trains sometimes and in joints sometimes and

then when he was in France with the A.E.F., cleaning up on the boys paydays. He said he never asked for trouble with amateur stuff like marked cards but he never saw the beat of the second deal he developed.

Well, this car had been on a Florida run in 1921 and Puggy and his partner had quarreled over money in the washroom; the partner had knifed him and he'd staggered out and fell into Lower Two and died there. "I been here ever since," he says. "When you're dead and got something on your mind, you stay where you died till you get it off. That's the rules. And that's where you come in, chum."

I said, "Why pick on me?" There must of been hundreds of people in that bunk in seven years.

"Ain't you my friend?" he says. "You're the first familiar face I seen since I got mine, boyhood pal." He sent that with a kind of a sneer. "Besides, I ain't the kind of spirit that can moan or holler or talk right out. Some can, but I'm the rapping kind, and the run of these passengers don't know Morse. A couple of times I tried the regular spirit system, rapping the alphabet by numbers, five for E and thirteen for M and such, but it's too monotonous to catch their notice. They'd just go to sleep on me. I don't see how those uneducated spirits get anywhere with it."

I asked if the train crews didn't know Morse.

"They don't sleep in Pullman berths," he says. "Now, if I was haunting a house, maybe I'd get somewhere pounding and hammering, but nobody pays any attention to noises on trains. I been trying Morse on them all this time and I never found a one that knew code, barring an old fellow that begun to tumble five years ago and got so scared he threw himself off the train. They put it down to suicide. He never said yes or no, just skinned out of the bunk and out to the vestibule and wrestled the door open and dived out and broke his neck. Served him right," he says. "He didn't have no call to panic like that. I wasn't going to hurt him."

Well, about that point I got out my bottle, poison or not.

"I ain't had a drink since I died," Puggy says, sort of wistful. "But don't you go getting plastered. I got a proposition for you."

I asked him was it honest.

"Your end is," he says. "Anyway, you got no choice. I'm asking polite, like one pal to another, but you try saying no and see what happens to you."

His trouble was money and his wife. Seems he'd eloped with a Callao girl named Velma Burke in 1912 and she was kind of up against it after he got killed. She was working in a roadside place called Virgil's outside Lansing and getting along the best she could and he wanted to see she was done right

by. He wanted her to have a nest egg he'd stashed away that she didn't know about, and I was to go lift it and take it to her.

I asked him how he knew where she was if he couldn't leave Lower Two, and he blew up at me.

"Rot you," he says, "I don't want no questions. We got ways of knowing things. I never see her, but I know what her situation is. If I can just fix this up, I can have some peace," he says with a kind of a sigh. "I sure can use some after doing sixty thousand miles a year in this old crummy. Just back and forth, back and forth. Now, dry up, and here's your marching orders," he says. And he give them to me.

The cash—ten thousand dollars in big bills—was in a couple of waxed flat-fifty cigarette tins nailed up inside a big hollow sycamore in the creek bottom on the Cass place outside Lebanon, Michigan. "Biggest tree anywheres along," Puggy says. "Way high in the dark of the hollow." And he sends "Dididitdadit—ditdit," which is "30" and means a sign-off.

I spent the rest of the night tapping, trying to raise him again, but I reckon he just squatted there and laughed at me. Between bad company and original cussedness he was a pretty mean lot. I didn't want any part of him, or Velma Burke either. I remembered her. She was kind of an angelic knockout to look at—green eyes and red hair and rose-petal skin, and blow-away slim—easy to fall for, I guess if you didn't know her the way I did, from being in the same high-school class.

I wasn't likely to forget her, because she did me real low-down dirt once, whispered to me for an answer in a history test and I gave her my guess, which was it was Benedict Arnold shot Alexander Hamilton. It sounded reasonable to me, but it was wrong, and when it come up that way on both papers they had us both on the carpet and Velma made out she'd guessed wrong and she'd seen me peeking at her paper. And that was the girl I was to drop everything and do a big favor for.

Well, I wasn't much use to Blatch & Cummings in Columbus, and I didn't sleep coming back next night, though I made sure the car wasn't Mt. Minnequamagog but Polecat Springs. Then that Thursday, while I was still groggy inside, old J.M. Blatch told me to get over to Bay City and find out about spoilage trouble there with our canned beets. Yes, Bay City is in Michigan and Lebanon is close by. I was crazy enough to wonder if maybe Puggy and his spirit friends hadn't fixed it to spoil those beets.

I went. And, after I'd smelled enough sour beets to last a lifetime, I hired a car and spent the weekend looking for the Cass place near Lebanon. And what beat me, being in the state of mind I was in, I couldn't get track of any Cass place within fifteen miles of that town.

I didn't just check the courthouse records and then drive around aimless. I covered the local real-estate men and the editor of the paper and the oldest inhabitants. If anybody named Cass had so much as dickered for an acre of land near Lebanon since Methuselah's time, I'd have got wind of it.

So I was sure I was crazy. Only, on the train coming back to Chicago, I got a queer feeling on my right thigh like nothing I ever had before. And when I took my clothes off that night, there, neat as you please, in red on my skin, branding me like a steer, not to be rubbed off or washed off—I found that out fast—was Puggy's call letters: Dash-dash—dash-dot-dot-dot.

I still recollect how that place felt—not like a burn or an itch or a sting or a prickle, but more like the way you feel in the back of your neck when you suspect somebody is staring at you and you turn around and sure enough they are. It was real, all right. I should know. I lived with it for years.

I got salve from drug stores and goop from advertisements about "blotched skin" and "stubborn blemishes." I gave up swimming because I didn't want people to see it. Finally I took it to the best skin doctor I could hear tell of and gave him the story.

He looked at my leg and said something about "interesting stigmata" and told me to come back Friday and he'd have a colleague there to look at it. Well, before Friday I looked up "stigmata" in the dictionary and it said stuff about "certain mental states, as in hysteria." So I never went back.

Next thing was to have it out with Puggy. So I wrote the Pullman outfit asking for sentimental reasons if they could locate me a car named Mt. Minnequamagog, and they wrote back short but polite that there was no longer any such name on the list. That made sense. She was probably overdue for scrapping. But that letter disappointed me so I didn't hardly bother to wonder where Puggy was hanging out, now that they'd put the blowtorch to his old home on wheels.

Always and forever I had that feeling in my leg, and it looked like there was no chance at all of ever getting rid of it. I took to drinking heavier and going out with a class of people I'd never liked before. I hung on to my job, but it was plain that old J.M. had stopped thinking of me as a comer the way he had. And even though I knew Puggy's old car was gone for good, I worked up a creepy feeling about trains so strong I took to driving or flying wherever I had to go—planes were coming in by then. For years I never set foot in a railroad car.

But, come winter of 1935, I was stuck. Ice all over, and I had to testify in a lawsuit about a refused order in Evansville. The airport was snowed in; trains were still

running, though. And every train was so jammed, the best I could get was Lower Two. The car was named Mountain Melody, but even so you probably have a rough idea of how creepy I felt about it.

She had plenty of clicks for me to wince at and listen to. Then, right out of Englewood, as speed picked up, they come cold and clear: Dit-didit—ditda—da, and that's Morse for RAT.

I just froze.

Dididididit — diditda — dadit — daditda, says the clicks, and that's Morse for PUNK.

I unfroze enough to work my nail on the sill. "This not your car."

"My car, chum," says Puggy. "Renamed years ago. Some professor of Indian stuff noticed her and wrote the company did they know what Minnequamagog meant in Indian and they found out it was something you'd blush to chalk on a fence. How's your right leg, you double-crossing swindler?"

Well, it was jumping and pulsing awful, that's how it was. I could scarcely keep from hollering. But I got a grip on myself and sent him all about how I'd combed Lebanon, Mich., and finished up: "I'm not spook enough to make out how you figure I get your mark on me because you don't know what you're talking about. But I do know there's no Cass place in that end of Michigan, nor ever was."

No answer for a spell. Then very slow: "What state was that?"

I sent: Dada—didit—dit-didit—didididit, meaning "Mich."

There was another long break, then a string of bad language sent sloppy but heartfelt, then: Didit-didit—dit-dit—diditda—ditdaditd—dit-dit—dit-dit—daa—didit — a — dididit—dada—didit—dididit — di-didit, making: "You fool, it's Miss."

I might have known. Practically every state in the Union has a Lebanon, and Puggy's dots were always unreliable. The string of dots on the tail of Miss. could easy make Mich., if the sender was careless. Or maybe I read it wrong. That was Puggy's idea.

I said it was his fault, and we had it backwards and forwards all the way to Terre Haute. I don't reckon any such language ever got into code since old man Morse invented it. But I didn't argue about what I did next. My leg was leaving me no choice but to hightail it for Lebanon, Miss., first chance.

Soon as I got back from Evansville, seeing thawing weather had cleared the highways, I told J.M. I had family trouble, borrowed a week against my 1936 vacation, and took out in my own car. With me went a big flashlight, a stout claw hammer, and a short stepladder.

This time it was a breeze. The day I struck Lebanon, it rained cats and dogs, so there wasn't anybody much outdoors to wonder about me. Three questions located the old Cass place—a played-out little cot-

ton plantation five miles from town on a miserable road, with nobody living there.

It took time, and I hadn't seen mud like that down along the creek since France in 1918. Raincoat or not, I got soaked to the skin. But here was my tree, big as a circus tent and hollow as a night-club smile. And here were the cigarette tins, each with a big rusty nail through a corner. I sure was relieved. I could just see myself convincing Puggy they were gone.

It come to ten thousand dollars, like he said: six five hundreds and seventy hundreds, all in those oversize, pre-Depression bills. They were going to cause comment at a bank, but I reckoned a story to fit could be cooked up when the time come.

I drove hard, but the weather was nasty and highways weren't what they are now, so I didn't make Lansing till afternoon the third day. The gas station I asked at said Virgil's had changed hands a while back but anyway it was the third joint on the right going north.

That turned out to be a little eatery painted blue and white, very neat, and with a big sign: Velma's Kitchen. No cars parked that time of day, no customers when I went in, which was fine. I was feeling good, even if I was kind of puzzled why Puggy thought Velma needed help so bad when it looked to me like she was doing all right.

Two girls in white uniforms were mopping up back of the counter, but what I was looking for was back of the cash register. Only it jolted me when I saw it. It was Velma all right, blazing red hair and bright green eyes and even the complexion pretty fair yet, but in her white uniform she was big as a house. In all those years she'd got a build like a plunging fullback—no fat but plenty of muscle on a solid frame.

I just stood and gaped at her.

After a while she says, kind of hard, "All right, what are you selling?"

I took off my hat and come close, beginning to think about what I should have been thinking about before—how was I going to get any sane woman to swallow my story?

"Velma," I says, "don't you know me?"

One look down and one look up and she says no and bit it off sharp too.

"I'm Tom Knox," I says. So she looked again.

"Well," she says after a while, "I guess you could be, at that. Little Tom Knox," she says, "still sneaking round after people. How'd you know where I was?"

"Puggy told me," I says.

"Puggy!" she says. "He's been dead fourteen years. What is this, anyway?"

"I know he's dead," I says. "He told me that too."

Well, if you can imagine a Shorthorn bull looking scared, that was

Velma for a couple of split seconds. But she got hold of herself quick and began to look like that bull fixing to charge. I don't know yet just how she'd muscled Virgil out and taken over, but then and there I began to feel sorry for him.

"Tom," she says, "I never had much opinion of you, but I wouldn't of thought you'd go crazy. What are you talking about? And what's more, I want to know how you got here. I'm through with Callao and everybody that ever come from there—through for keeps. And I don't want—"

I busted in on her. "I'm sane as you are," I says, "and I haven't been in Callao since before you and Puggy left town. Keep quiet and I'll tell you how I got here."

I felt like a fool, but I hoped the wad of money would put some backbone in it, so I stood there like a bad boy in front of teacher and sang her my song, short enough so she wouldn't lose patience and low enough so the counter girls wouldn't hear. Things looked just rough enough so I took the precaution of not giving details of where I lived or where I worked. It seemed like a good idea at the time but I didn't know till later just how good.

She frowned heavy and heavier right along, which was no help, and neither was the way Puggy's mark on my leg was heating up, just the way it had on the train.

About halfway through my story she reached under the cash register and got out a Colt .38 and laid it handy, and I was willing to believe without being shown that she could handle it. But I kept on swinging my jaw and finished by passing her a manila envelope jam-full of Puggy's spook money.

She took it and pulled the wad out halfway and says, "I thought this was a racket. Real money isn't this big."

I explained and told her she was plenty old enough to remember the old-size currency. She glared at me and says, "All right, now, on the level, where'd you get it?"

"Velma," I says, "I been telling you. If you got the time, I can run through it again but it won't make it sound any better."

"Oh, no," she says, pushing the wad back in again. "I take no money from lunatics or crooks that can't think up better yarns than that. It's a new wrinkle to me, but I'm not buying. Get out," she says, "and take this bait with you, Tom Knox. The one thing I'm sure of about you is you aren't drunk."

Well, it was all right by me if she was going to suspect herself out of ten thousand dollars—not that I couldn't see her point under the circumstances—but I knew I was branded for life if I couldn't get shut of Puggy's orders. I did everything but get down on my knees to her, and I'd have done that if it wouldn't have alarmed the girls behind the counter.

Finally I asked if she'd believe

me if she saw the marks on my leg. She said she'd bet every dollar in that envelope, if it was real money, that nobody but me *could* see those marks.

"I can't cover all that without long odds," I says. "But I'll bet you five hundred, even money, those marks are there and you can see them." I saw her eyes flicker. "Velma Burke," I says, "you take me where I can get my pants off and you got a bet on your hands."

"Let's see the dough," she says, "and not in this stage money."

Well, just in case, I'd cashed a thousand before I started South, so I could cover, though I don't generally carry such amounts. She looked my five hundred over, tucked it into the envelope, put it in the cash register, and picked up the gun. I started to duck, but all she did was call over the counter, "Girls, I'm going into the stock room with this character. If you hear me scream or shoot, call Sergeant Mickle. If I'm not out in ten minutes, call him anyway."

The girls gulped, but one of them says, "Okay, Velma." I took it what Velma said went around there, few questions asked.

"And if you don't think I'll get quick service," Velma says to me, "Sergeant Mickle is my fiancé and the barracks is only three quarters of a mile."

"He must like 'em big," I says, too sore at her to use good sense when it came to the backchat.

"He does," she says, "and he'd make two and a half of you. Now, we'll see about that bet."

So she covered me with the gun, backed toward the door, opened it behind her, backed in, and I followed, keeping well away so she wouldn't get nervous with that cannon. When I closed the door behind me, she was fifteen feet away at the other end of the stock room, against a background of cold cereals and canned corned-beef hash—our own brand, too. Well, I sure needed something to make me feel at home.

"Take 'em off," she says, motioning with the gun.

I did. I felt kind of screwily pleased I always been choosy about my shorts, even if I do wear nightshirts. Then I out with my right leg, like a girl in a ballet, and twisted sidewise so she could see. She breathed in sharp and come closer.

"Could be a burn," she says.

"You nor nobody else ever saw a burn like that," I says. "And it isn't lipstick or barn paint or ketchup or sealing wax. And it's gnawing at me like I can't tell you."

"Well," she says, kind of quavery, "my folks were Irish. I got a right to be some superstitious." She was breathing awful fast. "You mean to tell me," she says, "that Puggy Brinton went to all that trouble to see I got his last ten thousand dollars?"

"That's what I mean," I says.

"Well, Tom," she says, "you were a no-account kind of kid but you weren't a liar. I guess I believe you." And the moment she said that, the marks plumb vanished and the gnawing quit. "They're gone," she says. "But I did see them."

"You sure did," I says.

"I guess it's worth it, having to believe my own eyes," she says, and then come out of it fast. "The money!" she says, and drops the gun and dives for the door.

I come along out when I had my pants back on. She was counting it slow and careful. My stake and a five-hundred-dollar bill was already laid to one side for me. I took it.

"I might mention," I says, "that this party's cost me about three hundred dollars in travel expenses. Never mind the time out of my vacation."

She didn't even look up from counting.

"On your way," she says. "I got no time for childhood friends that know I was married to a gambler. And don't forget the friends I got around here wear police uniforms."

So I skipped warning her about how the bank might get inquisitive about that stack of old-time money. I just put on my hat and was on my way.

Two days later I was driving to Racine, up U.S. 41, with the radio on, and the noon news says: "Mrs. Velma Brinton, of rural Lansing, Michigan, has been held for questioning because ten thousand dollars in old-time currency that she brought her bank for deposit proved to carry serial numbers showing the bills are part of the loot that an unidentified mob took from the Briggs National Bank of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in March, 1920. Mrs. Brinton's fiancé, Police Sergeant Herman Mickle, says their engagement is off unless she can think of a better story than she has so far managed to give authorities. Previously known as an active committeewoman in local politics and a successful businesswoman, Mrs. Brinton may not be extradited on account of the statute of limitations, but she had already stated she plans to leave town when released. The money will be turned over to the insurance company which reimbursed the Briggs National—"

And right away I picked up a rattle somewhere down below the dashboard and it turned into Puggy, like I more than half expected. "Well, Tom," he says "that does it. We sure fixed her wagon, didn't we?"

I didn't say anything. I was still trying to take the thing in.

"Did I know that was hot money?" Puggy sends, kind of singing it. You can put a lot of expression in Morse if you try. "I sure did. I won it shooting crap with Big John and he was lookout man for the mob that knocked over the Briggs National and I done it with honest dice because I was scared to try

anything. Did I know she was going to marry a John Law? I sure did, boyhood pal, I sure did."

I answered back on the steering column.

"Nice guy you are, planting that kind of trouble on your widow just because she's getting married again."

"My widow!" he says. "My poor, bereaved widow. I'd never of been in that kind of crap game except for her. I'd just been home to the little flat in Detroit, Tom. And the furniture was still there, what was too big to carry away convenient. But she wasn't—and neither was the seventeen thousand dollars I'd left with her to keep for us against a rainy day. I was down to my last hundred when I went up against Big John. And I was mad. I been mad ever since. But now I got my own back."

"That kind of makes a cat's-paw out of me," I says.

"It sure does," says Puggy. "You were just made for the job, Tom, always were. Thanks, boyhood pal. I'm loose now. I can be on my way. Don't ask me where, but I reckon it's a good thing I always liked warm climates." And he signed off.

Which is why I lit a cigarette with a five-hundred-dollar bill there on the shoulder of U.S. 41.

DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 223rd "first story" published by EQMM . . . "The Eye of Jehovah" has a driving sincerity that achieves credibility—you can see the bedridden, nearly paralyzed old lady, almost hear her think . . .

Mrs. Melcher is in her early forties. She has two children—a teenage daughter who plans to be a nurse and a son who entered college in the fall of 1960 and plans to be a physics major.

The author's first job was that of Desk Assistant in a Public Library, but after two years of trying to support two children and herself on $90 per month, she took a State Examination and is now a file clerk in the Vermont State Income Tax Department.

Her "first story" stems from real life—she once knew similar characters and they made a strong impression on her; but, Mrs. Melcher tells us, "they are dead now, so perhaps I shan't be haunted by them any more."

THE EYE OF JEHOVAH

by RUTH MELCHER

SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAPPEN. I wish Nurse Barnes was here. Not but what she doesn't deserve her afternoon off—the trouble she has, taking care of a cantankerous old hulk like me, helpless as a great fat baby. Wonder what she'd do if she knew that every time she goes off, my dear little sister, Ellie, and her criminal son, George, come sneaking in to paw through my things.

She-devil and her whelp! They don't get past Miss Barnes—not after my first stroke.

Wonder how they get by Miss Trask downstairs—silly little flibberty-gibbet. Probably swallows all George's sweet-talk. Pretty good at it, George is. Got by with a suspended sentence even when they caught him red-handed. Talk himself out of anything.

Wish I knew what they want this time. Ellie's already taken everything worth any money, times she's pussy-footed around while Miss Barnes was gone.

Nothing I can do to stop them—can't hear, can't talk, can't move. Only my eyes and one finger, though Doctor Cushman told Miss Barnes the paralysis could get better gradually, if I don't have an-

other stroke. Funny, almost wish I hadn't seen him tell her—hard to know when your toes really tingle or when you just think yourself into it. If he'd been facing the other way, I wouldn't have been able to read his lips. And then I wouldn't be wondering.

Maybe Ellie and her precious son don't know Miss Barnes was supposed to take my will to the bank this afternoon. Can't be that they want, though. Ellie knows all the money I've got left goes to this Home. My books and the embroidered mottoes and the pictures are the only things I can leave anybody.

I hope Miss Barnes *did* take my will instead of leaving it in the safe downstairs. Ellie'd be mean enough to burn it in front of me just for spite. And the lock on that safe wouldn't stop George.

Wonder what they *really* want. I've got this funny feeling. Guess I'll know soon.

Door's opening.

So there you are, Ellie—and your darling George. Radio said *what*, George?—turn around, drat you, so's I can see your lips! What deed? To the Little Princess Mine? What in tunket would anybody want that for? Even Papa finally admitted he'd been swindled. Apologized for calling it the name he used to call me. Never was any gold there.

Government wants it? Willing to pay the owner how much, George? You don't say. And the owner has only three days to bring proof of ownership before the mine reverts to government property? Well, well. What was it they found there, I wonder. Never mind. I'm the owner. You won't get it, Ellie.

Yes, I could point to the deed. But I won't. Haven't even thought about it for years. Funny, I'd have thrown it away, except it reminded me of Papa—and it was just the right size to use as backing when I framed my embroidered motto. Right in front of me now. *THE EYE OF JEHOVAH IS UPON YOU.* You're looking right at it, Ellie, but you'll never think to take the frame apart.

So it's the deed you've been hunting for all this time. No wonder you didn't find it. You always slide right over that motto. *THE EYE OF JEHOVAH* . . . Makes you uneasy, Ellie, don't it?

My will? Lucky I got it tended to before I had the stroke. You're wasting your time, Ellie. You won't get a thing. All my pictures and books —*and* the mottoes—are for Miss Barnes.

After what you did to me, breaking Papa's heart and spoiling my engagement, do you really think I'd let you have anything of mine? I've had to watch you steal all my trinkets, Ellie, but you won't get the deed to that mine.

You're going to what, George? if the will *is* in the safe, you'll . . . Of course. You can do it so easily, too. With me dead and the will

burned, Ellie would get my stuff.

What did you say, Ellie? Who won't wake up? Oh, poor Miss Trask. Drugged. Her silly little head will ache when she does wake up, but she won't dare say anything. Won't want the trustees to know about her lallygagging.

Just like George to think of everything. Even has a substitute will all ready to forge the signatures on. I hope Miss Barnes remembered. If she didn't . . . Funny, I've been expecting to die for a long time now—but not like this . . . Probably he'll smother me. Won't leave traces.

He's gone. Will Ellie watch him do it when he gets back? I couldn't. I'd remember. Times when she was little—like a baby fox, she was—sly, but helpless and cuddly.

Burns me up, though—George to go unpunished and them to get all that money. My money.

There! I *did* feel a tingle. I *know* I did. I *think* I'm wiggling my toes. Isn't the blanket moving ever so little? Don't look this way, Ellie. I'm sure it is.

Too late. He's back.

Oh, Miss Barnes, you did forget. You never thought the safe downstairs would be so unsafe!

They're going to burn it. What's the matter, Ellie, don't you like what I said about you in it? Or are you feeling a little bit squeamish?

She's going. Almost running. Away from yourself, Ellie?

It's going to be *now*. I think I'm scared. I ought to be praying. I want to shut my eyes, but I can't . . .

What's happened? Did the bed shake just then? Something's happened! George has stopped. He's listening. I *wish* I could hear. Has somebody come? Too soon for Miss Barnes, and nobody else would . . . What *is* it, George? It's Ellie? . . . *THE STAIRS!* Ellie didn't know about the back stairs! The men weren't to start fixing them until this morning and it's dark in the hall. George is running out.

That hurt. All the way up my side. Pain. Real pain! Maybe I could roll over. Wouldn't stop George, but if I *can* move, maybe I can grab at his knees. He won't be expecting anything . . . Here he comes again.

Ellie's *dead*? Poor Ellie. Always wanted so much more than she could have. Funny, I've hated her for so long, and now I just feel sorry for her.

George, if you could see your face! The Devil himself must look just like you do now. Don't you even care, George? Your own mother's body still warm, and you'd leave her there and let them blame her for my death?

I'm—not—going to—let you—get away with—it, George. I'm—going to—stop you.

He's reaching for the pillow.

God, help me!

Now . . .

Stop that squirming, George. I couldn't move now even if I wanted

to, falling off the bed that way. You can't breathe under me? Of course you can, or you wouldn't be screaming like that. You'll wake all the old ladies, if they aren't already. But they're scared. I wish I couldn't see your face. It isn't pretty.

I hope Miss Barnes comes soon. I'm not very comfortable, either. Nothing hurts, but I can see my foot—turned backwards. It makes me feel queer to look at it.

I mustn't faint. Not until I can point to the deed for Miss Barnes. Please hurry, Miss Barnes!

Names won't hurt me, George, and blubbering won't help you either.

Are they here? I can't see the door.

Yes. At last.

That's right, George. Tell them everything. Later on when you're not so scared, you'll be sorry you talked so much.

I wish I didn't feel so dizzy.

Miss Barnes, never mind George and his broken ribs. He's lucky to be alive at all—my two hundred and seventy-two pounds landing on top of him when I got his legs and tripped him over backwards.

Just get me to where I can point to the motto. There. Look at my finger! Please, Miss Barnes. That's right. Now bring me the motto . . .

Why, my finger isn't moving any more. I feel very strange. Where did everybody go? It's so dark . . .

"She's gone," the head nurse said to Miss Barnes. "Why do you think she wanted that awful motto, Barnes? Oh, stop crying. You did everything you could. Everybody has to have an afternoon off once in a while. Snap out of it. We've got all Trask's patients to see to along with ours, remember."

Miss Barnes fumbled with the motto.

"Here, give me that thing. *THE EYE OF JEHOVAH IS UPON YOU . . .*" The head nurse shrugged. Suddenly her sharp eyes grew sharper. "Hey, look! The frame's loose. There's something behind—"

"It's the deed to the mine!" Miss Barnes exclaimed. "The one they were trying to find!"

"Aren't you glad now that you took the original of her will to the bank? That nephew must think he burned the only copy. Not that it would do him any good, where *he's* going," the head nurse sniffed. "Well, Barnes, let's start tidying up in here."

But for a moment Miss Barnes stood regarding the mountain of quiet flesh on the bed. "Poor poor thing," she said softly. "To die this way—so helpless."

THE SINGING HAT

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

(*continued from page 38*)

He called the local headquarters of the F.B.I. from a nearby booth. "This is Cleary of the Homicide Squad. I'm working on the case of a man we've just found shot to death, and I could use a little cooperation. Are there any peculiarities about those fake bills that have been turning up the last few days?"

"They're all twenties."

"Yeah, I know that already. I mean any distinguishing feature about the bills themselves you can give me? I can't tell you just what I'm looking for, because I don't know yet myself. It's got to come from you."

"Just a minute until I check on you. I can't give out any inside information until I'm sure who you are."

Cleary didn't resent that. There have been cases in which reporters impersonated detectives in order to get information for their papers. He gave his precinct house number and lieutenant's name, waited on the line.

The Federal official came back quickly. "Okay, sorry to hold you up. Now this is strictly confidential. Please see that it doesn't get around. The bills all show signs of having been folded *lengthwise,* and a number of them, not all but some, when first detected have had a peculiar tendency to *curl slightly.* D'you understand what I mean? Sort of tip up from end to end. The best we can make of that, so far, is that they were carried for days in a narrow money belt fastened around the wearer's body. And yet the awkwardness of having to unfasten the outer clothing to extract one each time would argue against that."

"Or inside the sweatband of a hat!" said Cleary elatedly—but to himself. He was working for the city, not the government.

He turned to Davis as he hung up. "Now I *know* that hat's going to get us somewhere! Let's go down to the office building where Dillon worked."

A night watchman was the only one left on the premises at this late hour. He took them down to the employees' locker room, opened the various lockers for them. Dillon and the other operators—there were two banks of elevators in the building—had of course worn their street clothing home. Their service uniforms were all that the lockers contained, but a small pillbox cap went with each. Cleary only showed interest in these; he took each one

out and held it close to his face, upside down.

"Nothing doing down here," he said finally. "I figured there wouldn't be anyway. It's between the two places, here and his room, that he found out too much. Let's retrace his homeward course."

"How you going to do that?"

"What's hard about it? We know where he started out from, we know where he was heading for. He was too tired after standing on his feet all day to do anything but take the shortest, straightest line between the two. Along there somewhere he stopped off to eat. He didn't eat in his room, so he must have. We want where he stopped in to eat. We're going to try every place we pass on the way until we hit the right one."

"What'll that get us?" queried Davis.

"Watch and see," promised Cleary mysteriously.

"Don't tell *me* anything," grumbled his teammate, "I just came along for the exercise."

"Now don't get touchy. You'll be able to hear for yourself when we hit the right place."

Davis pointed to a restaurant on the corner ahead. "There's the first one he'd pass."

Cleary shook his head. "Never mind that one. Too high-priced for an elevator operator. Just look for the places without cloths and table service—cafeterias, and such."

"All right, here's one now."

They went in and Cleary asked for the manager. "Was there a guy in here tonight, between six and eight or eight-thirty, slim, medium height, about twenty-six, wearing a pretty old suit of clothes but a brand-new, light-gray hat?"

"We feed hundreds of faces a day," said the manager. "No, I couldn't say. Maybe there was, and maybe there wasn't."

"I'll put it another way. Have you been stuck with any queer money lately?"

"Yeah," said the manager. "We got a lead half-dollar wished on us two months ago."

"Wrong place," said Cleary, and he and Davis went outside again. "Keep your chin up. We'll hit it yet. He had to eat some place."

"I'd feel a lot better if you'd let me in on what you're aiming at."

All Cleary would say was, "The hat, the hat."

"It was his own, wasn't it? You saw the initials in it yourself."

"Yeah, it was his own—by the time we got there. But what I want to know is what it was doing before then. Come on. Here's another, and it looks like about his speed." He pointed to a sign on the wall as they went in: *Watch your hat and coat.* "Now is it beginning to come clear to you what I'm driving at?"

The manager looked blank until Cleary came to the phrase, "—and a brand-new, light-gray hat." Then his face brightened. "Wait a minute! We had some trouble about a

hat in here right tonight. A guy that fits that description walked out with someone else's hat by mistake. But he didn't do it purposely. He came back later and told me about it. By that time the other party had left too. So he wrote out his name and address and left it with me, in case the second fellow should show up."

"And he did," Cleary told him.

"Yeah, how did you know? He was plenty burned up about it too, swearing and cussing under his breath."

Cleary gave Davis a look. "Now we're on the home stretch," he purred. And to the manager, "Now go slow and think hard. I want as close a description of this *second* man as you can possibly give me. This is police business, in case you don't know it yet. In the first place, was he alone in here the first time, or can't you remember that?"

"Yeah, I can—he was!" said the manager excitedly. "Tell you how I know. When this first young fellow came back, he pointed out to me exactly which seat he'd been in. It was still empty, and there was an empty one next to it by then, but all the others were taken. If there'd been anyone with him, there'da been two vacant seats."

"Good work," complimented Cleary. "How about when he came back the second time?"

"He came in alone, but there was a car waiting for him outside with another man in it."

"Give me his description."

"He was stocky, sallow-complexioned, with a beak like a hawk—let's see, what else?—he was well dressed, better than the kind of trade we usually get in here. Looked like he was in the money."

"He was," the dick assured him sardonically.

"Was he ever in here before tonight?"

The manager tried to recall, couldn't be sure.

"Well, the answer is probably no. He never eats twice in the same place, or buys anything twice in the same store, for good and sufficient reasons. You been stuck with any queer twenties lately?"

"No, thank God." The manager shuddered.

"That's what *you* think. Take a look in your till. You'll find one in there now."

The manager's face dropped with a consternation that was almost comic as he held up the single twenty that the cash drawer contained. "H-how did you know?" he stammered.

"That's what I'm paid for. Let me have it a minute." He showed it to Davis. "See the lengthwise crease? I'll refold it that way. Now watch it curl up. See that?" He rolled it in the palm of his hand like a little paper boat. Then he drew it slowly across his nose.

"You're always smelling things," said Davis irritably. "What are you, a bloodhound or something?"

Cleary didn't explain. As they left the manager was bellowing to the help, "Who took that spiked bill? I'll fire the man that accepted it without looking at it first!"

"Well," said Cleary outside, "now we know what one of the men that killed Dillon looks like. The rest is just a matter of catching up with him."

"Then why don't we haul this manager down to the rogues' gallery, have him pick him out for us if he can? That's the usual procedure. He probably has a record a mile long."

"Yeah, but that won't tell us where he is, only who he is. I've got a short cut that'll do both things at one time. Let's go back to that first place near where Dillon worked, the high-priced one we didn't go into."

This time Cleary didn't bother with descriptions. He just asked the manager, "You been stuck with any counterfeit bills here recently?"

"God forbid," said the latter, and rapped on the wooden edge of the counter for good luck.

"You will be," the dick warned him. "They haven't got around to you yet, that's all. Now here's what I want you to do. The very next time a customer offers one of your waiters a twenty . . ."

Cleary was alone in the precinct house when the call came in two nights later. That is to say, Davis was out doing some spade work on Featherlite hats, Size 7, Style 42, at the scores of men's shops around town that retailed them. It was his own idea, not Cleary's. Cleary still insisted that his short cut would do away with the necessity for all such laborious methods.

The cop on the switchboard said, "The manager of the Empire Restaurant is asking for Detective Cleary."

"Quicker than I expected," said Cleary, as he took the call.

The manager said, "I'm doing what you told me to. There's a party at Table Six just gave his waiter a twenty-dollar bill."

"Can you see him from where you are? Describe him."

"He's sort of stocky, pale complexion, got a sharp nose and—"

"That's him. Now be careful how you do this. Stall him until I can get there. None of this sending out for change. That's old in his racket. He'll catch on right away."

"I'll overcharge him, yeah?" said the manager hopefully. "Then he'll stop to argue about his bill—"

"No, he won't. He'll take a loss just to dump his twenty. Have your cashier pretend that the cash register drawer is jammed, that she can't get it open without a lot of help. That ought to be good for at least ten minutes, until I can get over there."

He went alone. He didn't intend making his pinch yet. "Tell Davis I've gone over to the Empire Res-

taurant—he'll understand what I mean," he told the desk sergeant as he left.

He got there in seven minutes flat, through four red stoplights. He went in the back way, through the kitchen and serving pantry as far as the flap doors that led out into the restaurant proper. A diamond-shaped insert of glass in each one gave him a view of the place.

There was a mild commotion up near the street entrance. The manager, the cashier, and several of the waiters were gathered in a huddle around the cash register. The manager kept elbowing them aside every time they tried to get at it, saying, "Here, let me try it," evidently to keep them from learning there was nothing the matter with it.

Dillon's killer was over at an inconspicuous table against the wall, his back toward the street. That way Cleary could see his face plainly. Cleary got it so firmly fixed in his mind he wouldn't forget it for the next twenty years.

The man's eyes were lowered. He was examining the nails of one hand. Then he examined the nails of the other. He was showing more nervousness than the rest of the customers, who were smiling at the difficulties the staff seemed to be having with the cash register. Then the man picked up his napkin and furtively dried his mouth and chin.

"Sweat, you rat," Cleary growled to himself, "you're cool, compared to what you're going to be!"

His hat was on the seat of a spare chair close up beside him, as though he didn't care to trust it to the checkroom attendant.

Cleary grabbed a waiter hustling by and said, "Tell your boss it's okay now." Inside of a minute the jammed drawer had shot out with a triumphant trill that penetrated even back to the kitchen. Some facetious diner clapped his hands. The man at Table Six straightened a little. You could see him take a breath of relief. The waiter came over with his change, and the customer paid up, left something for the kitty, and reached for his hat.

Cleary stepped aside, out of range of the diamond-shaped panes in case the suspect should look over that way. A waiter barged through and nearly flattened Cleary's nose with the fling he gave the door. Through the gap Cleary saw his man circling through the revolving door up front. He came out and started across the dining room toward it himself, slowly, almost aimlessly.

The manager edged up beside him. "How was I? I kept holding it back with one hand, trying to pull it out with the other."

Cleary smiled grimly. "When my teammate comes, tell him to wait here for me."

He emerged onto the sidewalk. The street was already empty, but that was all right; he didn't want to tread right on the guy's heels. As long as there hadn't been any sound

of a car engine starting up and driving off. He went up to the doorman and asked a question.

"Down that way," said the doorman.

Cleary drifted toward the corner that had been indicated as though he had all the time in the world.

He stopped flush with the building line, so that not much more than the button of his nose showed past it, and took a look down in the new direction. He was just in time to see the man in the light-gray hat go into a haberdashery midway down the block.

He could have nabbed him redhanded in there, just as he could have in the restaurant, but he still didn't want to do that. He wanted to track him down and get the other guy who had been in on Dillon's killing with him, and even more important, find out where the headquarters of the ring was, a thing even the F.B.I. hadn't been able to do yet.

The killer came out again with what looked like a flat box of socks or handkerchiefs under his arm. Cleary moved back a little to avoid that one preliminary glance up this way the man was almost sure to make before he continued on his way. Again Cleary gave him a full-block headstart. He knew he wasn't very likely to hole up this early in the proceedings—not until he had emptied his hat. Time enough then to get in closer to him.

Within the next three-quarters of an hour the passer, in full sight of Cleary, bought a dozen red roses in a florist's, mouthwash in a drug store, a two-pound box of chocolates in a candy store, and an assortment of magazines at a newsstand.

He didn't go along encumbered like that; he dropped each successive purchase in a refuse receptacle before he went on to the next. Cleary let them remain undisturbed as he came abreast of them. He wasn't after him for passing, he was after him for murder. Some old derelict hunting through the rubbish bins was going to be in luck tonight.

The passer was too smart to leave an easily followed trail by proceeding in a straight line. He zigzagged erratically, up one block, then over to the next, then up that one, and so on, planting his twenties as he went. The abundance of sheltering corners and angles this provided made it easier for Cleary to stalk him undetected.

When Cleary had counted ten separate purchases, and therefore figured he had planted at least two hundred dollars, he knew the man must be running out of his supply and would be reporting back soon. The passer gave himself away at this point. He came out of the last place with his hat in his hands, shaped it between his fingers, and replaced it on his head. He would not have disturbed it if it still had money in it, Cleary knew.

He started to close in; the night's business was about finished. Even allowing for a purchase discount of ten per cent on each twenty-dollar bill, he had managed to turn two hundred dollars of queer into a hundred and eighty dollars of genuine currency in something under an hour.

Cleary crept up on him until he was less than twenty yards behind. He still didn't intend to pinch, not until he had followed him back where he belonged. His quarry put about three blocks more, on foot, between himself and the last place he had worked. Then he came to a taxi stand, turned aside, and stepped into one of the cabs. Before it was across the next intersection Cleary was in another.

"Just string along after that cab ahead. Don't crowd it, but don't let it pull away from you either."

The lead cab followed an erratic course that obviously had no destination, was simply for purposes of tangling up the trail as much as possible. Not, Cleary believed, that he was wise to being followed—simply on general principles. The way he had fingered his hat when he came out of the last place showed that up to then, at least, he was unaware of being under observation.

Finally he got out again, in front of—of all places!—a church. This tipped Cleary off instantly that it was a stall. He was simply changing vehicles to blot out his trail. The dick had thought it unusual, all along, that he should take a hired cab back to wherever the ring's headquarters were.

"Keep going," he told his driver, "but don't take me too far past him."

It was safer than alighting himself and attracting attention.

They went on about half a block. Meanwhile, behind them, Gray Hat's cab had driven off, empty now, and its passenger stood there, as though at a loss where to go next. The fact that he was standing almost directly under a street light, dangerous as it was for him to do so, gave the dick the answer. He was waiting for a lift, waiting to make connections at a prearranged spot.

The timing was almost uncanny, as though he and his fellow passers worked against a deadline, had orders to dump the last of their queer by such and such an hour, and then clear off the streets. Within two minutes a sleek black sedan had come nosing down the street. It didn't stop, just swerved in a little, and Gray Hat hooked on, opened the door, got in, and it swept on with him. It whizzed past the cab at accelerated speed, but Cleary caught a glimpse of a second man at the wheel. "Get going!" he grated. "It's going to be tough to hang onto that thing!"

"You'd be surprised what I can get out of this coop," the driver reassured him.

"Well, then, get it out!" Cleary

barked. "They're already down to a red wink!"

One thing was in their favor: the sedan pulled away in a straight line, without any of the tricks and twists of the cab; otherwise they would have lost it sure. It dwindled to a red speck in the distance, but its tail-light never went out entirely, and that ruby spark was as good as the whole car.

It finally turned into a desolate marginal avenue that ran along the river, lined with warehouses, breweries, and ice plants, with occasional open dumps in between. It tore down this with a burst of speed, and only the fact that there was absolutely no other traffic on the godforsaken thoroughfare kept Cleary from losing the sedan.

It stopped finally and its red orb steadied and brightened, blocks ahead.

"Kill your lights and stay over close to the building shadows," Cleary muttered.

The sedan ahead sounded its horn, just once, evidently to signal its return. A bulb flashed on over a building entrance, then went out again. There was a muffled vibration of a big door or doors being rolled aside and yellow light spilled out toward the sedan. It turned toward it, climbed up a slight ramp, and was swallowed into the maw of the building. The doors closed again and the light blacked out.

"Home at last," Cleary told himself grimly. He got out, eased the cab door cautiously shut so it wouldn't crack out a warning in the stillness.

"Take a good look at that place," he said to the driver. "Think you'll know it again?"

"Sure," said the cabman.

"God help me if you don't. There's no phone anywhere around here, so it's up to you. Go back to the Empire Restaurant, on the west side, and ask for a guy named Davis. Just tell him where you brought me—he'll know what to do. And don't take too long about it, either. I'm on my own out here. Take it easy backing out."

He went the rest of the way on foot, hugging the building line. It was an old two-story red brick building with a slanted roof. There was murky lettering still riveted to the face of it close up under the eaves, but it was too dark to make out what it said. Judging by its looks it had once been either a car-barn or a ferry station. The corrugated iron portcullis that closed the wide gap in its front was obviously a later addition. So was the small fireproofed—and probably bullet-proofed—door to one side of this. This had the wickered bulb over it that he had seen flash on, then off.

It was going to be a fortress to break into. He hoped Davis had sense enough to bring plenty of assistance with him. He stroked one of his matches against the brick facing of the door frame, sheltered

it to no more than a pinhole of light between his hands, and ran it up and around the door seams. He had just made out a small hinged peephole in the metal door, the kind the old speakeasies used to have, when something unforeseen and calamitous happened.

His cab had been easing around in a U-turn to go back the other way, the driver trying to tone it down as much as possible. It was a block off, but it was very quiet here along the waterfront. Maybe he had driven it too hard for its own good, trying to keep up with the sedan. At any rate, it suddenly backfired, shatteringly and explosively. Bang! Bopetty-Bang!

Cleary whipped his match out, swore viciously between his teeth at the betraying mishap. Before he could move an inch, the lookout bulb over the door glowed warningly, and he stood as revealed under it.

There was no time even to step aside out of the door embrasure; the peephole in the panel was already scraping open. He threw himself down on hands and knees and let his back cave in in the middle.

The light was straight above him, luckily—it threw his shadow directly under his belly, not out to one side where it could be seen through the grate. He was packed so tightly up against the door he couldn't even get his gun out without risking knocking the butt against the metal and giving himself away.

A voice directly over him said, "It's a machine up the street some place. I can't see it from here. Sounds like it's going away." Now that the damage was done, the betraying cab was receding soft as silk in the distance.

The slot clicked shut, and the door fell away from its frame without warning. It was Cleary's luck that it opened inward instead of outward. His body sagged after it, off balance, and he went down flat on one side. A foot gave him a vicious, unintentional kick in the kidneys, and someone fell headlong over him and went down flat on his face with an *uff!* A glinting metallic T-square the other person had been holding in his hand flew up in the air, came down again, and struck sparks from the cement.

Cleary's arm flailed out, pinned it where it was, reversed it, and again the butt went up, but this time gripped in his fist. It came down with a mean, chunky blow on the back of the already prostrate one's head. He just spread out a little more and sighed.

Cleary didn't waste time straightening up. He simply swiveled around, still mostly horizontal, on one folded leg for a pivot, and jabbed his gun toward the door embrasure, where a white shirt loomed. When Cleary got up, he saw the reason he'd got away with it. The second one had come out unarmed.

The hallway was a black tunnel,

with just an orange floor crack at the far end. "Turn around and smell the plaster," Cleary ordered. He swung back and chopped the man down. The odds were too high. He couldn't leave him active. He broke the man's fall with the crook of his own left arm, then let him down the rest of the way easy so he wouldn't thump.

Cleary pushed the door partly closed and the light went out, as he had hoped. He started slowly forward, elbowing one wall as he went to guide himself. The reason the little set-to hadn't been overheard was plainly because of the thump of machinery somewhere near at hand. Presses. There was the faint odor of printer's ink noticeable too. But he knew it wasn't newspapers they were printing here.

He kept edging on until he was flush with the inner door that shows the light under it. The tactical thing to do was to stay outside and keep them sealed in until Davis got here with some help, now that he had them tracked to earth. But in the first place they were almost certain to investigate the continued absence of the two watchdogs before that happened, and then they could spill out the back way and leave him holding the bag. He couldn't throw a cordon around the place single-handed. And in the second place, he'd accidentally gained admittance now, and it might cost some of the other cops their lives later if he threw away that advantage just for the sake of caution.

He cupped one ear to the door, tried to take soundings, since there seemed to be no keyhole, or if there was it was stopped up. The continued thump of the press, which sounded as if it was coming from a basement directly below, made it difficult to hear anything beyond a blurred murmur of voices on the other side.

"Well, ready or not, here I come!" he thought grimly, and felt for the knob. He gave the door a fling and light flashed into his face. There was an ordinary office desk crosswise in the middle of the room, with a green-shaded light on it. A man with elastics around his shirt sleeves was sitting at it, sorting neat rubber-banded decks of twenty-dollar bills, magnifying glass in one hand.

The man with the gray hat was tilted back on two legs of a chair against the wall, looking on. There was a third guy in the room, the one who had driven the black sedan. He was standing with both thumbs hooked into his belt.

All three started to move their right hands simultaneously, and Cleary, with the sudden light still impairing his vision, had only a split second to decide which was the likeliest to get to his gun first. He made it, more by sheer instinct than visual power.

The man at the desk had his coat behind him, slung over the back of

his chair. Gray Hat was off balance, with his knees up higher than his hips. Cleary fired at the third guy, punctured his hand just as it came clear of his coat lapel. Cleary's bullet knocked the gun flying out of it, and the man screamed and doubled up. Cleary sideswiped the gun out of reach with his foot.

"Get over there by the wall! Get off that chair!" he grated. He pulled Gray Hat's gun out from under the edge of his coat, stepped clear again. He didn't bother going after the third gun, just kicked the chair over flat, with coat and gun both still on it.

There was a slithering sound of metal being scraped off the floor directly behind him. Before he could swing around, a gun muzzle was gouging into the hollow of his back, at about the same place he had been kicked.

"All right, let go of it," a voice said across his shoulder. "Come on, you guys, I've got him pinned. He bit off more than he can chew."

The two facing the wall whirled around again, nearly as surprised as Cleary himself. The third guy was in too much pain to be aware of what was going on around him. He was leaning sideways against the wall, still holding onto his hand.

Cleary let go of his gun so slowly that it turned over in his hand and fell out. He hated to see it go. He knew his life was going with it.

"What a fine bunch you've got around you, Carnetti," the voice behind him sneered. "He walks in and practically sits in your lap. If he hadn't left me out by the door."

"Where's Benny?"

"Still sleeping out there on the sidewalk."

Gray Hat said, "I told you someone was on my tail tonight!"

He got a clip in the jaw from Carnetti that sent him staggering back against the wall. "You told us you lost him, that's what you told us!" raged the leader. "Why didn't you stay out until you did lose him, instead of bringing him back here on top of us! You know what this means now, don't you? The whole investment's shot to hell, thousands of dollars worth of machinery thrown away! Come on, we gotta get out of here fast!"

Cleary spoke for the first time. "It's too late," he said quietly. "You don't suppose I walked in here alone, do you? We got a cordon around here three deep and tighter than a knotted shoelace. Now if you want to make it a murder rap—"

Carnetti, the leader, flinched. Cleary's quick eye took note of that. He was yellower even than his own men.

The one who had him pinned by the spine said, "What're you standing there listening to him for? I was out there just now. There isn't anyone around."

"What good is a cordon when you can see it?" said Cleary imper-

turbably. He was just talking against time, but that was the only thing left for him to do. "Try to break out, if you don't believe me."

"Then why ain't they in here? You fired a shot yourself a minute ago."

"Because I'm not giving the orders. Somebody else is. And that wasn't the signal."

Carnetti's cowardice came to Cleary's aid, unexpectedly. "I'm not taking any murder rap!" he whimpered. "Scorio and Eddie have one on 'em already, but I haven't and I'm not taking one now!"

A tugboat bleated somewhere out on the river. "That's them now," said Cleary coolly. "They're signaling to find out if I'm okay. Make up your minds. They'll be in in a minute." He fixed his eyes on Carnetti, the weak sister of the outfit. "D'ye want to be taken alive or do you want to be cut down?"

Carnetti broke under the tension. He pulled his gun out of his coat, which he had picked up off the floor by now, threw it down on the desk, stepped back.

"I'm not taking any murder rap," he whined.

The man behind Cleary took his gun out of his back a few inches, held it there undecided, as if hypnotized by his leader's capitulation. Cleary suddenly snaked around, struck it upward with his forearm.

"Well, I've got one already, so here goes for another!" snarled the man in the gray hat. He leveled at Cleary, who was grappling for the gun.

A shot boomed out at the other end of the hall, and Gray Hat jolted, went down.

Davis came pounding in, gun smoking, with a mess of cops a few steps behind him . . .

Back at the precinct house, while a doctor dabbed cotton at Cleary's ripped ear, Davis said, "Well, your short cut got results. But what made you so sure, two nights ago in Dillon's room, that that hat of his was going to get us the guy that killed him? It was his own hat, wasn't it?"

"Sure, but I could tell it had been on somebody else's head only recently before then, and therefore when the F.B.I. told me about the peculiar way those bills were creased and curled up, it was easy to figure out what must have happened. Dillon must have accidentally switched hats with a passer and found out too much."

"Yeah, but how could you tell it had been on somebody else's head just by looking at it?"

"I didn't just look at it, I smelled it. And then I smelled Dillon's hair. Didn't you see me? The hat reeked of bay rum, and there wasn't a trace of it on Dillon's head. There was no bottle of the stuff anywhere in the room either, and you could tell by the feathers on Dillon's neck he hadn't been in a barber shop in a month." He winced. "Ouch, Doc! Go easy on that iodine, will you?"

THE ADVENTURE OF THE CAT AND THE FIDDLE

A Sherlockian Sonnet

by VINCENT STARRETT

AT FIRST, WE MAY SUPPOSE, IT WAS A NIGHT
Like any other in the village year
Calmly, no doubt, upon its listening ear
Fell the accustomed silence, left and right;
Until the cat came fiddling, *do si do,*
Telling his longing in a gypsy tune,
Whereat the cow leaped nimbly o'er the moon
And strange events went forward, as we know.

What shall we say of this peculiar matter?
There are two schools of thought: one holds the cat
May have been drinking, and the other that
There was connivance with the spoon and platter.
One curious incident remains to mention:
The dog did nothing to attract attention.

a new story by

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**PHYLLIS BENTLEY**
TITLE:	***Miss Phipps Improvises***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVE:	You—if you wish to play detective
LOCALE:	Brittlesea, England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*In which Miss Phipps creates a detective story before your very eyes, thus giving would-be writers a lesson in technique, and readers a lesson in suspense . . .*

IT WAS A WET AFTERNOON IN BRITtlesea. The sea looked like lead and the rain poured from a sky of unbroken gray. Detective Inspector Tarrant had not come home for lunch. Young Johnny was upstairs engaged in his afternoon nap. Mary Tarrant and Miss Phipps sat beside a bright fire, each with a cup of Mary's excellent coffee beside her. Mary was knitting a pullover for her husband and Miss Phipps held a detective novel in her hand. The general effect was intimate and cosy.

With a sigh Miss Phipps threw down her book.

"Come to the end?" said Mary.

"Only to the end of my interest," said Miss Phipps.

"Why so?" inquired Mary.

"No suspense," said Miss Phipps.

"How does one create suspense, Aunt Marian?" asked Mary, beginning another row.

"The best way to create suspense in a detective story," declared Miss Phipps, "is to employ two characters, each of whose integrity appears to vary inversely with that of the other."

"I don't find that as clear as your usual pronouncements, Aunt Marian," Mary remarked with a smile.

"Let us suppose we have two characters—A and B."

"Arthur and Bob," suggested Mary.

"Just so. If Arthur is to be believed, Bob should be a scoundrel. If Bob is to be believed, Arthur must be the scoundrel. For a few pages the reader is led to believe in Arthur. Then some slight but significant incident occurs, which appears to reinstate Bob. Can Bob be innocent after all? If so, Arthur must have been telling lies; therefore he must be the scoundrel. The reader's suspense is drawn tauter and tauter by these alternate hooks —if you see what I mean."

"Who is found guilty in the end?" asked Mary.

"Well, there lies the peculiar advantage of that kind of story," said Miss Phipps, beaming. "There are no fewer than four possible answers to your question. One, Arthur can be guilty. Two, Bob can be guilty. Three, both can be guilty. And four, neither can be guilty. The final choice is open to the author and prevents the solution from becoming obvious until the end, or very late in the story."

"Certainly a complicated structure would be necessary to maintain the situation in doubt until the last page," said Mary, counting stitches.

"Oh, I don't know," said Miss Phipps confidently. "It would need some skill in invention, of course."

"Now you're boasting, Aunt Marian. I challenge you to produce such a story, here and now."

"But, my dear Mary—" began Miss Phipps.

"Start!" commanded Mary firmly.

"Well, let me see now," said Miss Phipps, half flustered and half flattered. "Arthur—a rather old-fashioned name. Yes. Arthur, let's say, was cashier of the Laire Woollen Company, a small but reputable firm manufacturing tweed cloth, in a rather quiet valley outside the city of Laire in Yorkshire."

"You've begun well. A cashier suggests at once the possibility of embezzlement or theft," said Mary.

"Doesn't it? Well, Arthur was a man in his late fifties, thin, gray-haired, meticulous, with a habit of looking over his spectacles in a rather crushing style at any younger person who ventured to disagree with him—even, we'll say, if that person were the junior partner. Slow in his bookkeeping, was Arthur, but sure—at least, the Laire Woollen Company had found him so for upwards of a quarter of a century."

"But such a man could not possibly be guilty of any crime," objected Mary.

"That," said Miss Phipps, "is precisely the impression the reader is intended to receive—at first."

"Go on," said Mary.

"It was the custom of the Laire Woollen Company to have the wages of the employees fetched from the bank in Laire on Thursday afternoon. Arthur then pre-

pared the pay envelopes, which were distributed on Friday morning. The money was fetched from the bank by Arthur and Bob—"

"Ah, ready to be stolen," said Mary.

"Bob being the junior partner of the firm—"

"I thought so," said Mary.

"—and Arthur and Bob naturally traveled to and from the bank in Bob's car."

"Tell me more of Bob," said Mary.

"Bob's grandfather, old Mr. Denison, was the head of the firm."

"*Grand*father?"

"Bob's father was killed in World War II."

"I see," said Mary thoughtfully. "A gap of two generations, and a gap in sympathy, huh?"

"Exactly. Bob had been sent to a good public school, and then to the textile department of Laire University."

"I suppose he was rather wild there, and got sent down without taking his degree."

"On the contrary—and who is inventing this story, Mary? Bob wasn't especially brilliant, but he took a good solid second-class. He also played rugby for the University."

"Oh, no!" said Mary. "We can't have the criminal being good at *football*."

"Who said Bob was the criminal? He was—or appeared to be—a nice ordinary young man, strong though stocky in build, with brown hair and brown eyes. Quite knowledgeable about textiles, and fond of athletics and amateur dramatics."

"That last item strikes a rather suspicious note," commented Mary. "The ability to act is often found in a criminal plot."

"Oh, he never took leading roles," said Miss Phipps reassuringly. "Only minor parts—one of the two policemen at the end who arrest the villain, and that sort of thing, you know. What he really enjoyed was building the set—whacking about with a hammer and so on. He had a good deal of physical energy which had to be expended somehow."

"He still sounds quite innocent," said Mary.

"Moreover, he was in love with Arthur's daughter."

"The plot thickens! Was she a nice girl?"

"Both Arthur and Bob thought so. She worked with the Laire Woollen Company as old Mr. Denison's secretary."

"Pretty?"

"Yes, certainly. Very fresh and neat, with those attractive legs and full skirts one sees about so much nowadays. I haven't worked out yet whether she was a blonde or a brunette," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully. "Blonde, I think. Yes, fair hair, very well cut. Fine gray eyes. She was not a fool, you know. Intelligent. Sensible. Full of go. Kind to her father and mother."

"The heroine, in short."

"Exactly."

"Had she any other admirers?"

"Oh, yes, one or two."

"I think you ought to be more specific," objected Mary.

"Very well. Let's say, two. One of the clerks in the outer office, and a childhood friend, the boy next door. Her name was—let's see, Catherine?"

"Agreed. Her father calls her Kitty in private?"

"I prefer Cathy. Arthur was a trifle old-fashioned, you remember."

"In that case he's probably rather strict with Cathy about dates and young men and coming in late, and doesn't approve of Bob's attentions."

"I agree. Now we come to the day of the crime. A bright, pleasant day in October."

"Thursday or Friday, no doubt."

"Thursday afternoon, just after working hours. Arthur was just completing the preparation of the week's pay envelopes when the mill buzzer sounded."

"Buzzer?" queried Mary.

"Well, a hooter, a siren—whatever you like to call it. Some loud noise used to mark the beginning and ending of the work day."

"Proceed."

"The mill rapidly emptied of its employees, who poured out of the gate. Arthur finished his task and was just placing the pay envelopes in the office safe when a man came in and asked for work."

"But don't men in this country usually obtain employment through a Labour Exchange?"

"Exactly Arthur's reaction. 'You'll have to go to the Labour,' he said. 'Any way we haven't any vacancies here. Try so-and-so's,' he said, giving the name of a neighboring firm. 'I did not,' said Arthur when giving his evidence later—you understand, this is Arthur's account of the affair—'I did not altogether like the appearance of the man. He didn't look very respectable to me, and he held a handkerchief to his face in an unbecoming manner.'"

"*Unbecoming* is good," said Mary with relish. "Just the right word for Arthur. What happened then?"

"The man said, according to Arthur, 'I'd like to see old Mr. Denison, all the same.' To which Arthur replied stiffly, 'Mr. Denison has left.' He looked into the inner office, and added, 'Mr. Bob is not here either.' 'Good enough,' said the man with the handkerchief, and drawing some implement from his pocket he whacked poor Arthur hard on the back of he head. Arthur fell down, but in falling grabbed hold of the man so that they rolled about together on the floor. The man disentangled himself, treading on Arthur in the process, and rushing to the window, shouted, 'Come on in!' and waved his arms, clearly beckoning to an accomplice. He then sprang

back to the dazed Arthur, wrapped a scarf round his head, and sat heavily on him, holding him face down to the ground. Arthur passed out—I believe that is the expression. When he came to some time later and tore off the scarf, he found the safe empty and the men gone. Fortunately, some of the wage envelopes were still lying on Arthur's desk—the men had overlooked these, or perhaps found them too scattered to collect in their haste. Arthur rang the police and old Mr. Denison, and very soon an able and conscientious Detective-Inspector—shall we call him Tarrant?—"

"Why not?" said Mary, smiling.

"—very soon Detective-Inspector Tarrant was at the Laire Woollen Mill, conducting a vigorous and detailed investigation."

"How much money had been stolen?" asked Mary.

"Fifteen hundred pounds."

"Not a big haul, as hauls go."

"No. Inspector Tarrant noticed that immediately. The criminals were either small-time thieves, or they were—"

"Somebody in desperate need of such a sum."

"Exactly. You've learned a good deal from your husband, my dear."

"It seems to me, too," said Mary thoughtfully, holding up the pullover to judge its length, "that a good deal of local knowledge was required for this robbery."

"Just what the Inspector said, my dear."

"I'm sorry. I can't listen any more for a minute or two," said Mary. "I have to narrow now, for the armhole."

"I'm delighted to hear it—it gives me time to plan the next development," chuckled Miss Phipps.

Presently Mary said, "I'm ready now."

"Old Mr. Denison and Bob have now joined Arthur in the Laire Woollen Company's office and are listening to Arthur's evidence."

Miss Phipps coughed to clear her throat and began to act her various characters.

"'I suppose the two thieves went out by the side door,' said Bob thoughtfully.

"'They can't have done that—I locked it when I left,' said old Mr. Denison.

"'But they can't have left by the front door,' exclaimed Bob.

"'Why not?' said the Inspector sharply.

"'Because I was standing at the gate, with the front door in full view, for at least ten minutes after the buzzer sounded,' said Bob.

"'What were you doing there all that time?' said old Mr. Denison.

"'I was waiting for Catherine, and when she came I was talking to her,' said Bob.

"At this both Mr. Denison and Arthur scowled at him, and the Inspector gave him a searching look . . . How do you think it is developing, Mary?" Miss Phipps inquired.

"Arthur is certainly under *my* suspicion," said Mary firmly. "That business about the second man—the accomplice—struck me as rather unconvincing. Why have an accomplice? Why not just knock Arthur out yourself and take the cash?"

"You would need to hit Arthur much harder to carry out that plan," said Miss Phipps. "As it was, a tap that merely stunned and a muffling scarf sufficed."

"That's exactly what I mean," said Mary. "Arthur had to invent some reason for his lack of severe injury—so he concocted this thin story of the second man."

"And how did he get rid of the money, if he stole it himself?"

"He had a few minutes alone, while he was supposed to be lying unconscious on the floor, you remember. And also while he was waiting for the police. However," said Mary, "you are telling this story, Aunt Marian, not I."

"At present, then, your suspicions rest on Arthur?"

"They certainly do."

"So did Inspector Tarrant's. Until he found the scarf in which Arthur had been muffled, lying in a corner of the office. It was what you would call a collegiate scarf, Mary—a scarf with huge stripes in pink, black, and gray. It was a Laire University scarf. In fact, it was Bob's scarf."

"I don't see that proves anything," objected Mary. "Those young men drive about in sports cars wearing huge gloves and enormous woollen collegiate scarves, I grant you. But Bob could easily have left his scarf hanging on a peg in the office. In fact, he must have done so, and the thief simply snatched it up to muffle Arthur."

"Unfortunately," said Miss Phipps gravely, "the evidence seemed to indicate that Bob left the office just before the buzzer went, *wearing* the scarf."

"Whose evidence?"

"Arthur's."

"I don't believe it. He was simply trying to implicate Bob and support his weak story about the accomplice."

"And Catherine's."

"Catherine's?" exclaimed Mary. "You mean *Catherine* said Bob was wearing the scarf?"

"Yes. While waiting for the police to arrive, Arthur telephoned his home to explain to his wife that he would be late and she was not to worry. Hearing the agitation in his voice, she asked what was wrong. He told her in general terms that there had been a robbery and he was awaiting the police. As soon as Catherine reached home and heard this news, she came straight back to the Laire Woollen Company. The Inspector saw her hurrying across the yard, intercepted her, and asked about her talk with Bob at the mill gate."

"She probably thought Bob had been hurt."

"Probably—let's say he aimed at some such impression."

"Then it was mean to trap the poor girl like that," said Mary.

"'Do I understand you and Mr. Bob left the mill together, Miss Catherine?' said the Inspector.

"'No. He left before I did and was waiting for me at the gate.'

"'And you stood there and talked for several minutes?"

"'Yes.'

"'And then what happened?'

"'I walked away towards the bus stop at the top of the road.'

"'And Mr. Bob?'

"'I don't know what he did then. I presume he walked towards the right of the mill where his car was parked.'

"'Still wearing his muffler?'

"'Yes, of course. Is he hurt, Inspector?'

"'No, no. I take it that he did not offer to drive you home, then?'

"'He did offer to do so, but I declined,' said Catherine.

"'Was there a quarrel between you, Miss Catherine?'

"'There was a slight disagreement,' admitted Catherine. 'But why do you want to know all this, Inspector? What has happened? Is Bob hurt? Is my father hurt? Has there been a robbery?' . . . And so on." Miss Phipps paused. "Poor Catherine was very much upset."

"No wonder!" exclaimed Mary. "This is dreadful, Aunt Marian! It would seem that Bob is guilty."

"If Arthur's evidence is truthful, perhaps so. Do you think Bob was the unseen accomplice, then?"

"Presumably. Yes. Yes," said Mary. "He did not wish to be seen in the act of robbery by Arthur, so he remained outside until Arthur was knocked out. His guilt would explain, too, why Arthur was not severely injured—Bob did not wish to hurt Catherine's father."

"Bob gave his scarf to the young thief who had first entered the office, then?"

"I suppose so," said Mary, but there was a doubtful note in her voice. "It seems a silly thing to do, I must admit. What did Bob say about the scarf?"

"At first he could not account for its presence in the office at all. Then he remembered that he had found the battery of his car run down, and had had to use the starting-handle. It seemed to him that he probably threw off his scarf while using the handle, but he could not remember with certainty."

"Foolish, misguided young man," said Mary sadly. "Why did he ruin himself by committing this crime? He was in debt, I suppose."

"The Inspector investigated that matter promptly. Bob was not in debt at all. The date was shortly after the beginning of the month and all his bills—garage and so on ——were paid."

"You mean he didn't do it?" asked Mary. "Then Arthur must have done it. He'd been stealing from the firm—fiddling the books, you know—and he stole this money to make good his shortage."

"A very possible solution," agreed Miss Phipps. "The Inspector, however, had the firm's books closely investigated by a chartered accountant. They were in perfect order."

"So we're thrown back again to Bob. What about that quarrel between Bob and Catherine? Another girl, perhaps? He had seduced her and needed the money to pay her off?"

"Again a possible solution. Arthur, I may say, hinted at it. By this time he was in a towering rage against Bob and swearing he should never marry his daughter."

"The Inspector investigated the 'other girl' possibility?"

"He did. There was no such girl."

"What about Grandfather Denison? Could he be involved somehow?"

"Oh, he had an unbreakable alibi. He was being driven home by his elderly chauffeur during the entire period of the robbery. No, he definitely does not come into the mystery."

"I wonder if Arthur and Bob could have been in it together?" suggested Mary thoughtfully. "Perhaps the Laire Woollen Company's finances were unsound. Maybe the money wasn't there at all, and Arthur and Bob faked the theft to conceal its absence."

"The money was withdrawn from the Laire bank that afternoon," replied Miss Phipps. "Inspector Tarrant investigated the Laire Woollen Company's finances and found that the firm, though not a gold mine, was solidly prosperous."

"Aunt Marian," said Mary with determination, "will you please tell me at once who committed this robbery, and why? I can't stand this suspense any longer. I'm on tenterhooks."

"A very textile metaphor, my dear. So you admit that my recipe for suspense—two characters each of whose integrity appears to vary inversely with that of the other—is a valid one?"

"Yes, yes, I agree."

"And that it is valid because there are four possible solutions? You have already advanced three of the four—that Arthur is guilty, that Bob is guilty, that Arthur and Bob are both guilty."

"The fourth possible solution is that neither Arthur nor Bob is guilty," Mary remembered. "I'd prefer that to be the correct answer, Aunt Marian, if it is at all possible. I've grown quite attached to these people, and I certainly want that nice Catherine to be happy. She can't be happy if either her father or her future husband is guilty."

"Well, let us see what we can do," said Miss Phipps, smiling. "Let us assume that both Arthur and Bob are telling the truth."

"Hurrah," said Mary.

"Arthur is a slow, precise, elder-

ly man; Bob is a vigorous impetuous young one. The sense of time could vary considerably between two such persons. I suggest that Arthur was a good deal longer in finishing his pay envelopes than he thought. On the other hand, Bob had a few sharp words with Catherine; she whisked away in a pet; he hurried across the yard, tried the self-starter of his sports car, leaped out, threw off his scarf, finally started the car manually, and drove off, all in a fury. By that time the mill yard was empty, the thieves arrived, and the scarf, forgotten by Bob, lay on the ground."

"Oh, quite," said Mary. "I can accept all that. But it doesn't give us a clue to the identity of the thieves."

"I think it does," said Miss Phipps.

"Really?"

"Yes. Remember that this scarf was very noticeably striped in the colors of Laire University. Nobody in the mill was likely to have a similar scarf. Everybody in the mill would know the scarf as Bob's."

"You mean that whoever took the scarf into the office did so to implicate Bob?"

"I do."

"But who could that be? Surely not Arthur?"

"No, of course not. Arthur was a good man, a little too strict perhaps —a nonsmoker and teetotaler and all that kind of thing—but thoroughly honorable."

"Then who? I don't see anybody else in the story."

"My dear," said Miss Phipps with something of a smirk, "it is not required of a detective-story writer that she *thrust* the guilty person into view. The man is there, however. You can find him if you think back to one small incident in the story—an incident which you dismissed too casually after a single question."

Mary paused. At length she said, "The quarrel between Bob and Catherine."

"Exactly."

"What was it about?"

"What indeed?"

"Did the Inspector investigate it?"

"Eventually."

"Was it about Arthur?"

Miss Phipps shook her head.

"About Bob's old grandfather? He disapproved of the match?"

"No. The grandfather was a rather fine old man, saddened by having lost his son in the War, a little perplexed by the strange modern world, but anxious only for Bob's happiness."

"Then who—oh!" cried Mary suddenly, dropping her knitting. "I've got it! Of course! Catherine's other suitors. The clerk in the outer office. Bob was jealous of his attentions and said so rather too possessively to Catherine, who tossed her head and walked off. It all happened just as you said—about Bob and the scarf and the car—and this

clerk, who of course knew all about the pay envelopes in the office—by the way, what was his name? Did you ever mention it?"

"No—but let's call him Eric."

"A name I've never had a fancy for. Eric picked up the scarf and gave it to his confederate in the office, deliberately intending to implicate Bob. Eric must have planned the theft beforehand."

"Oh, yes, he had."

"Gambling debts?"

"Dogs. And then a money-lender."

"I see. Tight trousers and a mop of hair?"

"No, older than that. Sideburns and a fancy waistcoat."

"And his partner in crime?"

"A bad companion from Laire's underworld, I'd say."

"Would they be caught?"

"Yes—you know that detective stories are the most moral of all stories. The numbers of the notes were known to the Laire bank—quite a customary precaution."

"So Arthur and Bob and Catherine and Grandfather Denison were able to live happily ever after."

"Yes. After a good deal of suspense, I hope you agree?"

"Oh, I agree. You win, Aunt Marian. Heavens, there's Johnny moving already How time flies!"

She ran upstairs to her little son. Miss Phipps, with a sigh, picked up her book again.

"No suspense," she murmured.

a new story by

ROBERT BLOCH

EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: ROBERT BLOCH

TITLE: ***Man Who Looked Like Napoleon***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *"A classical example of megalomania," said Doctor Rand—and one of the finest stories by the author of* PSYCHO.

THE MAN WHO LOOKED LIKE NAPOLEON got out of the elevator on the fifth floor. He walked down the hall slowly, his head bent so that his forelock bobbed up and down. He might have brushed his hair back, but only if he took his hand from inside the front of his coat.

He couldn't take his hand out now—later, perhaps, but not now. He was being watched.

All eyes were on the Emperor as he moved along the hall. No one was visible, but he knew they were there—behind the doors, watching. Watching and whispering. Well, let them whisper. He was protected by the Old Guard and the people were behind him, to the last man.

He came to the door. The sign on it read: *G. K. Rand, M.D.*

It was the right door. It was the right time. It was the right day—the anniversary of Austerlitz. The sun had been shining this morning, so he knew it was the right day. The sun of Austerlitz shone. And now he was coming here for his appointment—and because of *something else.*

A little pulse moved up and down in his throat when he thought of that *something else.* Well, he'd be able to handle things. *Able was I ere I saw Elba—*

He entered the office and the woman in white said, "Mr. Throng, good to see you—the doctor will be free in a moment. Please sit down."

"*Merci.*"

She didn't look at him directly, didn't notice the way he glared when she called him Mr. Throng.

He couldn't help glaring when people called him that. He knew why they did it—they hated him and tried to pretend they didn't recognize him. Well, they would have to recognize him now. He would tell the doctor.

"You may go in now."

She didn't even say "Sire"; she didn't bow. But he ignored the insults and strode into the other room. He took short steps walking with dignity, still keeping his hand under his overcoat. Doctor Rand was sitting in his chair waiting for him, and he walked over and lay down on the couch and closed his eyes.

Doctor Rand was talking to him, and from far away he heard his own voice saying, "I'm fine, thanks," and "Yes, I'm ready," and "There's a lot I must tell you."

The doctor said, "Aren't you going to take off your coat before you begin?"—but he shook his head without opening his eyes. He liked it better this way, with his coat on and his eyes closed. Then there were epaulettes on the coat, and underneath was the uniform of a colonel of artillery, the one he had worn ever since 1802, ever since Josephine had—

"Just relax now," said the doctor. "You know how to do it. Say whatever comes into your mind."

The doctor was master here. So begin. Let nothing interfere, let no man say him nay.

"Ney," he said. "Peter Ney. Marshal of France. Yet he denied me before my return from Elba. He said nay to me. Peter denied me. He denied Our Lord. Peter denied Our Lord, and I was Peter Ney's Lord, come to redeem all France.

"Why don't they tell the truth, Doctor? I wrote them of my escape to America. I can show you the letter. I told them to go to Paris and look into the Tomb. They'd find it empty and then they'd know. The Tomb was empty after the third day. Read your Bible."

He paused. Doctor Rand prompted. "Please, Mr. Throng. You aren't letting yourself go. Just say words—not sentences or thoughts. You understand, we've been all through this before. I want you to say just what comes into your mind—"

It was no use. He could see that now. He sat up on the couch and opened his eyes, swinging around until he could face Doctor Rand.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm afraid I'll have to give this up. You can't help me."

"If you'd only take my suggestion," the Doctor said softly. "Arrange to go away for six months. I could recommend a nice private sana—"

He interrupted the doctor quickly. "So that's it. History repeats itself. You want me to abdicate, go to St. Helena." He laughed grimly, and the laugh abruptly soared to a falsetto giggle.

The doctor shrugged. "It's the sensible solution, Mr. Throng. I

think I can speak frankly to you. This is getting out of hand. We haven't arrived at the adjustment I hoped for. You seem to be retreating from reality and—"

Retreating. He was rubbing it in about Russia again. But that had not been a retreat. Winter, and the firing of Moscow—how could he be held responsible for things like that? He wasn't responsible. That was the answer. He just wasn't responsible any more. That's what they had told him last week down at the office, when they fired him. The doctor didn't know about that part yet. And there were a lot of other things the Doctor didn't know, either. He found himself shouting.

"You're a fool, Doctor! It is *you* who refuses to face the truth. You earn a living by telling everyone who comes in here he's crazy. That's your little scheme and I see through it. No crazy ones and there'd be no business for men like you, would there? That's how it works, isn't it, Doctor?"

The nurse peeked into the room and the doctor nodded. She said, "Please, there are people waiting. I must ask you to restrain yourself, Mr. Throng."

"Restraint, eh?" he said when she disappeared again. "I know all about restraint. Remember two years ago, I got a sample of restraint at the hospital when I had my concussion. They put me in a jacket without sleeves and strapped it up my back. If it hadn't been for Josephine I'd still be rotting away in some damned asylum."

The doctor patted his shoulder and he calmed down. His voice dropped. He had to explain once more.

"Why don't you admit the truth, Doctor? Admit that I'm a product of reincarnation. There's no accident or coincidence about the way I look, though I didn't recognize myself until after the automobile accident. But it all ties in, doesn't it? Didn't I marry a woman named Josephine? And you know my family history. I'm a Corsican—I proved that to you. It's simple reincarnation, Doctor.

"All my life I moved in a dream —until that accident. Then I had time to lie there and think while my head healed up. Even when they put me in the psycho ward I knew exactly what I was doing. I let them keep me there so I could work things out in my mind, until I was absolutely sure it all made sense. Don't you see now, Doctor?"

Doctor Rand rose. "Really, Mr. Throng, you're not making the progress your wife hoped for when she suggested that you visit me. With your permission I'd like to speak to her again about this."

"Go ahead. Why don't you call her now? You have my house phone number."

He sat there grinning as the doctor dialed, waited, and finally replaced the phone.

"No answer, is there? I could have told you that. I was going to tell you, anyway. That's really why I came here today—to tell you. History repeats itself, Doctor. You see, I finally forced the issue. This morning I got rid of Josephine."

"You're divorcing her?"

"I wanted to. Believe me I did. I begged and pleaded with her. I told her it was long past time. I must have children, an heir. It's written in History. But she refused to consider divorce—she absolutely refused. And so I got rid of her."

"You—"

As the doctor started to ring for the nurse, he stood up and pulled his hand out from under the overcoat. He brought the gun with it.

"Don't do that, Doctor," he said. "Just sit quietly. That's better. Now I'm going to tell you all about it. Yes, I got rid of her this morning. You can't stop History, but you can alter it.

"That's the secret, Doctor. You can alter History, and this time things will be different. That's the real reason for reincarnation. It gives a man a chance to improve on Destiny. And I have my chance now. No Waterloo this time!

"I started to change the pattern this morning, when I killed her. She's lying on the bed at home now, but nobody knows. The police don't know. Fouché will never discover her. I won't tell. And you won't tell. Because I'm going to kill you, too."

He moved the gun up, stepped closer. The doctor was watching him, but he must be believing at last, because he didn't stir. He just sat there and listened while the truth came out.

"You see, I never recognized you before, you traitor. I didn't realize the whole truth—that we are *all* reincarnations of our past selves. How could I guess that it was you who betrayed the Revolution and then betrayed me to the Allies and the Bourbons? If I'd killed you the first time I would have saved myself. This time I'll make sure you're out of the way. I recognize you now. Doctor Rand, is it? I know your *real* name—Talleyrand!"

The doctor glanced toward the door. Hadn't the nurse looked in and out again just then, before he could stop her? That meant she was calling help. Yes, now he could hear footsteps and sounds in the outer office. She had summoned the police. But they couldn't stop him; this wasn't Waterloo, this time there wouldn't be any Waterloo.

Doctor Rand turned and said, "Mr. Throng!"—but it was too late. He aimed carefully and felt his finger move along the trigger.

He closed his eyes, started to squeeze and pull. Everything was squeezing and pulling and Josephine was dead, Talleyrand must die, he would raise a new army and they'd come out of the grave for him, the Marshals of France: Lannes, Bessières, Davout, Mar-

mont—all of them. Squeeze and pull—now!

Then he fired and Talleyrand was lying on the floor and there was shouting. A man in a blue uniform ran into the room and he had a gun too—he was the Enemy.

Squeeze and pull, run for the window, it was jammed, the glass splintered all around him, trapped, the Old Guard dies but never surrenders, aim and fire now, this is Waterloo after all, jump, black and falling—*Vive l'Empereur . . .*

The man who looked like Napoleon lay on the sidewalk. He was quite dead by the time Doctor Rand got downstairs.

Doctor Rand felt lucky that he had got off with only a flesh wound in the shoulder. Thank goodness the nurse had got the police in time!

He stared down at poor Mr. Throng and shook his head. A classical example of megalomania. It was almost a comic strip cliché—the man who thought he was Napoleon. Poor Throng, with his theories of reincarnation, his pitiful misinterpretation of coincidence!

Doctor Rand turned as the homicide men arrived. They were talking to the patrolman who had burst into the office and fired the shot which had saved his life and sent Mr. Throng tumbling out of the window.

He walked up to the patrolman and held out his hand. "Thanks," he said. "If you hadn't got him in time—"

"That's my job," said the patrolman. "That's what I'm here for."

"Well, I appreciate it, Mr.—"

"Wellington," said the patrolman. "Wellington's the name."

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